

Judges 18
Fighting Spiritual Drift
Sermon Outline

Introduction: Spiritual drift is for most of us more of a problem than outright spiritual rebellion. In any given unit of time—a week—a season of life (early career, university time)—we get caught in a tide that subtly but steadily pulls us away from our true home in God. What are some of the signs of spiritual drift, what is its source, and how do we fight it?

I) Some signs of spiritual drift

A) Empty performance of ‘sacred’ routines

- 1) We use religious language but don’t mean it
 - The Danites’ ‘inquiry’ of God (v 5)
 - The blessing of the young priest (v 6)

2) The conquest of Laish

3) Challenge for us: *You shall not take my name in vain*

B) Dysfunctional (disloyal, unreliable) relationships

1) The young priest and Micah

2) What do people say about us?

C) Bullying

1) The Danites and everybody else

2) How do we use power?

II) The source of spiritual drift: Idolatry

A) Idolatry rampant

B) What is idolatry?

III) How do we swim against the tide?

A) How not to

- Focusing simply on behavior

B) How to

- Going after idols

C) Practical matters

Questions for Reflection this Week

- 1) Document occasions of spiritual drift in your life—not so much a sudden and dramatic act of rebellion, but a slow drift away from finding your home in God. What happened? Why? What was the outcome?
- 2) Judges 18 describes three signs of spiritual drift: (1) Empty religion (forms without reality); (2) Dysfunctional relationships, marked by unreliability, disloyalty, and even treachery; and (3) Bullying. Where do you see these signs in Judges 18? Where have you seen them in your own life?
- 3) Judges 17-18, culminating in the establishment of the great ‘idol’ city of Dan in the distant north, presents idolatry as the deepest source of all the spiritual drift of the nation. Itemize the expressions of idolatry throughout the two chapters.
- 4) Idolatry is not just (or even primarily) bad *behavior* (though bad behavior can reinforce it). Idolatry is bad *faith*—that is, misdirected reliance, trusting anyone or anything more than God. Why does idolatry ‘show up’ in bullying, in disloyalty and unreliability, and in hollow religion?
- 5) If we are to swim against the stream of spiritual drift, and if the source of spiritual drift is idolatry, why is it not enough to try to swim against the drift by changing our behavior? What else do we need to do?
- 6) Pick a behavior of yours that you know to be an expression of spiritual drift (say, abuse of power, or unreliability in relationships, or an empty or non-existent prayer life). Analyze that behavior from the point of view of idolatry. Ask, in other words, “Why am I such a flaky friend? How is this behavior an expression of a skill or an outcome or a dependency that I have come to depend upon too much? What substitute god drives my flaky behavior?”
- 7) Read John 15:1-8. What is the relationship between ‘bearing fruit’ (resisting drift) and “abiding’ in Jesus? What steps can you take to ‘abide in Christ’ more steadily?