



Swimmer Rescued After Floating Adrift at Sea 36 Hours

The Wired Word for the Week of July 28, 2024

In the News

On Wednesday, July 10th, an unnamed Chinese national in her 20s was rescued after spending 36 hours drifting more than 50 miles in a floating ring out to sea from a beach in Shimoda, Japan.

The Japan Coast Guard launched a search for the woman after a friend called at about 7:30 p.m. on Monday, July 8, to report her missing from the beach on the southern tip of Boso Peninsula, about 125 miles southwest of Tokyo, where she had been swimming.

The woman was spotted early Wednesday off Japan's east coast by a cargo ship crew, which radioed a passing LPG tanker, the Kakuwa Maru No. 8, for help. When tanker crew members located her, they called to the woman, urging her not to give up as she battled 6.5-foot high waves. Two of them leapt into the water and secured a rope around the woman, so that other crew could lift her up to the deck of the tanker.

Once she was on board, the exhausted woman was wrapped in a pale blue blanket and hoisted up to a coast guard helicopter. She waved her thanks to the tanker crew below before the chopper whisked her away to Yokohama, where she was taken to a hospital for assessment.

"She is dehydrated, but her consciousness is clear and she is not in a life-threatening condition," the coast guard reported. "There is no need for hospitalization." They said the woman was lucky to be alive, considering the dangers she faced of possible hypothermia, heat stroke, or being hit by a ship in the dark.

Hidetoshi Saito, a senior member of the Society of Water Rescue and Survival Research, agreed, calling the woman's survival "a miracle."

Later, the woman told authorities that about a half hour after entering the water with an inflatable device, she realized she was drifting and was being swept out to sea by the currents and strong winds. The Chinese Embassy in Tokyo recognized the cooperative efforts of the Chinese Consulate and Japanese authorities, including the cargo and tanker crews, in the successful rescue. The embassy urged Chinese residents in Japan to use caution when engaging in activities along the coastline.

Not all those in peril on the sea are as fortunate as this Chinese swimmer. James Brett Clibbery and his wife, Sarah Justine Packwood, sailed out of Nova Scotia on June 11, headed for the Azores. They never made it. A 10-foot inflatable lifeboat containing what authorities believe are the couple's remains was discovered July 10 on Sable Island National Park Reserve, about 180 miles southeast of Halifax, Nova Scotia. Authorities said the area is known for its proximity to more than 350 shipwrecks.

The exact circumstances of the pair's failed voyage, the whereabouts of their 42-foot GibSea sailboat, and what role the wind, ocean currents, and drift played, are unknown.

More on this story can be found at these links:

[Chinese Woman Lost at Sea for 37 Hours \(Video 1:21\).](#) *South China Morning Post*

[Beachgoer Swept Away on Floating Ring Survives 36-hour Ordeal Off Japan's Coast.](#) *CNN*

[Woman Swept to Sea While Swimming at a Japanese Beach Rescued 37 Hours Later and 50 Miles Away.](#) *AP*

[Couple Who Attempted to Cross Atlantic Found Dead in Lifeboat.](#) *The New York Times*

Applying the News Story

In her blog, [Drifting Away From God](#), Kyra Riley wrote: "Drifting away from God is like drifting alone on the ocean. It happens subtly and over time. ... Little by little, we communicate with God less and miss church services more. As family and career obligations consume our schedules, we may see our faith as unnecessary.

"We experience this drifting for days and months," Riley added. "Then, before we know it, years have gone by, and our relationship with God becomes a distant memory. While we may distract ourselves with tasks and goals for this or that, we are, in fact, lost in life. We are lost because we do not have the one thing we need most: intimacy with the Lord."

We note that drifting from the safety of the shore doesn't happen deliberately. In the same way, people who drift spiritually don't usually intend to slip away from God. It can happen in such small increments that we don't even notice how far we have moved away from God until we are in a precarious situation.

We tend to think that sin is always a willful, deliberate, defiant act, but the Greek word *hamartia* (which is translated as "sin" in [Romans 3:23](#)) is also

used of an arrow that misses the bull's-eye. In Paul's analogy, humans are like archers who all miss the center of the target of God's glory. Some may come closer to the center while others miss it by a mile, but the result is the same: *All* have sinned (missed the mark) and fall short of the glory of God.

Scholar Jules Brody wrote that the Greek word "*Hamartia* is a morally neutral non-normative term, ... meaning 'to miss the mark,' 'to fall short of an objective.' And by extension: to reach one destination rather than the intended one; to make a mistake, not in the sense of a moral failure, but in the nonjudgmental sense of taking one thing for another, taking something for its opposite. *Hamartia* may betoken an error of discernment due to ignorance, to the lack of an essential piece of information."

"Nobody slips and falls on purpose, nor does anybody wander out of the way on purpose," wrote preacher John W. Ritenbaugh. Nonetheless, inattention to spiritual matters can have devastating unintended consequences.

"How many deaths have occurred where a person did something seriously wrong yet claims, 'I didn't mean for that to happen'?" Ritenbaugh asks.

"What could happen if someone is cruising along, not concentrating on his driving, and drifts into oncoming traffic, smashing into another car and killing its occupants? How many people have been killed because a driver's attention was diverted by a cell phone? Just because a sin is unintentional does not mean it is not serious. Such a sin is often one of careless, impatient, lackadaisical neglect. It is the ignoring of a higher priority."

Artist Jennifer Rothnie wrote that "Drifting away is not outright rebellion or defection from God, but is the accidental slipping away which occurs when someone neglects to keep Christ as their anchor. ... The final consequence of unchecked drifting is a complete shipwreck ([1 Timothy 1:18-20](#)).

A boat drifts away from safe harbor when it is not tied securely to its pier, or drifts out at sea when it loses contact with its home base. We must intentionally keep connected to God, always keeping our eyes on Jesus, to guard against spiritual drift.

The Big Questions

1. What do we risk losing if we drift away from God by neglecting our spiritual responsibilities?
2. Name a biblical figure who had trouble with spiritual drift. What factors contributed to that drift? What were the consequences of that drift? What, if anything, reversed that trajectory?
3. When, if ever, have you found yourself drifting spiritually? How did it happen, and what, if anything, did you do about it?4. What strategies may be useful to guard against spiritual drift?
5. What should we do if we have already drifted away from God?

Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

Mark 4:16-19

And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: when they hear the word,

they immediately receive it with joy. But they have no root and endure only for a while; then, when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. And others are those sown among the thorns: these are the ones who hear the word, but the cares of the age and the lure of wealth and the desire for other things come in and choke the word, and it yields nothing. (For context, read [Mark 4:2-9, 13-20](#).)

In the parable of the sower, Jesus uses an agricultural metaphor to explain how different people respond to the good news he brings. Some initially respond with enthusiasm, but lacking root, they fall away when trouble comes. Others are distracted by the cares of the age, the lure of worldly wealth and baubles, or intellectual pursuits, so they drift away to pursue interests in things that fascinate, but ultimately fade into nothing.

Questions: What difficulties or storms of life might lead to spiritual drift? What material or earthly blessings could mesmerize people to such an extent that they don't even notice that they are drifting away from what really matters?

Luke 15:13-17

A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant region, and there he squandered his wealth in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that region, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that region, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, and no one gave him anything. But when he came to his senses he said, "How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger!" (For context, read [Luke 15:11-32](#).)

The story of the Prodigal Son and his brother is familiar to most of us. The younger son, perhaps bored with life on the farm, longed for a little excitement, so he headed off to sow his wild oats until he had wasted all his money. It's doubtful that when he began to drift away from affection for his father, he realized how far the currents of the world would take him.

That's how spiritual drift works. We make one selfish choice, tell one little lie, turn away from the God who loves us, just once, thinking, perhaps, that we can always come back. And then, suddenly, we find ourselves in the pigsty, wondering what led to that sorry state of affairs!

But to be fair, the elder brother was also drifting away from his father's love, even though he didn't actually leave his physical home! He harbored resentment, greed and anger that meant he couldn't enjoy the company of his family, even while he was surrounded by blessings and was welcome to join in the festivities.

Questions: How might spiritual drift creep up without warning even on people who are trying to live right? What is the connection between spiritual drift and alienation from God and others?

Hebrews 1:1-2; 2:1

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. ... Therefore we must pay greater attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. (For context, read [Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:1-4](#).)

The overall theme of Hebrews is the superiority of Jesus to any other creature or manifestation of God. Because he is God's Son, heir of all things,

"reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being," he ranks higher than any other prophet or angelic being. That is why we must listen carefully ("give the most earnest heed") to the truth we have heard and seen in him, so we don't drift away into false teachings.

Listening to Christ means more than letting his words go "in one ear and out the other." Jesus tells us that we are not merely to hear his words, but also to act on them ([Matthew 7:24-27](#)). James echoes that exhortation in his letter ([James 1:22-25](#)).

Some versions of the New Testament (called "Red-Letter Editions") have highlighted Jesus' words in red. Of course, context is always important. But if we want to pay attention to what Jesus said, highlighting Jesus' words on the page, and in our hearts, seems like a good place to start.

Questions: Which sayings of Jesus seem to be fairly well-known? Which seem to be neglected or relatively unknown to most people? What might account for the discrepancy? Biblical illiteracy, cherry-picking favorite passages while ignoring those we find problematic or too pointed, or something else? What can you do to become more familiar with what Jesus actually said?

Revelation 2:1, 4-5

To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: ... But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember, then, from where you have fallen; repent and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. (For context, read [Revelation 2:1-5](#).)

It sometimes happens that when a person first comes to faith in Christ, there is a kind of ecstasy or euphoria that fills every day with joy. But over time, as reality sets in and the new believer realizes that every day still has its set of problems, disillusionment and cooling of zeal may come. This passage refers to this phenomenon as the loss of one's "first love" -- of the ardor that burned hot when one first discovered the wonder of who Jesus is and what Jesus has done to show God's great love for humanity.

Questions: How might the diminishing of fervent love for Jesus lead to spiritual drift away from him? How might remembering "from where you have fallen" help restore one's first love for him? How do we repent the loss of our first love? What are the works we once did that we need to do again, to bring us back from the place where we have drifted?

For Further Discussion

1. [José Salvador Alvarenga](#), a Salvadoran fisherman, was adrift in a 23-foot skiff in the Pacific Ocean for 14 months, the longest time on record that anyone has been drifting at sea, according to *Wikipedia*. Shortly after embarking on a fishing expedition on November 17, 2012, with another angler, Ezequiel Córdoba, Alvarenga's vessel was blown off course by a storm that lasted five days, during which the motor was damaged, most of their food and gear was lost, and the radio battery died.

Alvarenga reported that about four months later, Córdoba got sick, gave up hope, eventually refused to eat, and starved to death. Alvarenga struggled with suicidal thoughts after his companion died, but said his Christian faith kept him going.

Somehow, Alvarenga happened upon a tiny island in a remote part of the Marshall Islands on January 30, 2014. The mariner jumped overboard

and swam to shore, where he was found by two locals. He received medical treatment before flying home to his family in El Salvador 11 days later.

How do you imagine the challenges of drifting at sea compare and contrast with the challenges of drifting away from God?

2. In ["Thoughts on Why People Drift From Faith,"](#) Dan Osborn wrote: "One of C.S. Lewis's better-known works, *The Screwtape Letters*, highlights interaction between Screwtape, a senior demon and instructor, and Wormwood, a demon in training. Screwtape lays out effective ways to undermine the Words of God and cause those who follow God to abandon their belief and Christian commitment.

Wily Screwtape gives Wormwood this gem of wisdom regarding the temptation necessary to cause one to abandon belief in God:

You will say that these are very small sins; and doubtless, like all young tempters, you are anxious to be able to report spectacular wickedness. But do remember, the only thing that matters is the extent to which you separate the man from the Enemy [God]. It does not matter how small the sins are provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the Light and out into the Nothing. Murder is no better than cards if cards can do the trick. Indeed the safest road to Hell is the gradual one -- the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts.

The *Screwtape Letters* is to remind readers of the vital truth: following Christ, and growing in affection for him and the Words of God, requires staying intentionally focused on the things of God rather than allowing the lesser things of this world to control one's heart.

What "lesser things of this world" vie for control of your heart? How does intentionally focusing on the things of God keep you from drifting after those lesser things?

3. Consider this, about the choral piece "All We Like Sheep" from Handel's Messiah:

The website, [Messiah: The Complete Guide](#), contains this program note: "Handel begins this movement with the chorus singing chords all together on the words, 'All we like sheep.' [This musically expresses the idea that "all" includes everyone.] But on the word 'astray,' the sopranos, tenors, altos and basses wander away from each other almost aimlessly and in faster notes. Then later, on the phrase 'We have turned every one to his own way,' the lines become even more independent, using counterpoint."

According to [musicologist Georg Predota](#), a researcher at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, "As a scholar writes, 'In Handel's famous chorus, sin glories in its shame with almost alcoholic exhilaration. His lost sheep meander hopelessly through a wealth of intricate semi-quavers, stumbling over decorous roulades and falling into mazes of counterpoint that prove inextricable.' All our foolishness is brought home in the final devastating section marked 'adagio,' with note values doubled [for the phrase, 'And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all']."

Discuss how this piece expresses the concept of drifting away from God, how it happens, and the consequences of spiritual drifting.

4. Other biblical words that express a similar concept to drifting include: "wandering" and "chasing after wind" ([Proverbs 21:16](#); [Ecclesiastes 6:9](#); [Jeremiah 14:10](#)); "straying" ([Isaiah 53:6](#); from God's commandments and from words of knowledge -- [Psalm 119:10, 110](#); [Proverbs 19:27](#); into paths of sin -- [Proverbs 7:25](#); from home, like a bird straying from its nest - [Proverbs 27:8](#)).

What do these synonyms add to your understanding of spiritual drifting?

5. Dan Osborn of the C.S. Lewis Institute described how he landed in Cleveland and rushed to find his car in the airport parking lot to make it to a midmorning meeting. About 25 minutes into his drive on the highway, he saw a sign indicating that he was 90 miles from Toledo. He was making great time! The only problem was, he had headed the wrong way on the turnpike and was seriously off course.

Drifting from our intended destination can happen when we fail to pay attention to spiritual signposts that inform us of the correct route we need to take and warn us about hazards and detours on the way.

Paul told Timothy, "Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching" ([1 Timothy 4:16](#)). Osborn wrote that if we want to avoid drifting off on the wrong path, we need to pay attention to our own obedience to Christ and the way we instruct others to follow Christ.

What steps can we take to ensure that we are paying close attention to our own faithfulness and to what we are teaching others by our words and example?

Responding to the News

Check out the children's story, "[Snowflake](#)", about a shepherd who rescues a lamb who has strayed away from the flock. You can use it to talk with children you know about the importance of keeping our eyes on Jesus the Good Shepherd so that we don't drift away.

Prayer suggested by [Hebrews 10:23](#)

O Christ, the anchor who keeps us from drifting away from God during the storms we face in life, by the power of your Spirit, strengthen us to hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for the God who has promised is faithful to keep his promises. Amen.

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