

PASTOR'S PACKET

Are We
DRIFTING?

So great a salvation

Hebrews 6:1-8

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A resource for your church, given freely

BISHOP ROBERT W. LYONS, JR.

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A WORD TO FELLOW PASTORS

Pastor's Letter

Are We Drifting?

To my fellow pastor,

The question I brought before my congregation in the spring of 2026 came out of Hebrews 6:4--6 and the diagnostic that precedes it in Hebrews 2:3: "how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" It was directed not at the unconverted but at people who already know the Lord. The entry point the text names is not scandal or rebellion. It is neglect -- passive, quiet, entirely respectable inattention. The drift that does not announce itself. The deviation that looks normal while it is compounding.

This packet equips you to stand the full six-session arc up in your own congregation. The Preaching Guide carries the exegetical framework and suggested movements for each message. Sessions 3 and 5 were originally taught on Wednesday evenings; the Guide notes how both adapt to a Sunday setting. The curriculum pieces -- Teacher Guide, Student Guide, and Weekly Companion -- are ready for your groups from week one.

The series ends at a well in Samaria. The God who cannot be blamed for our drift went out of His way to be at the place where a drifting person was. "He had to pass through Samaria." That divine necessity is the last word of the series, and my prayer is that it becomes the last word for someone in your congregation as well.

Serving,



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Forged and first preached at The MarketPlace Movement, Dayton, Ohio.

DROP-IN SERIES OVERVIEW

Series Arc

Are We Drifting?

■ THE GOVERNING QUESTION

How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? -- Hebrews 2:3

The series is built around a single diagnostic question: when you examine the trajectory of your life honestly, is it trending toward holiness or toward departure? The text does not ask this question of unbelievers. It asks it of those who already know the Lord.

■ THE 1-IN-60 FRAMEWORK

In aviation, a single degree of heading error causes approximately one mile of lateral drift for every sixty miles traveled. A flight from New York to Los Angeles carrying that one-degree error lands forty miles from its destination -- not because of a crash, but because of a small, sustained deviation that compounded invisibly while everything appeared normal.

Spiritual drift works the same way. There is no announcement. There is no visible collapse. The drift is an inner-man issue before the body shows signs. It takes root in the quiet space between what we say we believe and what we are actually building our lives on. By the time it becomes visible, the deviation has been underway for a long time.

Three Propositions:

Drift Is Real. The warning in Hebrews 6 is not hypothetical. The writer does not imagine that members of his congregation might drift. He sees that they are drifting.

Drift Is Sneaky. It does not come as rebellion. It comes as neglect -- passive omission, not active hostility. The church attendance can increase while the heart recedes.

Drift Is Dangerous. The text does not soften the endpoint. The progression is real and it has a direction. The series is a call to examine the direction honestly.

■ THE THREE SERIES THREADS

Thread One -- The Diagnosis: Sessions 1 and 2 establish what drift is, that it is real and not hypothetical, and that God is not responsible for it. The agricultural metaphor of Hebrews 6:7--8 provides the answer to the charge against God: the rain is still falling. The soil changed, not the rain.

Thread Two -- The Anatomy: Session 3 opens the mechanism. James 1:13--15 maps how drift actually works inside a person: the draw is not external. It originates in the uncrucified flesh, which presents its desires as worth moving toward. The lust is *idias* -- his own. The process is biological in its progression.

Thread Three -- The Return: Sessions 4 through 6 carry the series question through two human faces. Naomi left Bethlehem under the logic of necessity and came back changed. The Samaritan woman had never fully arrived at the truth. Both met God. The governing principle across both: the God who cannot be blamed for our drift passes through the places where drifting people live.

■ SIX-MESSAGE STRUCTURE

Session 1 -- Are We Drifting?

Scripture: Hebrews 6:4--6; Hebrews 2:3

Thesis: Drift is not characterized by dramatic departure. It is characterized by neglect -- small, sustained deviation that produces catastrophic displacement while everything feels normal.

Preaching Center: The 1-in-60 diagnostic illustration. The three propositions. The distinction between falling and falling away: a righteous person can fall seven times. Apostasy (*parapitō*) is a different category entirely. The warning exists because the danger is real.

Landing: A direct invitation to honest self-examination before the question becomes theoretical.

Session 2 -- It's Not Him

Scripture: Hebrews 6:7--8

Thesis: God has not withheld His provision. The soil changed through drift. Every gap between the human and the divine was created by human movement, not divine withdrawal.

Preaching Center: The agricultural metaphor. Rain falls on both kinds of soil. The thorn-bearing land is not under drought. The close-to-but-not-yet framing of verse 8 -- there is still time.

Doctrinal Anchor: The immutability of God. He does not change in His nature, His standard, or His requirement. Because He does not change, all responsibility for alignment falls on man. In the immutability of God is the responsibility of man.

Landing: There is still time. Make your decision.

Session 3 -- It's Not Him, Part 2

Scripture: James 1:13--15

Note: Originally taught on a Wednesday evening as a continuation of Session 2. Adapts naturally to a Sunday format.

Thesis: The draw that produces drift is not external. God is not the tempter. The draw is internal -- the uncrucified flesh presenting its desires as worth moving toward.

Preaching Center: The Greek anatomy of the passage: *exelkomenos* (drawn out -- like a fish drawn from its natural environment), *deleazomenos* (enticed with bait), *idias epithumias* (his own lust -- the possessive is emphatic). The biological progression: draw, conceive, birth, death. You can interrupt a pregnancy. You cannot undo a birth. Interrupt the drift before the next stage.

Two-Witness Frame: Hebrews 6 answers the charge against God with an agricultural image -- the rain is still falling. James 1 answers it with a biological image -- God is not the tempter, the draw is your own lust. Two texts, same answer.

Landing: The question is not what is coming at me from outside. The question is what is already in me that I have stopped crucifying.

Session 4 -- Close to, But Not Yet

Scripture: Ruth 1--4; Hebrews 6:7--8

Note: Originally preached on Mother's Day.

Thesis: The narrative of Naomi carries every thread of the series into a single human life. She knew the covenant, left under the logic of necessity, suffered the fruit of the departure, and found the road back.

Preaching Center: Naomi did not have it together when she turned back. She arrived in Bethlehem calling herself Mara, empty, without the things she had left with. But she turned. The kinsman-redeemer was already in the field before she arrived. You do not have to have it together to return. You just have to turn.

Landing: The God who visited His people in Bethlehem does not wait for you to have it together. The road back leads to the same God at the same address.

Session 5 -- Returning from Moab

Scripture: Ruth 1--4; Malachi 3:6--7

Note: Originally taught on a Wednesday evening as a continuation of Session 4. Adapts naturally to a Sunday format.

Thesis: What does the return journey actually require? What does turning back look like practically, and what does the person coming back find when they arrive?

Preaching Center: Malachi 3:6--7 -- "Return to Me and I will return to you." He does not come to where drift carried us. He says: return. The call to return is not a negotiation. It is a statement of where He remains. The road back leads to the same God at the same address.

Landing: He is where He is. He has never moved. The return road leads to a fixed destination.

Session 6 -- He Had to Pass Through

Scripture: John 4:1--42

Thesis: The series closes with a second category. Not everyone in the room drifted from truth they once held. Some have never fully arrived. The Samaritan woman was at the margins where drift had deposited her -- and Jesus went out of His way to be where she was.

Preaching Center: John 4:4 -- *edei* -- He had to. Divine necessity. He did not wait for her to navigate her way back. He rerouted the journey to be at the well where she was at noon, alone. The God who cannot be blamed for our drift passes through the places where drifting people live.

Landing: Two categories of person in the room: those who drifted from truth they held, and those who have never fully arrived. One response covers both: He had to pass through Samaria.

■ ADAPTING THE SERIES

Six Sundays (full arc): Preach all six sessions across six consecutive Sundays. This is the fullest delivery of the series. Sessions 3 and 5 were originally Wednesday teachings; the Preaching Guide notes how to adapt each for a Sunday setting.

Four Sundays (condensed): Preach Sessions 1, 2, 4, and 6. Session 2 can absorb the James 1 material from Session 3. Session 4 can absorb the return-anatomy material from Session 5. This gives you the diagnosis, the anatomy, and two return narratives in a tight Sunday arc.

Midweek addition: If your congregation has a midweek service, Sessions 3 and 5 were designed for that context and serve it well. The Preaching Guide notes their original Wednesday structure.

■ KEY TEXTS ACROSS THE SERIES

Hebrews 2:3 / Hebrews 6:1--3 / Hebrews 6:4--6 / Hebrews 6:7--8 / James 1:13--15 / Galatians 5:16--24 / 1 Corinthians 6:19--20 / Colossians 3:5 / Romans 6:6--14 / Malachi 3:6--7 / Ruth 1--4 / John 4:1--42

WEEKLY TEACHING PREP

Preaching Guide

Are We Drifting?

This guide gives you the exegetical handles, key arguments, and preaching movements for each session. The Series Arc gives you the structural overview. This guide goes deeper into what to do with the text each week.

■ SESSION 1 -- ARE WE DRIFTING?

Hebrews 6:4--6 / Hebrews 2:3

The Diagnostic Frame

The series opens not with a warning but with a question. The question is personal and directed at believers, not unbelievers. Hebrews 2:3 sets the posture for everything that follows: "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" The word *amelesantes* -- neglect -- is passive omission, not active rebellion. The entry point of danger is not scandal. It is paying no attention. The wedding guest who paid no attention was not treated as innocent.

The 1-in-60 Illustration

A single degree of heading error causes approximately one mile of lateral drift per sixty miles traveled. A flight from New York to Los Angeles carrying that error lands forty miles off course -- not because of catastrophe, but because of a small, sustained deviation compounding invisibly while every instrument looked normal. Spiritual drift is structurally identical: it is an inner-man departure before it is a visible one. By the time the drift is visible, the deviation has been underway for a long time.

The Three Propositions

These are the load-bearing girders of the opening session. Establish them firmly:

Drift is real. The writer of Hebrews does not imagine that his congregation might drift. He observes that they are. The warning is pastoral, not hypothetical.

Drift is sneaky. Drift does not come as rebellion. It comes as neglect -- the failure to give proper attention, the stepping back from spiritual discipline a little, then a little more, until the heart is far from Him while the body is still in the building. It is possible for church attendance to increase while adherence to the things of God decreases.

Drift is dangerous. The passage in Hebrews 6:4--6 does not soften the endpoint. The text describes the one who has tasted, been made a partaker, and fallen away (*parapiptō*). This word appears only here in the New Testament. It is lateral departure from the path -- not a stumble along it. The distinction between *piptō* (recoverable fall) and *parapiptō* (lateral departure) is load-bearing: a righteous person can fall seven times and rise again. Apostasy is a different category. The warning exists because the danger is real.

Key Greek Terms

Term	Reference	Meaning
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amelesantes	Heb 2:3	neglect; passive omission; paying no attention
parapiptō	Heb 6:6	fallen away; lateral departure from the path
piptō	general	recoverable fall; stumbling on the path

Preaching Movements

1. Open with the 1-in-60 illustration. Let it land before you say anything theological. Ask: what if spiritual life works the same way?
2. Establish the audience. This text is not addressed to the unconverted. It is addressed to those who know the Lord.
3. Name the entry point: neglect. Define it precisely -- passive omission, not active hostility.
4. State the three propositions. Take time with each.
5. Draw the distinction between falling and falling away. This is where the tension in the text lives.
6. Close with a direct invitation to honest self-examination. Do not soften it.

Pastoral Note

Expect some anxiety in the room. Some people will hear this text and fear they have already crossed a line they cannot come back from. Assure them that the warning text presupposes proximity -- "close to a curse, but not yet burned" (6:8) -- and that the series is going to spend the next five sessions on what the road back looks like. Session 1 diagnoses. Sessions 4 through 6 address the return.

Bridge to Session 2

Session 1 establishes that the danger is real. Session 2 answers the objection that begins forming as soon as the warning lands: "But is God responsible for this? Is God withholding from me? Is He the reason I am in this condition?" The agricultural illustration of Hebrews 6:7--8 answers that charge directly.

■ SESSION 2 -- IT'S NOT HIM

Hebrews 6:7--8

The Agricultural Illustration

The author shifts from warning to image. The same rain falls on two kinds of land. One produces useful vegetation. One produces thorns and thistles. The land bearing thorns is not under drought. God has not withheld His provision. The soil changed -- through drift -- and what the grace-rain now grows in that changed soil is iniquity.

This image answers the charge that drift always wants to make: that God is responsible. He is not. He is still sending the rain. The condition of the soil is what changed.

The Immutability Anchor

This is the doctrinal foundation beneath the pastoral argument. God is immutable -- He does not change in His nature, His character, His standard, or His requirement. Because He does not change, all responsibility for alignment falls on man.

Malachi 3:6--7 puts the two faces of immutability in a single passage: "For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed." The unchangingness is both the source of His mercy (you are not consumed) and the ground of His call to return (Return to Me). He does not come to where drift deposited us. He says: Return. The call to return is a statement of where He already is and has always been.

Put it this way: the same attribute that secures His faithfulness secures His standard. He does not change in love. He does not change in holiness. The immutability that holds His promise holds His requirement with equal force.

In the immutability of God is the responsibility of man.

Close to, But Not Yet

Hebrews 6:8 contains two of the most important words in the passage: *kataras eggus* -- near to, close to a curse. The land is not yet burned. It is close to being burned. There is still time. The warning of this passage is not already too late -- it is a warning precisely because the termination has not yet arrived. Preach with urgency on this: the warning is only meaningful because the verdict has not yet landed.

Key Greek Terms

Term	Reference	Meaning
kataras eggus	Heb 6:8	close to a curse; near to cursing -- proximity, not finality

Preaching Movements

1. Ask the congregation directly: do you ever feel like God is withholding from you? Let the question sit.
2. Open the agricultural image. Establish that the rain is still falling -- the provision has not changed.
3. Name the immutability principle. He does not move. Every gap is a human-caused gap.

4. Land on "close to, but not yet." The warning exists because there is still time.

5. Close with: the rain is still falling. The standard still stands. The return road leads back to a fixed destination. What will you do with that?

Pastoral Note

The immutability point is easy to mishandle. Be careful to hold both faces equally: He does not change in love (comfort), and He does not lower the standard to accommodate our drift (demand). Neither face can be separated from the other without distorting the attribute.

Bridge to Session 3

Sessions 1 and 2 have established the diagnosis and answered the charge against God. Session 3 moves from the diagnosis to the anatomy: now that we know God is not the variable, what is? James 1:13--15 provides the mechanism.

■ SESSION 3 -- IT'S NOT HIM, PART 2

James 1:13--15

Note: This session was originally taught on a Wednesday evening as a direct continuation of Session 2. For a Sunday setting, open with a one-minute recap of the Session 2 agricultural argument, then move directly into James 1.

The Connecting Logic

James 1 is the direct epistolary parallel to Hebrews 6:7--8. Where Hebrews 6 shows the outcome (thorn-bearing soil), James 1 shows the process -- how the soil came to bear thorns. These two texts are the exegetical bracket around the drift anatomy. Establish the connection before you open the James passage.

The Fishing Image -- Verse 14

James uses fishing language. *Exelkomenos* -- drawn out. The image is a fish pulled from its natural environment by a hook. *Deleazomenos* -- enticed with bait. The fish goes toward what looks like food. Note carefully what James is not saying: the draw is not an overpowering of the will from outside. The lure works because it looks like what the fish desires. The presentation happens because there is something inside the fish that the lure appeals to.

The Internal Address -- *Idias Epithumias*

This is the doctrinal weight-bearing phrase of the passage. *Idias epithumias* -- his own lust. The possessive *idias* is emphatic: not someone else's, not the devil's, not God's. His own. The draw that initiates drift has an internal address. This is not the enemy waving a carrot. The uncrucified flesh is the carrot. It presents its desires from within, as something worth the will moving toward.

This is why drift is sneaky. We look for an external explanation for what is an internal departure.

The Biological Progression -- Verse 15

James shifts from fishing to biology. The progression is: draw, conceive, birth, death. Map it clearly for your congregation:

Draw: The will ceases to maintain the reckoning against the flesh. The lust begins presenting its desires as worth considering. This is the entry point -- neglect.

Conceive: The will re-presents itself to the flesh. Desire takes hold internally. This is the cooling stage.

Birth: The internal produces the external. The pattern is established.

Death: The completed trajectory.

The biological metaphor is not decorative. James chose it because conception and birth are sequential processes. You can interrupt a pregnancy. You cannot undo a birth. Preach with pastoral urgency on this: identify the stage and make the interruption before the next stage arrives. Close to, but not yet.

The Two-Witness Convergence

Hold Hebrews 6:7--8 and James 1:13--15 together as two witnesses to the same truth:

Hebrews 6 -- Agricultural: the rain is still falling. The soil changed, not the rain.

James 1 -- Biological: God is not the tempter. The lust is your own.

Two texts, same answer. The charge against God is answered at every level of examination.

Key Greek Terms

Term	Reference	Meaning
exelkomenos	James 1:14	drawn out; dragged from one's natural place -- fishing image
deleazomenos	James 1:14	enticed with bait; lured with a desirable presentation
idias epithumias	James 1:14	his own lust; the possessive is emphatic -- internal, native, resident

Preaching Movements

1. Recap: two sessions ago we established that God is not the variable. Today we locate what is.
2. Connect Hebrews 6 and James 1 as a two-witness frame.

3. Slow down on *idias epithumias*. Let the congregation sit with the fact that the draw is internal.
4. Walk through the biological progression. Map it to the stages of drift.
5. Land the pastoral urgency: identify your stage and interrupt before the next one.
6. Close with the reframed pastoral question: not "what is coming at me from outside?" but "what is already in me that I have stopped crucifying?"

Bridge to Session 4

Sessions 1 through 3 have built the full diagnostic -- what drift is, that God is not responsible, and how it operates mechanically inside a person. Sessions 4 through 6 shift register from diagnosis to narrative: what does the return journey look like, and who does it cover?

■ SESSION 4 -- CLOSE TO, BUT NOT YET

Ruth 1--4 / Hebrews 6:7--8

The Narrative Turn

The series shifts from expository teaching to narrative preaching. Naomi's story carries every thread of the first three sessions into a single human life. She knew the covenant. She left under the logic of necessity. She suffered the fruit of the departure. And she turned back.

The skill of this session is letting the narrative do the theological work. You do not need to lecture on drift while preaching Naomi. Her life is the lecture.

The Logic of Necessity

Naomi left Bethlehem -- the house of bread -- because there was a famine. The departure felt reasonable. Necessary, even. This is one of the defining characteristics of drift: it rarely feels like defection. It feels like preference, or pragmatism, or survival. She was not leaving the covenant deliberately. She was making a reasonable decision under pressure. Drift almost never announces itself as drift.

The Fruit of the Departure

By the time Naomi returns, she has lost her husband, her sons, and everything she left with. She arrives calling herself Mara -- bitter -- and says: "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, but the LORD has brought me back empty."

Note what she does and does not do here. She does not claim ignorance of the return road. She walks back toward Bethlehem. She turns. But she has not cleaned herself up before turning. She is not pretending to have it together. She is returning exactly as she is.

The Kinsman-Redeemer Was Already in the Field

Before Naomi and Ruth arrive and begin to figure out their situation, Boaz is already in the field. The kinsman-redeemer is not waiting to see how well they manage their return before stepping in. He is already there. The provision for the return is already positioned. The only thing required is that Naomi and Ruth show up in the field.

You Do Not Have to Have It Together

This is the preaching landing of the session. You do not have to have it together to return. You just have to turn. The road back does not require that you arrive in presentable condition. Naomi arrived calling herself bitter. The kinsman-redeemer received her anyway.

The God who visited His people in Bethlehem does not wait for the returning person to reconstruct themselves before He acts. He is already in the field.

Preaching Movements

1. Establish the three-session foundation briefly: drift is real, God is not responsible, the mechanism is internal. Now -- what does the return look like?
2. Enter the Naomi narrative. Let the story carry the diagnosis without narrating it explicitly.
3. Identify the logic of necessity in the departure. Help the congregation recognize it in themselves.
4. Trace the cost. Do not soften it.
5. Land on the turn -- not the arrival, not the reconstruction, but the turn itself.
6. Reveal the kinsman-redeemer already in the field.
7. Close: you do not have to have it together. You just have to turn.

Bridge to Session 5

Session 4 shows a person who turned. Session 5 asks: what does the return journey actually require? What is the road back, practically and spiritually?

■ SESSION 5 -- RETURNING FROM MOAB

Ruth 1--4 / Malachi 3:6--7

Note: This session was originally taught on a Wednesday evening as a continuation of Session 4. For a Sunday setting, open with a brief recap of the Naomi narrative, then build the anatomy of the return.

The Anatomy of Return

If Session 4 is about the decision to turn, Session 5 is about what happens when you do. What does the road back look like? What does the returning person encounter?

Malachi 3:6--7 as the Return Frame

"For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed. From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from My statutes and have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you."

Notice the structure: immutability generates both grace (you are not consumed) and the call to return (Return to Me). He does not travel toward the people in their drifted state. He says: I am here. Return. The return road leads to a fixed destination. The call is not a negotiation. It is a statement of where He already is.

The return address has not changed. That is both the demand and the comfort of immutability.

What the Return Requires

The return does not require having it together. It does not require having reconstructed yourself before you approach. What it requires is:

Honesty about where you are. Naomi named her condition. She called herself Mara. She did not pretend the cost had not been paid. Honest acknowledgment of drift is the beginning of return.

Movement toward rather than away. The return is directional. It is not a feeling of regret from a distance. It is turning your feet toward Bethlehem. Toward the God who has not moved.

Willingness to be received as you are. The returning person is not received on the basis of their reconstruction. They are received on the basis of what the kinsman-redeemer has already done and is already doing in the field.

The Same God at the Same Address

He is not waiting to see how well you manage your return. He is where He is. The rain is still falling. The standard still stands. The return road leads to the same God at the same address where He has always been.

Preaching Movements

1. Recap: we saw Naomi turn. Today we trace what the return requires.
2. Open Malachi 3:6--7. Let the structure of the passage -- immutability generating both grace and call -- do the work.
3. Build the three elements of what return requires: honesty, movement, willingness.
4. Hold the immutability framing: He does not come to where drift carried you. He is at the same address.
5. Close with a direct call to return for anyone in the room who has been naming the drift honestly for five sessions but has not yet turned their feet.

Bridge to Session 6

Sessions 4 and 5 have addressed the person who once knew the covenant and drifted from it. Session 6 addresses a second category: the person who has been drifting without the full presentation of truth -- the one who has never fully arrived. John 4 is the text that covers that category.

■ SESSION 6 -- HE HAD TO PASS THROUGH

John 4:1--42

The Second Category

The series has addressed the believer who has drifted from truth they once held. But not everyone in the room has that testimony. Some have been drifting without ever fully arriving at the truth. The Samaritan woman at the well represents that second category -- not a returning covenant member, but someone at the margins where a people's drift and a life's drift had deposited her.

She is coming to the well at noon, alone. This is not incidental. It is the posture of someone who has arranged their life around what drift produces.

John 4:4 -- He Had to Pass Through

Edei -- had to. Divine necessity. This word appears in theological weight-bearing contexts throughout John's gospel -- "the Son of Man must be lifted up," "I must work the works of Him who sent Me." When it appears here -- "He had to pass through Samaria" -- it is not a statement about geography. Jews routinely bypassed Samaria. The routing was deliberate. There was someone at the well.

He did not wait for the Samaritan woman to navigate her way back to a truth she had never fully received. He went out of His way to be at the place where she was.

The God Who Passes Through

This is the governing principle that closes the series: the God who cannot be blamed for our drift passes through the places where drifting people live. This is not passive. It is active, purposeful, and prior to any response on the drifting person's part. He had to pass through Samaria. Not because the road required it, but because she was there.

The Same Rain on Different Ground

Hebrews 6:7--8 said the rain falls on both kinds of soil. John 4 shows it falling on ground that had never been cultivated by the covenant at all. The provision of God is not limited to returning covenant members. The same God who passes through Bethlehem passes through Samaria.

The Two Categories Together

Close the series by naming both categories explicitly:

There are people in this room who drifted from truth they once held. Naomi's story was for them. The return road leads back to the same God at the same address.

There are people in this room who have been drifting without ever fully receiving the truth. The Samaritan woman's story is for them. The God who cannot be blamed for their drift went out of His way to be where they were.

Both responses to this series are available. Both lead to the same God.

Key Greek Terms

Term	Reference	Meaning
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edei	John 4:4	had to; divine necessity; a must that is theological, not geographical
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Preaching Movements

1. Name the two categories that have been present across the series.
2. Open John 4 with the geography. Let the fact that Jews did not pass through Samaria land.
3. Slow down on verse 4. *Edei*. He had to. Not geographically -- theologically. There was someone at the well.
4. Trace the encounter. Let the progressive revelation of the woman's situation do the work.
5. Bring the series' governing principle: the God who cannot be blamed for our drift passes through the places where drifting people live.
6. Close with both categories. Name them explicitly. Make the response available to everyone in the room.

Pastoral Note

This is a wide-net closing session. The altar response to this message covers both the person returning from known truth and the person receiving the truth for the first time. Both are covered by the same provision. Do not limit the invitation.

FOR GROUP LEADERS ONLY

Teacher Guide

Are We Drifting?

This guide is designed for the pastor or group leader facilitating discussion around the "Are We Drifting?" series. It assumes you are leading a group through the series in real time -- whether a small group, a leadership team, or a Sunday school class.

■ HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Each session follows a four-part structure: a brief exegetical orientation for the leader, an opening question to bring the group into the week's text, discussion questions drawn from the message, and a closing reflection. You do not need to cover every question every week. Read the group and move where the conversation has weight.

One note on posture: this series asks hard diagnostic questions. Some people in your group may surface real drift -- in themselves or in people they love. Move slowly. Make room for honest answers. The series ends in return, not condemnation.

■ SESSION 1 -- ARE WE DRIFTING?

Hebrews 6:4--6; Hebrews 2:3

Leader Orientation

The opening session diagnoses the condition. Drift enters through neglect -- passive omission, not active rebellion. The 1-in-60 illustration frames it: small sustained deviation produces catastrophic displacement while everything feels normal. The key theological distinction is between falling (*piptō* -- recoverable) and falling away (*parapiptō* -- lateral departure). The series raises the danger. It does not close without the road back.

Opening Question

Have you ever looked up and realized you were somewhere you did not intend to be -- not because of one big decision, but because of a series of small ones? What does that feel like?

Discussion Questions

1. The message said drift is characterized by neglect, not rebellion. How does that distinction change the way you think about spiritual danger?
2. "Drift is sneaky." What are the ways drift disguises itself -- the forms it takes that do not look like drift from the inside?
3. The 1-in-60 illustration: if a single degree of error compounds invisibly over distance, what does that suggest about the importance of early correction?
4. What is the difference between a person who falls and a person who falls away? Why does the distinction matter pastorally?

5. The message ended with an invitation to honest self-examination. What would it mean for you personally to answer that question honestly this week?

Closing Reflection

The warning exists because the danger is real. But the series is not over. Five more sessions remain -- and they are about the return.

■ SESSION 2 -- IT'S NOT HIM

Hebrews 6:7--8

Leader Orientation

The agricultural metaphor answers the charge drift always wants to make: that God is responsible. The rain is still falling. The soil changed, not the rain. The immutability of God is the doctrinal anchor: He does not change in His nature, His standard, or His requirement. Because He does not change, all responsibility for alignment falls on man. "In the immutability of God is the responsibility of man." The session closes with "close to, but not yet" -- there is still time.

Opening Question

When things go wrong spiritually, what is the first thing you are tempted to blame? What does that tendency reveal?

Discussion Questions

1. The rain falls on both kinds of soil. If God is still sending the provision, what does that tell us about why some soil bears thorns?
2. "In the immutability of God is the responsibility of man." What does that statement mean? What does it demand of us?
3. If God never changes, what does that mean for the return road? Where does it lead?
4. The message said "close to, but not yet." Why is proximity to the danger the presupposition of the warning rather than the evidence that it is too late?
5. What does it mean to make your decision now, before the proximity becomes finality?

Closing Reflection

He has not moved. Every gap is a human-caused gap. The return address has not changed.

■ SESSION 3 -- IT'S NOT HIM, PART 2

James 1:13--15

Leader Orientation

James 1 is the biological map of what Hebrews 6 shows agriculturally. The draw is internal -- *idias epithumias*, his own lust. The uncrucified flesh presents its desires as worth moving toward. The will is not seized; it is solicited. The biological progression (draw, conceive, birth, death) maps the stages of drift. You can interrupt a pregnancy. You cannot undo a birth.

Opening Question

Have you ever drifted toward something and, looking back, realized the draw came from inside you rather than outside? What does that recognition feel like?

Discussion Questions

1. The message said the draw toward drift is internal, not external. How does that change the way you approach your own spiritual vulnerabilities?
2. *Idias epithumias* -- his own lust. What does it mean for the flesh to present its desires from within? How does that differ from an external temptation?
3. The biological progression: draw, conceive, birth, death. Where is it easiest to interrupt that progression? What makes each stage harder to interrupt than the previous one?
4. The two-witness frame: Hebrews 6 (agricultural) and James 1 (biological) both answer the same charge. What is the charge, and why does it take two witnesses to answer it?
5. The closing question of the message was: not "what is coming at me from outside?" but "what is already in me that I have stopped crucifying?" How would you answer that question personally?

Closing Reflection

The draw has an internal address. The question is not what is coming at you. It is what is already in you that you have stopped bringing to the cross.

■ SESSION 4 -- CLOSE TO, BUT NOT YET

Ruth 1--4 / Hebrews 6:7--8

Leader Orientation

The series shifts from exposition to narrative. Naomi's story carries every diagnostic thread into one human life. She knew the covenant, left under the logic of necessity, paid the cost, and turned back. She did not reconstruct

herself before turning. The kinsman-redeemer was already in the field before she arrived. The pastoral point: you do not have to have it together to return. You just have to turn.

Opening Question

Have you ever returned to something -- a relationship, a commitment, a conviction -- after being away for a while? What was that return like?

Discussion Questions

1. Naomi left Bethlehem for a reasonable, seemingly necessary reason. Why is the "logic of necessity" one of the most dangerous forms drift takes?
2. Naomi arrived home calling herself Mara -- bitter -- and did not pretend the departure had not cost her. What does her honesty about her condition model for us about the beginning of return?
3. The kinsman-redeemer was already in the field. What does it mean for the provision of return to already be positioned before the returning person arrives?
4. "You do not have to have it together to return. You just have to turn." What is the difference between having it together and turning?
5. Where in your own life do you need to turn -- not reconstruct, just turn?

Closing Reflection

He is already in the field. The question is not whether you are ready. The question is whether you will turn.

■ SESSION 5 -- RETURNING FROM MOAB

Ruth 1--4 / Malachi 3:6--7

Leader Orientation

Session 5 is the anatomy of the return journey. Malachi 3:6--7 provides the frame: immutability generates both grace (you are not consumed) and demand (Return to Me). He does not come to where drift deposited us. He says: return. The return road leads to a fixed destination at the same address where He has always been. What return requires: honesty about where you are, movement toward rather than away, and willingness to be received as you are.

Opening Question

What makes a return journey hard -- not the destination, but the road itself?

Discussion Questions

1. Malachi 3:6--7 says "I, the LORD, do not change" and in the same breath says "Return to Me." How do the comfort and the demand of immutability belong together?

2. The message said He does not travel toward us in our drifted state -- He says: Return. What does it mean to move toward rather than wait for something to change?
3. The three elements of return: honesty about where you are, movement toward, willingness to be received as you are. Which of these is hardest? Why?
4. The return address has not changed. What is the significance of the destination being fixed?
5. For someone who has been convicted across this series but has not yet moved: what is the one thing standing between them and the first step?

Closing Reflection

The return road leads to the same God at the same address where He has always been. He is waiting. What will you do?

■ SESSION 6 -- HE HAD TO PASS THROUGH

John 4:1--42

Leader Orientation

The series closes by naming the second category. Not everyone in the room drifted from truth they once held. Some have been adrift without a clear account of truth to return to. The Samaritan woman is the representative of that category. Jesus did not wait for her to navigate her way back -- He went out of His way to be where she was. The governing principle: the God who cannot be blamed for our drift passes through the places where drifting people live. Both categories are present. Both are covered.

Opening Question

Has there ever been a time when someone came to you -- went out of their way for you -- at a moment when you were not expecting it and could not have found them yourself? What was that like?

Discussion Questions

1. *Edei* -- He had to pass through Samaria. Not geographically but theologically. What does divine necessity mean in this context? What does it tell us about how God moves?
2. Jesus met the woman at the well at noon, alone, in her precise condition. What does it mean for God to meet someone in the exact circumstances of their drift rather than waiting for them to come to Him?
3. The series has addressed two categories: those who drifted from truth they held, and those who have been adrift without the full truth. Which of these describes where you are today?
4. The governing principle: the God who cannot be blamed for our drift passes through the places where drifting people live. How does that statement change the way you pray for people you know who are drifting?
5. The series is closed. What is the one thing you will do differently because of these six sessions?

Closing Reflection

He had to pass through Samaria. Whoever you are and wherever the drift deposited you -- He had to pass through there too. The only question is whether you will let Him stay.

FOR GROUP MEMBERS

Student Guide

Are We Drifting?

This guide is your companion to the "Are We Drifting?" series. Each session has a scripture anchor, a key idea from the message, space to reflect, and a question to carry into the week.

■ SESSION 1 -- ARE WE DRIFTING?

Hebrews 6:4--6; Hebrews 2:3

How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? -- Hebrews 2:3

Key Idea

In aviation, a single degree of heading error causes approximately one mile of lateral drift for every sixty miles traveled. A flight can end forty miles off course not because of a crash but because of a small, sustained deviation that compounded invisibly while everything seemed normal.

Spiritual drift works the same way. It does not announce itself. It does not begin with rebellion. It begins with neglect -- paying no attention, stepping back a little at a time. The drift is an inner-man departure before it is a visible one.

Three things this series establishes from the beginning:

Drift is real. The writer of Hebrews is not describing a theoretical danger. He observes it in people he knows.

Drift is sneaky. It comes as neglect, not scandal. Church attendance can increase while the heart recedes.

Drift is dangerous. The warning exists because the danger has a direction and a destination.

Reflection

The text asks believers -- not unbelievers -- to examine their trajectory. When you look at the direction your life is moving, is it trending toward holiness or away from it?

This Week

What is one area of your spiritual life where you have been paying less attention than you used to? Name it honestly.

■ SESSION 2 -- IT'S NOT HIM

Hebrews 6:7--8

For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned. -- Hebrews 6:7--8

Key Idea

The same rain falls on two kinds of soil. One produces useful vegetation. One produces thorns and thistles. The land bearing thorns is not under drought. God has not withheld His provision. The soil changed -- through drift.

This is the answer to the charge drift always wants to make: that God is responsible. He is not. He is still sending the rain. What changed is the condition of the soil.

The immutability of God is the doctrinal anchor: God does not change in His nature, His character, His standard, or His requirement. Because He does not change, every gap between where we are and where He is was created by our movement, not His withdrawal. He has not moved. The return address has not changed.

In the immutability of God is the responsibility of man.

The passage closes with "close to being cursed, but not yet burned." This is not a closed verdict. It is a proximity warning with urgency: there is still time. Make your decision.

Reflection

When things go wrong spiritually, what do you tend to blame? What does that tendency reveal about where you place responsibility?

This Week

Where have you been living as though God has withheld something from you? Is there evidence that the rain is still falling?

■ SESSION 3 -- IT'S NOT HIM, PART 2

James 1:13--15

But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. -- James 1:14--15

Key Idea

James maps the mechanism that Hebrews 6 implies but does not name. Where Hebrews 6 shows the outcome (thorn-bearing soil), James 1 shows the process -- how the soil came to bear thorns.

The draw toward drift is not external. James is precise about this: *his own lust*. The possessive is emphatic. The draw has an internal address. It is not the enemy presenting something from outside. It is the uncrucified flesh presenting its desires from within, in a form the will finds plausible. Drift rarely looks like defection. It looks like preference.

The progression is biological: draw, conceive, birth, death. Each stage requires the will's cooperation. Each stage produces the next. The progression can be interrupted -- but only before the birth. You can interrupt a pregnancy. You cannot undo a birth. The pastoral urgency of James 1 is: identify your stage and make the interruption before the next one arrives.

Reflection

The question the message asked: not "what is coming at me from outside?" but "what is already in me that I have stopped crucifying?" How would you answer that question today?

This Week

Identify one thing the flesh has been presenting to your will as worth moving toward. Name it. Bring it to the cross.

■ SESSION 4 -- CLOSE TO, BUT NOT YET

Ruth 1--4 / Hebrews 6:7--8

And she said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the LORD has witnessed against me and the Almighty has afflicted me?" -- Ruth 1:20--21

Key Idea

Naomi knew the covenant. She left Bethlehem -- the house of bread -- not in rebellion but under the logic of necessity. There was a famine. The departure felt reasonable. And then it cost her everything: her husband, her sons, her substance.

By the time she turns back toward Bethlehem, she has nothing. She arrives calling herself Mara -- bitter -- and does not pretend the cost has not been paid. She tells the truth about her condition.

But the kinsman-redeemer is already in the field before she arrives. The provision for her return is already positioned. Boaz is already at work. All that is required of Naomi and Ruth is that they show up.

Naomi did not reconstruct herself before she turned back. She turned back exactly as she was. And the grace waiting for her was not conditioned on her condition.

You do not have to have it together to return. You just have to turn.

Reflection

What has your departure cost you? Name it honestly. Then ask: is the God who was present in Bethlehem before I left still present now?

This Week

Identify one direction you need to turn your feet. Not reconstruct, not clean up -- just turn. What is the first step?

■ SESSION 5 -- RETURNING FROM MOAB

Ruth 1--4 / Malachi 3:6--7

"For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed... Return to Me, and I will return to you." -- Malachi 3:6--7

Key Idea

Malachi 3:6--7 contains both faces of the immutability of God in a single passage. On one side: you are not consumed. He has not retracted His mercy. On the other side: Return to Me. He does not come to where drift deposited us. He says: return. The return road leads to a fixed destination.

What the return requires is not reconstruction. It is:

Honesty about where you are. Naomi named her condition. She called herself Mara. She did not arrive pretending.

Movement toward rather than away. The return is directional. It is turning your feet back toward the God who has not moved.

Willingness to be received as you are. The provision is already in the field.

He is where He is. The standard still stands. The return road leads to the same God at the same address where He has always been.

Reflection

What does "Return to Me" mean for you specifically today? What direction is that return?

This Week

Take one step on the return road. It does not have to be a large step. It has to be a step in the right direction.

■ SESSION 6 -- HE HAD TO PASS THROUGH

John 4:1--42

And He had to pass through Samaria. -- John 4:4

Key Idea

The series has been addressing the person who drifted from truth they once held. But there is a second category: the person who has been adrift without ever fully arriving at the truth. The Samaritan woman at the well represents that category.

She is at the well at noon, alone. That is the posture of someone who has arranged her life around what drift produces. She has not had a journey away from the covenant and back toward it. She has been at the margins of the truth, close but not quite arrived, her whole life.

Jesus did not wait for her to find the road. He rerouted the journey to be at the well where she was.

He had to pass through Samaria. Not because the road required it -- Jews avoided Samaria. Because she was there.

The governing principle that closes the series: the God who cannot be blamed for our drift passes through the places where drifting people live. This is not passive. It is purposeful. It is prior to any response from the drifting person. He comes to where you are.

Both categories are present in every room where this series has been preached. Both are covered by the same provision.

Reflection

Which category describes you? Did you drift from truth you once held, or have you been adrift without fully arriving? Both questions deserve an honest answer, and both answers have a response available.

This Week

The series is closed. Name one thing that will be different because of these six sessions. Write it down. Make it specific. Return to it in thirty days.

PERSONAL & MIDWEEK STUDY

Weekly Companion

Are We Drifting?

This companion is designed for your daily and midweek engagement with the "Are We Drifting?" series. Each week includes a journal prompt, a deeper reading, and reflection questions to carry through the week.

— WEEK 1 -- THE DIAGNOSTIC —

How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? -- Hebrews 2:3

Journal Prompt

In aviation, a one-degree heading error is undetectable in the moment but produces catastrophic displacement over distance. Think about a specific area of your spiritual life. If you applied the 1-in-60 rule to it -- tracing the current degree of deviation out over the next year, five years, ten years -- where does the trajectory lead?

Write honestly. Not where you want it to lead. Where it is currently heading.

Deeper Reading

Read Hebrews 6:1--8 in full. Sit especially with verse 3 ("And this we will do, if God permits") alongside verse 6 ("and then have fallen away"). The writer places the intention to press on directly alongside the warning about falling away. Both are in the same passage.

Consider: what does it mean that pressing on is treated as something that requires God's permission -- and that falling away is described as a real and present danger in the same breath?

Reflection Questions

1. The message defined drift as beginning with neglect -- passive omission, not active rebellion. Where in your life has neglect, rather than rebellion, been the entry point of spiritual erosion?
2. The text says it is "impossible to renew again to repentance" those who have fallen away in the sense described. This is a warning, not a verdict already rendered. What does the presence of the warning -- rather than the pronouncement of the verdict -- tell you about where the text assumes you still are?
3. The three propositions: drift is real, drift is sneaky, drift is dangerous. Which of these is hardest for you personally to take seriously, and why?

— WEEK 2 -- THE RAIN IS STILL FALLING —

For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned. -- Hebrews 6:7--8

Journal Prompt

The message established that the rain is still falling -- that God has not withheld His provision. Write about a specific area of your life where you have been living as though God is the variable, as though He has withheld something or moved away from you.

Now examine: is there evidence that the rain is still falling in that area? Name it, even if it is difficult to see through the thorns.

Deeper Reading

Read Malachi 3:6--7 and James 1:17 together.

Malachi: "For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed. Return to Me, and I will return to you."

James: "Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow."

Both texts ground God's provision in His immutability. He does not change. His provision does not vary. His standard does not shift. The variance is always on the receiving end.

Reflection Questions

1. "In the immutability of God is the responsibility of man." What does this statement require of you personally? What does it make unavoidable?
2. The message said God does not lower the standard to meet our compromise. He does not change His requirement because the drift has moved us away from it. How does that truth feel -- both as comfort and as demand?
3. "Close to being cursed, but not yet burned." What does the phrase "not yet" mean for where you are right now?

— WEEK 3 -- THE DRAW IS INTERNAL —

But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. -- James 1:14--15

Journal Prompt

James says the lust that draws toward drift is *idias* -- his own. The draw has an internal address.

Write about a specific area where you have been looking for an external explanation for an internal departure. What would you have to acknowledge about yourself if you stopped blaming the external source?

Deeper Reading

Read Galatians 5:16--24. Focus on verses 24--25: "Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit."

The crucifixion of verse 24 is a past-tense act -- *estaurosan*, they crucified. But verse 25 calls for ongoing present-tense response: "let us walk." The crucifixion was done. The walking is continuous. What does it mean for the crucifixion to be past and the walking to be ongoing? What happens when the walking stops?

Reflection Questions

1. The biological progression of James 1:15 -- draw, conceive, birth, death -- maps the stages of drift. Identify which stage describes where you are in an area you have been honest about in these first three weeks.
2. You can interrupt a pregnancy. You cannot undo a birth. What does the current stage you identified require of you if the interruption is going to happen?
3. The question from the message: not "what is coming at me from outside?" but "what is already in me that I have stopped crucifying?" Write your honest answer.

— WEEK 4 -- YOU JUST HAVE TO TURN —

And she said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, but the LORD has brought me back empty." -- Ruth 1:20

Journal Prompt

Naomi named her condition before she arrived. She did not pretend the departure had not cost her. She called herself Mara -- bitter -- in the presence of the people who had known her before.

What has your departure cost you? Write about it honestly. Not with self-condemnation -- with honesty. The kind of honesty Naomi modeled at the gate of Bethlehem.

Deeper Reading

Read Ruth 2:1--12. Note that Boaz is introduced in verse 1 -- before Naomi and Ruth have figured out their plan. He is already there. When Ruth arrives in the field, he is already watching. His provision for her is already prepared before she asks.

Sit with the theological implication: the provision of return is positioned before the returning person arrives.

Reflection Questions

1. Naomi left Bethlehem under the logic of necessity. There was a famine. What is the "logic of necessity" in your own story -- the reasonable-sounding reason the departure began?
2. "You do not have to have it together to return. You just have to turn." What is the difference between those two things in your own life right now?
3. The kinsman-redeemer was already in the field. What does it mean for you to believe that the provision of return is already positioned before you arrive?

— WEEK 5 -- THE RETURN ADDRESS —

"For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed... Return to Me, and I will return to you." -- Malachi 3:6--7

Journal Prompt

Malachi 3:6--7 contains a call: Return to Me. It is not a negotiation. It is not a conditional promise waiting for you to get something right. It is a statement of where God already is and has always been.

Write a response to that call as though it were addressed to you personally in this moment. What would you say?

Deeper Reading

Read the whole of Malachi 3:1--12. Note that the passage begins with the messenger who prepares the way and ends with a promise of provision for the returning people. The call to return is bookended by preparation and promise. The road back is not empty.

Reflection Questions

1. The return requires three things: honesty about where you are, movement toward rather than away, and willingness to be received as you are. Which of these is the hardest for you? Why?
2. "He does not come to where drift carried us. He says: Return." Does that feel like an invitation or a demand? Can it be both at the same time?
3. The return address has not changed. What is one concrete step you can take this week to move toward rather than away?

— WEEK 6 -- HE HAD TO PASS THROUGH —

And He had to pass through Samaria. -- John 4:4

Journal Prompt

Jesus rerouted His journey to be at the well where the Samaritan woman was. He did not wait for her to find the road to Him. He came to the place where she was, at the time she was there, in the condition she was in.

Write about a time when God came to where you were rather than waiting for you to come to Him. If you cannot identify a time, write about what it would mean for that to happen now.

Deeper Reading

Read John 4:1--42 in full. Note the progression of the encounter: Jesus asks for something before He offers anything. He speaks about living water before she knows who He is. He names her situation before she confesses it. The revelation comes in stages -- meeting her exactly where her understanding allows and drawing her forward.

This is the shape of God's engagement with the drifting person: meeting them where they are and drawing them toward what they need to know.

Reflection Questions

1. The series identified two categories: the person who drifted from truth they once held, and the person who has been adrift without fully arriving at the truth. Which category describes you most honestly?
2. The governing principle of the series' close: the God who cannot be blamed for our drift passes through the places where drifting people live. What does it mean for your life that He goes out of His way to be where you are?
3. Six weeks later -- look back at your journal prompt from Week 1. What is different? What trajectory has changed, or begun to change? What remains to be addressed?

A Final Word

The series ends here, but the road does not. The God who passes through Samaria is the same God who set the diagnostic standard in Hebrews 6. He is not finished. He is still in the field, still sending the rain, still rerouting the journey to be where the drifting person is. The question the series leaves you with is the same one it opened with -- only now you have walked six weeks with it.

When you examine the trajectory of your life honestly: is it trending toward holiness, or toward departure?

And wherever the answer lands: He had to pass through there.



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