



The Southeast Sower

Southeast Church of Christ

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“Caught In The ‘Tow’ ”

by

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On a hot summer day over 35 years ago, two young boys, Billy and Amos had been playing together when Amos suggested that they sneak off to go swimming in the Ohio River. Amos said, “It’s hot, we’re sweaty and the river is only half a mile away. Let’s go!” Billy wasn’t so sure it was a good idea. He remembered the warning of his grandfather: “Don’t go to the river to swim, you’ll get caught in the ‘tow’.” The “tow” referred to a powerful undertow, or current, near underwater ledges, drop-offs and deep holes which created a downward suction. It was a danger to even the strongest swimmers. But Amos persisted. “We’ll be back before anyone knows we’re gone; we won’t stay long.” “I don’t know,” Billy replied, “It may not be safe.” “But we’re good swimmers. It’s not as dangerous as they say. We’ll be all right. It’ll be fine,” Amos argued. After much deliberation, Billy reluctantly agreed. After all, it *was* hot. The water would feel good. As they descended the hill they could see how calm and smooth the river’s surface appeared. It looked like there

was almost no current. Surely it would be alright they thought.

They slowly waded out into the cool water - to their knees, to their waist and eventually to their neck. They were swimming, splashing, and having a great time. After about half an hour, Billy reminded his friend it was probably time to head back. Amos said, “OK, but I want to go out a little farther first.” Billy didn’t think it was such a good idea. Amos responded confidently, “Were having so much fun and the water feels great! I’ll come right back to shore.”

Amos waded a few steps more and sank into an unseen drop-off. He was sucked under the water by the undertow. He came thrashing to the surface in a panic crying for help before going under again. Billy swam to where Amos had been and dove deep, reaching in the dark, murky water for Amos. He grabbed his arm and tried to pull. However, Billy soon realized that not only was he unable to help his friend, but now he also was caught in the dangerous undertow. Amos slipped from Billy’s grip and Billy frantically swam to the surface. He cried out for his friend, but Amos was gone.

His friend, Amos, had drowned beneath the quiet

The Southeast

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SERVICES:

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Bible Study: 10:00 am

Worship: 10:50 am

6:00 pm

Wednesday

Bible Study: 7:30 pm

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surface of the Ohio River that horrible summer day.

This is certainly a sad story to hear, but it’s even sadder for me to tell. It is based on a similar event that happened to my cousin Billy, who I spent a lot of time with while growing up. After this event and the loss of his father to cancer, Billy, the happy-go-lucky boy with the ornery grin grew quiet, sullen, and withdrawn. The emotional trauma was so

great that he took his own life a few short years later.

As difficult as this story is to tell, I think it serves as a powerful illustration of the enticing nature of sin and its consequences. Falling prey to temptation and the tragic consequences of sin is not the fault of God. We are drawn away, enticed or allured, whether it be willfully or reluctantly, by our own choices. James 1:13-15 reads, *“¹³ Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. ¹⁴ But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. ¹⁵ Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.”*

Also, I John 2:16-17 tells us, *“¹⁶ For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. ¹⁷ And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.”*

We are surrounded by many worldly, temporal things that may tempt us even as the young boys were tempted by the cool river.

The lust of the eye - after all, the water looked calm peaceful, and refreshing. It looked like there was hardly any current.

The lust of the flesh - the water felt cool, satisfying and refreshing on such a hot day.

The pride of life - they were good swimmers and experienced enough to handle it. It couldn't really be that dangerous.

But the consequences of their enticement was death, even as it is with sin, both physical and spiritual. It leads to pain, anguish, emotional trauma and the hardening of one's heart in this life as well as spiritual death in the life to come.

We've all heard the expression, "Experience is the best teacher." But when it comes to negative experiences that are sinful I've heard it said that "Experience is a teacher a wise man rarely consults." How true that is. We should not test God's word, but rather heed his warnings regarding sin and the choices we make.

However, too many have waded farther and farther into the waters of sin through their own poor choices and have been overwhelmed by the flood. They need to look to God for their salvation even as the Psalmist wrote in Psa. 69:1-2, *“Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto my soul. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me.”*

Thankfully, for those "caught in the 'tow'", Edwin Ufford tells us in the song, "Throw Out The Lifeline", salvation is available through Jesus Christ!

"Throw out the lifeline across the dark wave;

There is a brother whom someone should save; Somebody's brother! Oh, who then will dare

To throw out the lifeline, his peril to share? Throw out the lifeline with hand quick and strong:

Why do you tarry, why linger so long?

See! he is sinking; oh, hasten today

And out with the life boat!

Away, then, away! Throw out the lifeline to danger-fraught men,

Sinking in anguish where you've never been;

Winds of temptation and billows of woe

Will soon hurl them out where the dark waters flow. Soon will the season of rescue be o'er,

Soon will they drift to eternity's shore;

Haste, then, my brother, no time for delay,

But throw out the lifeline and save them today. This is the lifeline, oh, tempest-tossed men,

Baffled by waves of temptation and sin;

Wild winds of passion, your strength cannot brave,

But Jesus is mighty, and Jesus can save. Jesus is able! To you who are driv'n

Farther and farther from God and from Heav'n,

Helpless and hopeless, o'erwhelmed by the wave,

We throw out the lifeline—'tis, "Jesus can save."

This is the lifeline, oh, grasp it today!

See, you are recklessly drifting away;

Voices in warning, shout over the wave,

Oh, grasp the strong lifeline, for Jesus can save."