

AWOL

What happened to - what's his name - Bob?

This is not an uncommon question in simple church or even in pastor's forums. Some folk that have been attending for a while suddenly disappear. In some cases emails bounce back – “message undeliverable”. The classical cell phone response – the number does not exist. I have many of the ilk of Bob, Fred and John whose length of stay with us as been short like their names.

Why do they disappear without notice? Over the years I have discovered a few reasons after accidental meetings in funerals, restaurants, birthdays and weddings. Other reasons I have heard by rumour.

1. OFFENCE

Something said or someone caused serious offence which shattered the individual's faith in the group. The offence overrides all the good that the individual received from the association. Like the older son in the story of the prodigal, the intensity of the offence compels the “victim” to stay out of the house.

2. AVOIDANT PERSONALITY DISORDER

These individual are more private than public. They avoid social contact and confrontation as this produces anxiety. Because of the expectation of being ridiculed or embarrassed they avoid contact or confrontation. They came to the meetings to try to deliver themselves, but eventually settled for the demands of their condition. Sadly they are often not motivated to be delivered from their disorder.

3. DEMONIC ACTIVITY

Adam and Eve's satanic encounter in the garden caused them to hide from the presence of God.

When Satan entered Judas, Judas felt compelled to leave the table of the Lord.

John 13:26-30

26 Jesus answered, "It is he to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it." And having dipped the bread, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. 27 Now after the piece of bread, Satan entered him. Then Jesus said to him, "What you do, do quickly." 28 But no one at the table knew for what reason He said this to him. 29 For some thought, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus had said to him, "Buy those things we need for the feast," or that he should give something to the poor.

30 Having received the piece of bread, he then went out immediately. And it was night.

NKJV

4. INDIVIDUALISM

These folk do not look at the church as a family. They cherish their isolation. They are consumed by their own desires.

Prov 18:1

18 A man who isolates himself seeks his own desire; NKJV

They disappear if their needs are not met. They are governed by an overwhelming need for self-preservation. Group dynamics require self-denial and this is alien to their mind-set.

5. LAWLESSNESS

They have no sense of accountability to anyone. There is no social conscience. They despise authority and submission to the Word of God.

Matt 7:23-27

23"And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'(NKJ)

24"Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock:

25"and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.

26"Now everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand:

27"and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall."(NKJ)

The lawless cannot obey God's Word.

An environment that is Word intensive is antagonistic to the lawless – the lawless will always flee from a Word intensive environment.

6. CARES OF THE WORLD

Some are seduced by the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches – too busy pursuing business prospects.

Matt 13:22-23

22 Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.NKJV

7. PERSECUTION

Some disappear because of persecution.

Matt 13:20-22

20 But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; 21 yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. NKJV

8. DEATH OR SICKNESS

Always check because the person could have been hospitalized or could have died.