

The Way Back

'While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him. He ran to his son and threw his arms around him. '
(Luke 15:20)

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The Outset

We can lose our way. Jesus himself spoke of how the *'worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth'* could 'choke' his word in our life.¹

Have you wandered from Jesus? Has life pulled you and pushed you, and now you find yourself distant from the Lord?

I began following Jesus at the age of sixteen. I had believed in him before that, but when 'tested' as a teenager, 'tempted', I just wandered with the crowd and found myself very distant from a 'true' belief in Jesus. I was very much part of the world – immoral, self-serving, dishonest.

¹ Matthew 13:22

So at sixteen, one particular, quiet moment, my heart was convicted of sin. The Spirit of the Lord moved gently, strongly, on my own spirit, calling me to be true to him. I chose in that moment – a hard choice - to repent of my sin and actually ‘walk’ my faith out sincerely. I chose to make Jesus Lord of my life and my closest ‘friend’.

This cost me. It cost me nearly all my friendships, because these had been based on world values. And when I chose to repent of sin, to pull back from world values, my friends disappeared quickly.

I began to decline invitations to parties, and I would be honest with people about my reason: *‘I’m a Christian now, and trying to follow Jesus, and I don’t believe I should go...’* Many questions would come my way, and lots of quiet mocking and whispering. I broke up with my girlfriend on the same ‘religious’ grounds, so to speak, and that caused a flurry of talk.

I began avoiding certain people groups in school because I knew the conversation was unwholesome, and very quickly I

found myself alone. It was a type of death. It wasn't hardcore opposition, but just a strong, real divide between myself and the world.

I began getting up early in the morning before school to read my Bible, pray, and even walk around the neighborhood in the dark morning sky, praying and preparing for my day. After school – much less social for me than previously – I would come home and again, read my Bible, whisper to the Lord.

I truly felt like all I had been gripping – friends, approval, activity, attention – was slipping from my grip. God had called me to pursue and 'hold' his truth, his Spirit, his Word. So as I took hold of the Lord, and let go of the world, I was dying to 'self'. It was a lonely fall.

After a few months attending church with more personal interest and commitment, I began to build new friendships with other Christians based on Christ, with a true and upright foundation. It was now clear to me and to others that Jesus was my own, personal Lord, and his ways were

my commitment. This gave me a new floor, a new foundation, upon which to build friendships, and indeed build life. It was like a new dawning. It was like a 'resurrection'. I had died with Christ, and now I was rising to new life with Christ.

This was the beginning for me. It was real, it was deep, it was lonely, but it was very intimate with the Spirit of God, and very precious to my soul.

But, my friend, that was thirty years ago. And looking back now even over my years as a Christian, I see many valleys and peaks. I have had dark times of temptation and stumbling. I have had whole seasons of being distracted by the struggles of finances, and the lure of pursuing money. I have had ego-driven seasons where I weary myself out trying to get the attention and approval of other people – Christians as well as non-Christians. I've wandered at times. I've been deceived at other times. I've had ups, downs, lefts and rights.

I've had to repent of sin, and come back to the Lord often. Walking with Jesus,

with God, is a real – the *most* real – relationship a person will have. And like any relationship, it is challenging, it is alive, it can grow strong or become weak. It can be faithful and true, or dishonest and unfaithful. Our relationship with Jesus is not a status, a ‘talk’; it is a ‘walk’.

Temptation

Sometimes life has distracted, tempted, pulled me. I want *this* life, what the world has to offer. I want to hold it, to 'save it'. But as I reach for this life, I lose *true* life. Jesus said it would be this way:

'Whoever wants to save their life will lose it...' (Luke 9:23)

You see, there's 'life' and then there's '*Life*'. Paul refers to life in Jesus as, '*life that is truly life.*' (1 Timothy 6:19)

This is the constant tension we are faced with. We live in a dark, tempting world. Yet we are called by God to a life of faith, and to avoid immorality and sin. It's a tough choice, and goes against the 'path' of this world, the flow of desire, the voices of our friends. Jesus puts it this way:

'The path that leads to life is narrow, and few find it.' (Matthew 7:14)

Has temptation and sin pulled you away from your true life in Jesus?

Weary?

The truth is, when we wander from the Lord, we become weary. We find ourselves tired from the inside out. We are 'soul' tired. Our spirits have lost their light, their center, and our true self is now behind a mask.

Deep in our soul we know the truth. We know that Jesus is true. We know his ways are true. We know his Spirit is real. We know his love is pure.

We also know what is false. We look around us at people who deny Christ, who live for themselves – for money, for drugs, for pleasure – and we just know. We know the difference. We've seen the light of Christ. We know what we've seen. And yet we're here now, distant from that land. We're lost. We're among people that have *not* seen the light. We are now counted among the false.

Are you in this place? Have you wandered from the light of Christ, and now find yourself in a world that is not his?

Afraid?

I think there are two kinds of fear that meet us here. There is the fear of danger and poverty in this world, and this fear has driven us to work and save and sweat and obsess over money and things. No one knows us as men and women of faith; they know us as hard-working, hustling, scrambling, busy people of the world. Maybe nothing particularly 'bad', but nothing, either, particularly of Christ.

The other fear that can get us, now that we've lost our way, is the fear of coming *back* to Christ. People now know us as one of their own. People now know us as a sinner – immoral, dishonest, lustful, etc. We fear the cry of '*Hypocrite!*' We fear the accusations of what we've done in the dark. We fear exposure. We also fear coming into the light, giving up some things, and being accountable for righteous living going forward.

Fear got us off the road of truth and faith, and now fear keeps us from the way back.

The Way Back

My friend, it is time. You know it in your heart. You know it is true, and that this call is to you. You know it.

Maybe you tremble. Maybe you feel it is impossible now. You've learnt how to cope with this dark world, and you feel you just need to keep fighting forward... Too late for a real faith. Too late for change. Too much done. Too much lost. Too late for God's forgiveness. Too late.

This is precisely where the 'prodigal son' (you, me) found himself. 'Prodigal' means 'reckless' or 'wasteful'. Jesus told this story. Please read this whole story now, taken straight out of the Bible from Luke chapter 15.

The Prodigal Son

'Jesus told a story: "There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, *'Father, give me my share of the estate.'* So he divided his property between them.

“Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

“When he came to his senses, he said, *‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’* So he got up and went to his father.

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

“The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

“But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. This son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.
(Luke 15:11-24)

We cannot undo what we have done. We cannot ‘get back’ to truth in our own strength. We cannot save ourselves.

The prodigal son had to simply go home. He could not recover the money he had wasted. He could not repay his father. He did not, it would seem, even retrace his steps and apologize to those he had hurt. He was past even that. He simply had to humble himself, walk away from his sinful life, and go home. Go back to his father.

Jesus does not call you to fix your life, or retrace your steps. He does not call you to right all your wrongs. He calls you to come home to him. In spirit. In truth. In humility. In repentance.

Are you ready now to lay down your burden? Are you ready to go back to your true and trustworthy Father God?

Jesus said, 'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest... I am gentle and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls.'
(Matthew 11:28-29)

Where You Are

'Be still and know that I am God.'

(Psalm 46:10)

Jesus comes to you. The truth is, the 'way back', is not a journey on your part. Jesus has pursued you. He knocks on the door of your heart, and asks that you just open the door – right where you are.

'Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in...' (Revelation 3:20)

My friend, today is your day to come home to Jesus. Now is your moment to walk back through the 'door' that is Jesus:

Jesus said, *'I am the door. Anyone who comes through me will be saved.'*

(John 10:9)

Are you ready to commit your life to Jesus? Are you ready to open the door of your heart to him now?

This is a prayer you can read – and as you read, believe.

Prayer

Dear Jesus, I'm tired. I have wandered from you. I have sinned.

I want to be right with you again. I want to come home to you.

Please meet me here, Lord. Please meet me now. I hear your knock on the door of my heart, and I open it to you now.

Jesus, I turn my back on my sin. I walk away from my sin. I need you to hold me and help me walk away.

I turn my face to you, Lord. I walk to you. Please give me a new start today. Please fill my heart with your forgiveness, your love and your joy.

Thank you, Jesus. Thank you for bringing me home.

Amen.

Celebration

Jesus told us that there is more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents, than over others who don't need to repent. (Luke 15:7) We saw this also in the story of the prodigal son, right? The father celebrated the return of his son.

If you have just read and prayed to come back to Christ, there is joy released in heaven. Your spirit decision, your heart turned to Jesus, is a *real* change – now and forevermore.

You are forgiven - right here, right now. Your sins have been washed away. Here in this quiet moment, this place, everything has changed! You are saved. You are free. You are new.

'Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation - the old has gone, the new has come!'
(2 Corinthians 5:17)

'As far as the east is from the west, that's how far he has removed our sin from us.'
(Psalm 103:12)

Walk the Talk

Jesus constantly asked people to 'follow' him. To actually put their faith into action.

If we don't get practical about our faith, it does not grow strong. It quickly becomes just 'lip service'.

God said through the prophet, Isaiah, *'They honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.'* (Isaiah 29:13)

The next five sections will be five practical ways to grow in faith. You could maybe read and meditate on just one each day?

After that, I will conclude with some suggestions of other resources available to you, to help you continue your walk, your growth, your new life of victory in Jesus!

#1 'Quiet Time'

Jesus said, 'Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.'

(Matthew 7:24-27)

We can't put the teaching of Jesus into action, if we don't know his teaching.

I recommend what is called a daily 'Quiet Time'. That is a quiet time where you sit alone with the Lord, to read the Bible and pray.

If you don't have a Bible that is easy to read, I suggest buying an 'NIV' version, or

an 'ESV'. But any Bible is better than none, so start with whatever you have or can get hold of quickly.

A daily 'Quiet Time' for me lasts about 10 minutes. I get a good, hot cup of coffee and I do two things:

1. I read one chapter of the Bible. I recommend you start with the Gospel of Mark.
2. I pray. I sit quietly and whisper to the Lord Jesus. I sit quietly and listen.

#2 Repentance

‘God’s solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: ‘The Lord knows those who are his,’ and, ‘Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness.’

(2 Timothy 2:19)

Is there a particular area in your life that you need to repent of?

In ‘walking the walk’, we need to walk *towards* Christ, but we also need to walk *away* from wickedness.

We need to be practical in this. We need to be bold. We need to be honest about it, in ‘secret’ and in public.

Pray and ask the Lord today for his help and his guidance, in repenting of sin in your life.

Note some practical things you can do to make it happen.

#3 Advance!

Jesus said, *'Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.'* (Matthew 12:30)

I remember when I was about 15 years old, and had my back to the Lord, my mom said to me, *'Peter, there is no 'parking' in our spiritual lives, or 'time out'. You are either following the Lord, or you are moving away from him.'*

Jesus is saying the same thing in today's Scripture. We have to be actively following, actively building our relationship with Jesus, and building his kingdom. How?

We share Jesus with others.

Is there someone close to you – a friend, or a family member – that you could tell about your renewed faith in Jesus?

Pray, and ask the Lord today to help you share your news, your faith, with someone in your life.

#4 Family

'Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.' (2 Timothy 2:19)

We're talking here about your true, spiritual family – other Jesus followers. Jesus himself said that his true family were people who believed in him and followed him.²

Now, this can be accomplished at church, but not always. Today's verse is 'qualifying' who you should be fellowshiping with: *'...those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.'*

Not just 'Christians', but people who are 'walking the walk', from a heart commitment.

Do you have a trustworthy church you can attend? Do you know of any true believers you could meet with?

² Matthew 12:48-50; John 6:40

#5 Peace

‘As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!”

“Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10:38-42)

My friend, never lose your peace in the Lord. Like Mary, always prize your time with the Lord, his presence in your life. Spend time with him.

Conclusion:

My friend, the end of this short book is, I hope, only the beginning of a new start in your walk with Jesus.

In Christ, *'the path is ever-brighter...'*
(Proverbs 4:18)

Life is not easy, but in Jesus you are saved, safe, and your name is written in heaven. (Luke 10:20)

On my website there are lots of free resources to encourage you – videos, blog posts, devotionals, etc.

What I recommend at this point is the booklet called, **'First Steps'**. It may go over a few points we've addressed, but it will give you some more practical encouragement as you get established on this path.

You will find this booklet in PDF on the tab called, **'FIRST STEPS'** at:

www.1peter1three.weebly.com

Alternatively, if you prefer a paperback copy, my booklets are sold at cost price (0% profit) on Amazon, so you could search for it there.

God bless you, my friend, in your new commitment to Jesus Christ!

I leave you with this blessing from the Bible:

'The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.'
(Numbers 6:24-26)

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