

WISDOM UNIVERSITY

PROVERBS 14:14

# BACKSLIDING CLASS



**FIRST BYRON CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH**

DAVID MURRAY  
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# INTRODUCTION

Children, very soon the snow will be here and you're going to get great fun out of sliding, sledding, skiing, and snow-boarding. When we sled, slide, etc, we are usually trying to go forwards, aren't we? Sliding or skiing backwards is usually a bad idea. It's not something we would usually choose. Sometimes it happens, and it's not pretty. I remember the first and only time I tried snowboarding and ended up going downhill backwards at one point. It was scary and ended in a painful collision with a table.

This evening we want to look at something even more dangerous than sliding backwards on snow. We will be looking at sliding backwards in our soul. In our verse, it's called backsliding and it usually results in a lot of pain. But we'll not only look at the danger and pain of going backwards, but the blessing of going forwards in our spiritual life. We're going to explain and apply Proverbs 14:14 by hearing a story about Bill the Backslider. In it, we'll learn the message of this verse: **God 'rewards' backsliding with more backsliding, and 'rewards' forward momentum with more forward momentum.**

## CONTEXT

As we noticed before, Proverbs 14 teaches a lot about right ways and wrong ways. Last week we looked at two different ways: Feel-Right Road and Believe-Right Road. We heard God's warning about the dangers of Feel-Right Road and his commendation of Believe-Right Road. This week we want to look at two different directions on Believe-Right Road: forwards and backwards. Only true believers are on Believe-Right Road, but, as verse 14 tells us, they are not all heading in the same direction. Some are going backwards (often called backsliding), while others are going forwards (they are growing in grace and advancing in holiness).



Why is backsliding so dangerous?



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# 1. BACKSLIDING BREEDS BACKSLIDING

*The backslider in heart will be filled with the fruit of his ways (14).*

Bill came to faith in his early teens. It wasn't sudden or dramatic, but slow and quiet. Over many months—perhaps it was even a couple of years—he gradually realized that his teen faith was different to his childhood faith. He wasn't just interested in Jesus; he loved him. He didn't just obey God; he enjoyed him. He wasn't just praying out of habit; he was praying out of need. Worship wasn't just a 'have-to' but a 'get-to.'

By his late teens, Bill not only had saving faith, he had assurance of faith, and when he made confession of faith, it was much more than just a tradition or a rite of passage. He wasn't just pleasing his parents; he was truly confessing Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior.

His parents and pastor sent him off to college with confidence that he would be a wonderful witness to other students. Privately, they wondered if God would call him to the ministry or the mission field, but kept that to themselves, trusting God to call Bill if that was his will.

The first semester passed in a blur. By the middle of the second semester, Bill's devotional life had taken a hit. Although he had always prayed and read his Bible each day before High School, late night socializing at College meant late-morning rises for classes. He started rushing his devotional time, then skipping the odd day, but soon it was weeks. He would catch up in the summer break, he assured himself. He knew he was slipping, but was confident he could step it up when he wanted and get back to where he once was.

He was still going to church from time to time, a church his pastor had recommended, but didn't feel engaged in the worship. For the first time in years, sermons bored him. They also made him feel guilty, which made him miserable. Sometimes, he found himself catching up on school work or watching the football instead of going to church and youth group. He felt bad the first few times, but every other student was doing the same. When he occasionally went back to his home church, his guilt went into overdrive. It reminded him that he was not what he once was and not what he should be. He avoided his pastor afterwards. His slipping had turned into sliding now and he couldn't find his grip to stop it.

He started attending a new church nearer college, which also had shorter services. No one knew him there and he could slip in and out unnoticed. Although it was brief and the Bible was rarely opened, he felt much better afterwards. In the talks (you could hardly call them sermons), the pastors would chat about what they called 'progressive faith' and how they had to adjust to the times to be relevant. He rarely heard about holiness, sin, guilt, judgment, eternity, hell, conversion or



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repentance. Instead, the most common words he heard were acceptance, love, tolerance, social justice, and the importance of being non-judgmental. This was exactly what Bill's conscience needed to hear. And the more his conscience heard it, the quieter his conscience became. His sliding was now accelerating.

That's when the drinking started. Then the weed. Then the porn. Each made Bill happier at first, but, as time went on, he needed more and more to get his happiness hits. He had no idea where this was going to end or how to end it. It felt like the point of no-return.

By the end of the second semester, Bill was a shadow of his former self. His parents were shocked to see him when he came home (his visits home had become more infrequent). It wasn't just that he'd lost weight, he looked so miserable. At first, they put it down to the stress of studies and exams. But they were worried it was something more than that. He spent most of his time in his room, he avoided family devotions, he made excuses to avoid church, and he started criticizing their 'old-fashioned values, as he called them. He was turning day into night, spending the day in bed then going out all night, they knew not where. They asked him to see the pastor but he refused.

By now, Bill was deeply depressed. Being home reminded him of his happiest days in the past. But instead of returning to the faith that had brought him so much joy and purpose, he turned more and more to what had brought him so much misery. He once had faith; he now had doubt. He once felt happy; he now felt wretched. He once looked forward to every day; now he dreaded every day. He was once the King's son; now he was the prodigal son. **The backslider in heart will be filled with the fruit of his ways** (14).

## CHANGING OUR STORY WITH GOD'S STORY

### **Backsliding can happen to the best of us.**

(e.g. David, Peter). It begins in the heart and is usually a slow process. Re-read this story to find out the early warning signs. **Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall** (1 Cor. 10:12).

### **Backsliding is chastised with more**

**backsliding.** We know how to start it but we don't know how to stop it. We think we can slide then stop, but when we chose to slide, God chastises us with more sliding. Better never slide at all.

SLIDING IS EASY TO START  
BUT HARD TO STOP.



What's the best way to prevent backsliding?  
Forward progress.



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## 2. FORWARD FUELS FORWARD

*...a good man will be filled with the fruit of his ways (14)*

Just as backsliding produces backsliding, so forward progress produces forward progress. Let's see how this worked out in Bill's life.

Bill's older sister, Kelly, was the only family member that could identify with him. She too had faith struggles in college. She understood the temptations and had also backslid, though not so far and fast as Bill. Skipping devotions, guilt; skipping church, more guilt; liberal Christianity, less guilt; drink, moments of guilt; weed, hazy guilt; porn, eventually zero guilt. But in its place, misery, depression, and hopelessness.

Kelly prayed for an opportunity to speak to Bill and share Gospel hope with him, but he skillfully avoided any deep conversations with his family all summer. When it came time for him to return to campus, though, he needed Kelly to drive him, because he couldn't afford to repair his car. This was her opportunity and she took it.

She told him about her own backsliding, which though not as deep as Bill's, touched all the same bases. He was surprised to hear this. He thought he was the only one. Kelly gave him hope of healing and restoration. She told him the story of the prophet Hosea's wife, Gomer, who was horrendously adulterous and yet how Hosea pursued her as God pursued adulterous Israel. Bill didn't say much, but Kelly noticed out the corner of her eye that he seemed to be wiping away tears as he turned his head away and looked out of the passenger window.

That night Bill opened the drawer in which he had hid his Bible. Then closed it. The next day, he opened the drawer and took the Bible out. But he couldn't bring himself to open it. Kelly texted him that evening and simply said. "Read it." She knew exactly where he was. "Where?" he texted back. "Psalm 51," she said.

He opened and read but his eyes were so full of tears that he couldn't see to finish reading the Psalm. That night he felt as if his slide had slowed somewhat. He went back to that Psalm every day for the next two weeks. By the end of the first week, he felt his slide had stopped. By the end of the second week, he sensed a turn, that the long slide had not only stopped but reversed. Encouraged, he turned to Psalm 1. There he read.

***Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers (1-3).***

The way back was clear. There were setbacks along the way, but over the next two months he could sense a momentum carrying him forward. Every day he read the Bible



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made the next day easier. Every day he prayed, he felt more prayerful the next day.

Every time he resisted porn, the next time was easier. By rejecting weed, he also lost his appetite for beer. As he soaked in the Bible, his discernment grew and his conscience revived. His moral sense returned and he realized that he had been duped by liberal Christianity into believing human opinion rather than God's truth.

He went back to his old church, and while it was uncomfortable to see people's surprise at his return, he persevered and found his desire for church growing again. As he sang, his singing increased in volume. As he listened to sermons, he found it easier to listen. He wanted to attend family devotions when he was home and even began to contribute to the discussion.

God was healing his backsliding. He slowed his slide, stopped his slide, reversed his slide, and was now growing him faster and in his faith than before. He started witnessing to his room-mate and found it easier to witness to others at the university too. He especially had a burden for new students from Christian homes who he made a point of checking in with and encouraging through their first year.

Bill had feared he was past the point of no-return or that at least he would never get back to where he was. But where his sin abounded, God's grace much more abounded. His forward movement was 'rewarded' with more forward movement. **A good man will be filled with the fruit of his ways** (14)

## CHANGING OUR STORY WITH GOD'S STORY

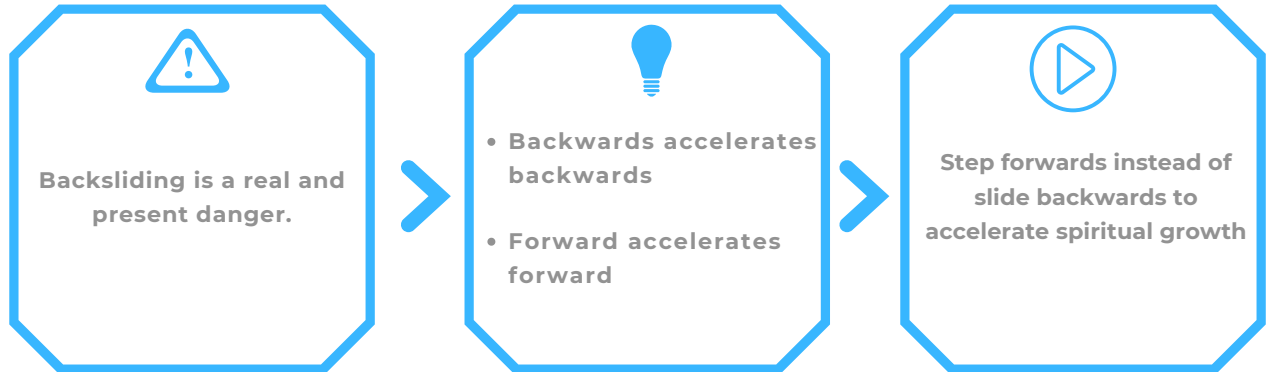
**Forward momentum can be regained.** (It can also be maintained). Reverse and regain momentum. **"Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first"** (Rev. 2:5). Go back to where you began. Be encouraged by how David and Peter regained their direction and movement. No matter how far you have slidden, remember God's great promise: **"I will heal their backsliding; for my anger has turned from them"** (Hosea 14:4). No matter how far you have fallen, see Christ's pitying eye upon you, and hear him sending his grace to you as he did with Peter (Luke 22:61; Mark 16:7).

**Forward momentum is rewarding.** Each forward step is rewarded with an additional forward step. It's almost like 'Take one, get one free.' Just as backsliding can accelerate, so can spiritual growth. It's got a compounding effect. There's so much room for growth. The more we grasp the grace of the Gospel, the more we will want to read the Bible, the more we will want to worship with our families, the more we will want to hear sermons, worship together, and pray together. By God's grace, take a step forward and see what momentum can be generated.

MOVEMENT IS HARD TO START  
BUT MOMENTUM IS HARD TO STOP.



# CONCLUSION



**PRAYER:** Lord heal my backsliding and love me freely by stopping my slide, turning me round, and accelerating me forwards.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What were the warning signs of backsliding in Bill's life?
2. What are the warning signs of backsliding in your life?
3. Why is backsliding so easy?
4. How would you speak to a backslider and what would you say?
5. How does Psalm 51 encourage a backslider?
6. What lessons did Peter learn from his backsliding (see 1&2 Peter).

First Byron Christian Reformed Church  
8541 Byron Center Ave SW, Byron Center, MI 49315  
Phone: (616) 878-9768  
[www.firstbyroncrc.org](http://www.firstbyroncrc.org)

Pastor David Murray  
[www.HeadHeartHand.org](http://www.HeadHeartHand.org)  
[www.livingthebible.net](http://www.livingthebible.net)  
[www.whyamifeelinglikethis.com](http://www.whyamifeelinglikethis.com)