
WELCOME BACK TO JESUS

Lyle Pointer

CONTENTS

I.	Introductory Letter.....	1
II.	Why Others Lost Out Spiritually.....	2
III.	What Prevents Us from Returning to Christ?	6
IV.	What Helps People Back to Christ?	11
V.	Here's How You Can Return to Jesus.....	15
VI.	Evangelism through a Holiness Church.....	16

INTRODUCTORY LETTER

Dear _____

When we have once known Jesus but have drifted away, we are never at rest until we find our way back to Him.

In this booklet you will find the stories of former believers: the causes of their backsliding, the hunger of their spirits to return, God's loving invitations, and the glad testimonies of those who have found renewal and hope.

Let me encourage you to read these few pages this week and to think about God's love for you.

When you feel your spirit drawn to Jesus, ask Him to forgive your failure and to come into your heart again. Any sincere prayer of desire and confession is enough. When you feel the desire, put it into words, and you too can know the joy of His presence once again.

Your friend,

Lyle Pointer

WHY OTHERS LOST OUT SPIRITUALLY

A Personal Crisis

Their married life had been troubled until two years before. At that time Diane, a young wife and mother, accepted Christ. Two weeks later her husband was born again at a large gospel-preaching gathering in the East. Looking back since their conversions, she related:

“Things just seemed to fall in place with God in our lives. We had three beautiful children, two boys and a girl; we were all happy and greatly blessed of God.

“Everything went along fine,” she continued, “until four days after last Christmas. My husband, 33 years old, was killed instantly in an automobile accident on his way home from work. I saw the accident from my kitchen window as I fixed a cup of tea for him.

“Our whole world dropped out from underneath us overnight, but I had the Lord, and He gave me miraculous strength at this time.”

Undoubtedly Diane would have pulled through her loss victoriously if tragedy had not struck again. She continued:

“I just seemed to be getting back on my feet when five months after my husband’s death our 10-year-old son was hit by a car while riding his bicycle. He lay in a coma in the intensive care unit for 11 days. I stayed with him around the clock, praying for the Lord to heal him, even though the doctors said from the beginning there was no hope for him to survive.

“After 11 days, my nerves were shattered. I prayed the Lord would either heal him or take him. God took him to heaven.”

The crises had drained Diane emotionally and spiritually. Satan began to attack her from all sides, and she commented, “I was weak, vulnerable, and inexperienced at handling temptation.” Looking back, she observed, “Had I called upon the Lord at this time, I know He would have helped me, but the thought never occurred to me.” Instead, Diane gave up her faith, lost her hold on God, and drifted away from Him.

Gradual Drifting

Most people who move away from God do so gradually. Ron recounted: “We got away from God, and it started when we missed church two Sundays in a row. Before we realized it, six or eight weeks had passed. By then it didn’t matter too much anymore.”

Bob, a young building contractor, spoke of the moment he became aware of his drift away from the Lord. Divorce had terminated his marriage, and Bob no longer professed a faith in God. He reflected on what happened:

“We stopped attending church. I quit reading the Bible regularly. I began to lose out, and I didn’t know it was taking place. One day suddenly I realized the way I was headed. A crossroad loomed before me, and I had to choose. I made the wrong choice; I went my own way.”

Drifting is always deadly. The pull of the tide is toward the rocks. The flow of the current is downstream. The path of least resistance took both Ron and Bob away from God.

Assuming God Is Always Around

Slipping away from God often comes from the easy assumption that He is with us no matter what we do. Mary and Joseph lost Jesus by assuming He was with other travelers on the way home from Jerusalem. For three days Jesus was not with them. Fortunately they sought for Him. And where did they find Him? Right where they left Him-in the Temple.

What Mary and Joseph experienced in physical separation from Jesus, we know to be true spiritually. If we take Christ's presence for granted too long we shall miss Him. But in this failure God has given us His gracious promise: "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the Lord, 'and will bring you back'" (Jer. 29:13-14).

Selective Obedience

If some of God's commandments seem difficult, we are sometimes inclined to pick those we wish to obey. Just before joining the church, a lady asked me, "Tithing is optional, isn't it?"

A young married woman announced to her minister, "God told me to divorce my husband.

"Has he been unfaithful to you?" the pastor asked.

"No."

"On what do you base the feeling that God wants you to get a divorce?"

She replied her husband had insisted she abort an unplanned baby. She had consented but later hated herself for it. The resentment grew within her until she thought God wanted her to break up their marriage.

The pastor asked, "Do you know God hates divorce?"

"Where does the Bible say that?"

So he read Mal. 2:16: "I hate divorce,' says the Lord God."

She shrugged her shoulders. "I don't care. God told me to divorce him."

"Do you feel God is making your case an exception to His rule?" the pastor asked.

Again she shrugged, saying "All I know is, I'm not going to remain married to him." And she divorced him.

When we strongly desire something, we tend to ignore God's clear teaching in the Bible, and disobedience brings backsliding,

Loss of Hope

Lou and his wife, Susan, attended church regularly for two years; then their attendance began to slacken. Once interested in joining the church, they no longer wanted to become members. When offered places of service, they refused to minister anywhere.

After declining for many weeks to visit with me, they consented to meet me for a Coke. Susan began to pour out all the disappointments she was suffering. She had lost hope because of the mistaken idea that God protects us from all difficulties. She expected the Lord to put up an invisible shield to ward off the attacks of the enemy.

All attempts to help her were futile. She rebuffed encouragement or counsel and did not wish to look at her rejection of Christ and His Church. Her husband, though not agreeing with her opinions, conceded they would drop out of church because of her feelings.

New converts are often unprepared for Satan's rush to break their decision to live for God. They have said to me, "Since I accepted Christ, everything that could go wrong did just that."

When these pressures come, God wants us to understand His purpose to strengthen our character through testing and victory He wants to help us discover the secret of coming to Him daily for new strength and fresh hope.

An Unforgiving Spirit

Disturbed because she possessed no assurance of going to heaven, Mary came grumpily to visit me.

"I'm 67 years old. I've been in the church all my life, but if I died I don't know if God would take me to be with Him."

"Have you repented of your sins and asked Christ into your heart?" I asked her.

"Oh, yes. I did that years ago, but I'm not sure God really forgives me.

"Let's read from 1 John," I said. "In chapter 3 God gives us five ways we can know for sure we are right with Him. Look at verse 14: 'We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death.' Mary the test of assurance is: Do you love others?"

"Why I don't have an enemy in the world that I know about," she replied.

"Let me ask the question in another way: Do you hold any grudges or resentments?"

"Well, yes," she admitted. "But I have ~ right to. For three years my husband lay bedridden. I had to take care of him around the clock. You don't know how de-manding that was! I'm bitter toward my Sunday School class. They did not care one bit that I was penned up with a dying invalid. Sure, they came and stayed with him so I could get out. But they didn't help as much as they should. I'm bitter. And I have good reason to be."

The tension softened in her voice as she paused.

Then she asked hesitantly "You don't think that's the reason I lack assurance, do you?"

“Yes, I believe that is why God cannot forgive us if we are unwilling to forgive others. I understand, Mary how difficult your situation must have been. I wish we had done more for you. On the other hand, building resentment does not change the past. Resentments only poison and destroy us.”

Mary began to see that God could not forgive an unforgiving spirit. Tired of carrying a grudge, she wanted Christ and His assurance of salvation in her heart, so she prayed for God to forgive her. Mary’s hope was born again-and so was Mary!

People Let Us Down

As with Mary most often when people let us down it is an incident of omission-what they fail to do. When Joe and Erma wrote a letter requesting their church membership be dropped, I inquired about their thinking. They had been members for over 15 years and had served in leadership capacities. Joe explained: “We got to thinking that people were taking us for granted-just assuming we would attend church. So we decided to stop coming, just to see if people cared. After missing church for six weeks and nobody called to ask about us, we figured the church could do without us.

Melvin had also been disappointed. He cited how one pastor lied, a lay leader had carelessly injured him with his sharp tongue, and a so-called Christian had deceived him in a business deal. Bitterness flooded his conversation. God helped me to respond:

“Mel, have you ever seen anyone who lived the life-really lived as Christ wants us to?”

“Oh, yes. I have known some real saints,” he answered.

“When you’ve seen someone live the life, it answers a lot of questions, doesn’t it?”

Tears leaped to his eyes. Trying to answer, “Yes,” he choked and could only nod affirmatively

Blaming God

When we feel discouraged we sometimes blame God. Sitting in a bar, brooding over his past, a veteran tells his story:

“During my service in Vietnam, I lived a very immoral life. It hit me the hardest when I got home and my wife and little girl met my plane. Right then and there I breathed a prayer, asking God to forgive me.

“But in less than six months my daughter contracted spinal meningitis and died. I blamed God. After the funeral I remember going into the backyard and shaking my fist at the sky ‘I hate Him!’ I shouted. Why did He have to get back at me through my little girl? ‘You’ll never get me inside a church building again,’ I vowed. I saw enough hell in the war to convince me God either does not exist, or He is only worth spitting on!”

He downs another beer, slaps down a dollar, and walks out. The belief that his sin caused his daughter’s death was false, and that false belief had pushed him to hate God.

Stress and tension cloud our minds and distort our feelings. Depression stirs up attitudes of weakness and futility. Feelings of sinfulness fog up our formerly clear perception-and alcohol only compounds the wrong thinking.

But if we will seek to be calm for a moment we will hear God's gentle Spirit whisper: "Come now, let us reason together . . . Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow . . . If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land" (Isa.1:18-19).

A Change of Priorities

How does it happen? We are lonely or an attractive temptation comes our way. We lose our single-mindedness and begin to tolerate divided loyalties. Next we become confused. Finally because we feel so powerfully attracted, we think that is a good reason for doing it.

Mickie, wife of a ministerial student, described her backsliding. "Money became too important. Then the drugs were easily brought back into the home. The next step was partying-unfaithfulness-divorce."

What Was Your Reason?

Have you found yourself somewhere in the company of these former Christians? If not, can you put your finger on the problem? Some have said:

"The rules are too strict."

"No one is going to tell me what to do."

"The church is always hitting us up for money "Sunday is the only day we have off."

"We bought a camper, a cabin, and a boat. We won't make church much this summer."

Whatever the words, the real issue is that we decide to do our own thing. We let go of God's priorities. By despising His authority we take Lordship from Christ. We have begun to rule ourselves, but we are not happy because we are not right. In that hour of clear thinking hear His personal word to you: "Return to me, and I will return to you," says the Lord Almighty" (Mal. 3:7).

WHAT PREVENTS US FROM RETURNING TO CHRIST?

We are never really happy away from Christ. We know His invitation: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). Why then do we not come back?

After years of living with men while unmarried, Tern decided to return to God for salvation. She repeatedly failed to live as she knew God wanted her to. She explained: "My life patterns were established, and they were tough to break. I covered up my hurt instead of working through it with God and allowing Him to heal me. I was confused, and I guess God allowed me to go through these things in order to understand myself. Now I know nothing is going to give me peace except Jesus. I tried every way I could to prove that He's not the answer, only to find that He is."

Jason teetered back and forth about returning to Christ. He confessed, "I'm all confused and don't know what to do. I know I should accept Christ, but I just don't."

I asked him, "Suppose you were lost in a city. In your attempt to find your bearings, you spot a former friend. Wouldn't you ask him for help?"

"Yes," Jason replied.

"Then why not come to Christ, the One who can help you out of your uncertainty?"

Jason returned regularly to worship services, and he took some tentative steps toward the Lord. I left that church and had no further chance to speak to Jason about his decision to follow Christ, but I learned of good changes in his life.

Finding Jesus again will help you out of your confusion. Wouldn't it feel good to step out of the spiritual fog?

Fear of Failure

Another reason we do not return to Christ is because we fear failure. "What if I sin again?" we ask. Our fear may be caused by a strong commitment to an entangled relationship.

When people are sexually involved, they find it difficult to extract themselves. Physical pleasure and satisfaction is only a fraction of the difficulty. Their human needs for love, belonging and companionship are being met. Shared finances and shared living quarters further complicate attempts to break with sin. We say, "I'm too involved to get out."

We fear we will be drawn back into sin again because sin excites and attracts us. Furthermore, when the choice to do right or wrong is before us, it is easier to do wrong than to resist.

I asked Sandy why he did not come back to God. He answered, "Once you fail as a Christian, to continue to try is hypocritical." He reasoned that since salvation is instantaneous, it is all completed in one experience. If the practice of sin was not licked in a moment, it never would be. He concluded: "If I couldn't live it after God saved me, I never will."

Sandy believed the momentum of his salvation should have carried him through a lifetime. He was sincere in his idea, but wrong.

For us fearful seekers who think we will fail if we start again with God, we may find courage in this truth: Christ did not need to die if we had not failed. He died to help us find victory over sin. The Heavenly Father invites us, "Return to me, and I will return to you," says the Lord Almighty" (Mal. 3:7).

Is this prayer really the way you feel? "God, You know I am uneasy about trying to live right again. I have tried before. But if You will forgive me and then help me to walk a step at a time, I really want to be Yours."

Change Hurts

Sure, change hurts-and coming back to Jesus means changing one's life-style. This pain is heightened because what used to be easy is now difficult. What came naturally as a former Christian, the recovering backslider must now give conscious effort to perform.

Charlie had backslidden years before, but after some traumatic events his family encouraged him, and he attended church often. He felt God tugging at his heart, trying to get Charlie to strike up a new relationship

with Him. Charlie wanted to, but he had learned that anger helped him get his way. Whenever his temper stampeded, he burst into violent cursing. He used to do better, but now his habits handcuffed him. He anguished over the thought of controlling his emotions and language-the frustration of starting over!

Mark had known a long history of backsliding but was now recovered. He responded analytically to the question, "What kept you from getting back to God?"

"Three reasons," Mark listed. "One, I knew I must obey God. Two, I knew I could put off making the decision-I'd delayed before. Three, I knew I would have to stick with my decision if I was ever to be His, really His."

Does your heart urge you to come back to Jesus? Mark made it. He decided to begin again. You can, too. Would you like to think about it some more today? Turn to page 39 and learn what steps have been helpful to others.

I Can't Quit Sinning

Mary resisted starting with God again because, in her words, "I can't quit sinning." She felt her human drives were too strong for God to help. At her request I read these scriptures to her:

"I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Phil. 4:13).

"If the Lord delights in a man's way, he makes his steps firm; though he stumble, he will not fall, for the

"Lord upholds him with his hand" (Ps. 37:23-24).

"The Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one" (2 Thess. 3:3).

"To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy-to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen" (Jude 24-25).

Mary and I talked about her thoughts and feelings.

She remarked with deep conviction: "I really want to- in fact, I need to-believe what you have read to me."

She hesitated to make a commitment to God, but she permitted me to pray this prayer for her. May I pray it for you?

"Lord, You know how difficult it is to live as You want us to. Yet You still require that we quit what we know is sin. Mary is overcome by her inability You desire to give her Your strength. Help Mary to release herself to You to work unhindered in her life. Thank You that making it as a Christian depends more on Your work in us than on our effort. Lord, give to Mary Your love and power so that she can live faithfully before You."

I Need to Improve First

Some of us backsliders plan to return to God when we improve our lives enough to be acceptable to Him. We wish to present a good person to God. Several have told me, "If I could just quit smoking, I'd serve the Lord." Others have said, "When I can control my temper, I'll pray to accept Christ again."

Donna wrote, "All day long I cried and prayed, 'God, I'm no good, I want to be valuable to You. I want so badly for someone to care for me.' I pray every day that God will love me."

The truth is we cannot earn God's love. He does not start loving us when we decide to be better persons. Can you believe God loves you the way you are right now?

Mary said to me, "I can't get right with God."

"Why not?" I inquired.

"I need to atone for my sins. Then God will accept me."

"How will you know when you have fully satisfied God?" I asked. She had no answer.

I questioned her further, "If we can atone for our own sins, why did Christ die?"

An awakening awareness slipped across her face.

She smiled. "Now I understand."

Are you thinking, If God would offer me the opportunity to become His loved one again, I would start right now? If so, tell Him. That is what He wants to hear-and that is all you need to do!

Unsure About the Future

Some hesitate to return to Christ because of their uncertainty "Will it be the same this time?" they inquire. The implication may be, "I want this experience to be identical with my former encounter with God."

But one's saving experience will never be the same a second time. The same emotional intensity may not be present; a second start may require a more rational approach. Our minds may need to be urged by our wills to deliberately take the path of right and obedience.

Nor will the details of the actual event be the same as before. We may attend church for a year before our special invitation song, "Just as I Am," is sung-or the same messenger of God is preaching. Although God may deal with us in varying ways, His work of salvation will be the same. He always forgives, cleanses, gives new life, and adopts us into His family

Thinking with Our Feelings

We sometimes fail to return to God because we think with our feelings. We make decisions based on the emotions of the moment. But these choices lead us into trouble because a sinful heart draws us away from God. Feelings can blind us to the facts. The sin principle inclines us to do things our own way-the way that feels good or that seems easiest or most pleasant. But in our better moments we know it will not work. We know that God's man was right when "he chose. . . the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time" (Heb. 11:25).

Dave was a former Christian and a previously married young man who talked openly of his sexual involvements. He said he disagreed with the church's prohibitions because he had found sex outside of marriage to be satisfying. His life-style felt good, and he therefore believed his involvements were justifiable in God's sight.

I responded frankly and kindly to him: “Dave, the great danger to you is not your sexual involvements, but rather feeling good about your sin. You have fulfilled the scripture that says, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death” (Prov. 14:12).

Will the Church Accept Me?

Royce felt isolation from the church was preferable to being hurt. Three pastors in a row had disappointed her. She recounted: “I laid out my heart to people, and they broke it. One can only lay out the pieces so many times, then you have to tape them back together. Before long you decide you are not going to risk loving again.”

After Royce told her story to my wife, Paula, and me, Paula commented, “Most church people really care. It’s sad that Royce retreated for fear she might be hurt. God wants to use the love of His people to bring healing and help.”

When Grace and Lynn dropped out of church, three couples kept contacting them. The ladies shopped with Grace. The families barbecued supper together on occasion. But Lynn complained to the pastor, “Only three couples stayed in touch with us.”

Was Lynn expecting too much? For three families to foster an ongoing relationship seemed excellent to me.

I am fortunate to pastor a church that loves and cares for people. Ken and Erma had dropped out four years before. They were still members but seldom attended, carrying a secret resentment. They unrealistically expected George, a Christian man in the church, to apologize to them.

As their fears of rejection unfolded, I urged Ken and Erma to return. On two occasions they tried, but their painful feelings attacked them. They backed away from worship and fellowship.

Our people, however, continued to be friendly with them. Joe and Nadine invited them to a backyard barbecue. Their Sunday School class phoned to make sure they were informed of activities. God won them back.

When Ken and Erma informed George of how he had injured them, George’s eyes brimmed with tears. He asked their forgiveness, and they all hugged. Ken and Erma now attend church every week. They know they are loved and wanted.

Amid all the questions and fears about coming back to God comes the voice of Jesus: “Come on home,” He says. No “ifs,” “ands,” or “huts.” Jesus wants you back near Him.

You would like to be close to Him, too? Come. Maybe the suggestions on page 39 will help you take the right steps.

WHAT HELPS PEOPLE BACK TO CHRIST?

God Is Better than I Think

Upon returning from lunch, a lady pulled up next to Jean's car in the parking lot, rolled down the window, and called over: "I feel I'm to tell you God loves you! And even though you are confused, He still cares about you!" They talked for a few minutes before Jean was due back at her desk. God had used a member of His church with a message from the Bible to stir the heart of a backslider.

Jean phoned me. "Pastor, I feel God is trying to get me to come back to Him. I've drifted away, as you know. I had started doubting. I even began to wonder if someone hadn't made up all this stuff about God, the church, and the Bible. But I know that is not true. God is real."

One of the most effective healing agents is a true knowledge of God, not just the intellectual kind—rather, a firsthand, intimate understanding of God that produces healing in a scarred heart.

So how do you obtain this personal knowledge of God? By allowing Him to be what He wants to be. Listen to His Word:

"I will love them freely, for My anger has turned away" (Hos. 14:4, NASB).

"Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord; for I am married unto you" (Jer. 3:14, KJV).

"Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely par-don" (Isa. 55:7).

What, then, should we know about God?

God does not change:

in His Lordship

in His attitude toward sin

in His approval of right living

in the love, peace, and mercy He offers

in His concern for you

in His power to help you

God does not give second chances only. Rather He provides as many as we need as long as we live. If Jesus had given Peter only a second chance, we wouldn't have heard much about the man.

God Seeks Me Even Before I Seek Him

Backslidden Ollie, well up in years, decided she wanted to return to her hometown in Arkansas. Barbara, her niece who had often attempted to talk with her about God, asked, "Do you really want that, Aunt Ollie?"

"More than anything in the world," she responded.

Said Barbara, "Then I'll pray, and God will make a way for you to go."

Ollie glared at Barbara's mention of God. "You can do what you want," she snapped.

Two weeks later Barbara's phone rang. Out of no-where the money and the transportation were provided with which Ollie could return to her hometown. Barbara joyfully responded: "See, Aunt Ollie, God has answered prayer. I knew He would."

At first Ollie did not want to accept these unusual circumstances as an answer from God. Reluctantly however, she admitted: "I guess if God could do a miracle like this one, He could help me in other ways, too."

We need this confidence if we are to make a re-newed commitment to living for God. John Baillie writes:

I steadier step
When I recall
That though I slip
Thou dost not fall.

Consent for God to begin His Work in You

This question may be lingering in your mind: "Can I overcome my past with its failures?"

Spiritual success is possible, not because of our ability but because of God's willingness to help. Our sins need not be the end of the story. From broken people God brings beauty. Let your deep desire to be on good terms with God encourage you to flee evil. You need only consent for God to begin His work in you.

Would you open your Bible to Jeremiah 31 and meditate on verses 16-22? Here, in abbreviated form, is how God deals with people who want to get back to Him.

Stop crying over the past (v. 16).
There is hope for your future (v. 17).
Yes, you are ashamed and embarrassed (vv. 18-19).
God loves you deeply (v. 20).
Get going down the highway and watch the signs (v. 21).
I will create a new person (V. 22).

John, the husband of Ollie, had lived 30 years without a positive relationship with God. Meanwhile Barbara, his niece, had prayed for him.

John became ill with cancer. He came to Barbara, asking, "Is it true that time comes to an end for every-one who dies?"

Barbara answered, "Yes, but eternity also begins at that point, and you can prepare for eternity."

As suddenly as John's interest was born, it died. For no apparent reason a door closed between Barbara and him.

A few months passed. John again came to Barbara. "Tell me how a fellow can prepare for that eternity you talked about. What do I do?"

Barbara led him to repent of his sins and trust in Christ alone to save him. A few days later he came back to Barbara again. "How do I make sure?"

With a confidence born of faith, Barbara replied:

"Just tell God in your heart that you believe He forgave you. Tell Him you love Him for it."

John smiled peacefully "I have," he told her simply.

Once more John came, this time visibly dying. "You say we have a place to go, Barbara," he whispered. "Tell me about it."

From God's Word she read:

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (John 14:1-3).

"Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb... No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads... The Spirit and the bride say 'Come!' And let him who hears say 'Come!' Whoever is thirsty let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life" (Rev. 22:1, 3-4, 17).

Three weeks later John died. But God had developed an openness in him, and John had consented step by step to let God bring him to salvation.

God Uses His People

God has chosen to use His people, the Church, to bring backsliders into fellowship with Him once more.

Markeeta wrote to a Christian friend:

"I find myself not only wanting to live up to Christ's expectations of me, but your confidence in me has made me want to live up to yours also."

Is there some Christian friend in whom you have confidence? Why not tell him of your desire to get back to God, and ask him to pray for you?

Dean swayed back and forth in indecision. He wanted to renew his relationship with God, but he feared he would fail again. His desire to be God's person played teeter-totter with his fears of failure. He explained his quandary: "If I just knew I could make it! If there were some way I could see the possibility of succeeding!"

Sensing his dilemma, I offered, "Dean, if I promise to stick with you until you feel you are able to make it, will you choose to go Christ's way?"

With warm appreciation, he responded, "I'll do it, if you'll help me." And what a beautiful prayer of commitment he prayed: "God, I really want to be a good Christian. I've tried and failed before. Will You please forgive me? Help me to keep going and not quit."

A Commitment to Continue

When a person considers getting back to God, he must start over to stay at it. Persevering is not glamorous, but it is necessary

The need for spiritual stick-to-itiveness was embedded in me even as a teenager. I led my friend Larry to the Lord first in his junior year of high school, and helped him come back twice more in his senior year. Larry wanted to be God's person. He made good starts, but living right on a daily basis appeared too tough for him. He worried about failure more than he actually failed. As his trust grew, his backsliding was resolved.

Times will come when you feel like giving up. To quit may look attractive, but if you are going to serve Christ acceptably you must hold on even when it hurts. These are the times for us to pray: "Lord, I am tempted, but I am Your child. If You will help me, I can be true. By Your grace I am made stronger, and with You by my side I am saved from failure."

Mike Stephens tells how he learned to cope with these temptations: "I look back on my decision to follow God. I meant it when I said, 'I'll always serve You.' But it was good only for that day. So now I decide every day to follow God." He had learned the value of living a day at a time.

Perseverance is God's way of bringing us to maturity. The process of faith building is being completed. The reward of success and blessing awaits us who endure to the finish.

I know a man who testifies to backsliding 52 times, but each time he sought the Lord again. God forgave him, and he is an exceptional missionary today. When he dies he will go to heaven because he refused to quit; he chose to keep on trusting God.

"Just as I Am, I Come"

You have thought about coming back to Jesus. God is pleased with your thoughts. He is not mad at you for what has happened in the past. You may be reaping some of the harvest of what you have sown, but God does not hold grudges. We do not return to a wrathful God but to a loving Father. He promises, "If you return to the Almighty you will be restored" (Job 22:23).

"Not too quick now," you object. "I'm not sure I'm ready I have to think this through."

Yes, it is important to consider carefully the decision to come back to Jesus. Perhaps some questions others have had may help you decide:

"Is the way I'm now traveling going to satisfy me now and in the end?"

"What do I gain if I don't change the way I am going?"

"Is the present destination of my life what I hope it to be?"

"To what am I now giving highest priority in my life—comfort, money, sex, freedom, fulfillment, success? Is it what I really want?"

"For what have I traded my soul?"

In Revelation God speaks to some people who had formerly loved and obeyed Him. They were not against God, just not for Him. He did not wish them to remain in spiritual poverty so He counseled them to rely on

Him. He invited them to return. "Repent," He said. But He did not leave them on their own just to turn over a new leaf-to struggle against temptation and sin. Christ says: "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me" (Rev. 3:20).

Greg called me late one Sunday night after church, "I need to tell you something," he began. "My life as a Christian has become a role to be played instead of a growing point. I never thought it would happen to me. I stopped being fruitful. I called simply to tell you I've gotten back in alignment with God and His will for me.

No one would have guessed, but Greg knew. And he decided the way he wanted to go was God's way. I thanked him for sharing the good news with me. I prayed for him over the phone: "Father, if You were to speak right now, You would say, 'Welcome back home!'"

HERE'S HOW YOU CAN RETURN TO JESUS:

1. Be assured of His love for you.

"Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline."

(Rev. 3:19)

If God did not care for you, He would not be seeking to get you back. His rebuke is His earnest attempt to encourage you to allow Jesus to enter your life.

2. Sincerely repent.

"So be earnest, and repent."

(v. 19)

God asks you to change your attitude to-ward sinning. He invites you to obey Him.

3. Open your heart's door to Jesus.

"Here I am!

I stand at the door and knock.

If anyone hears my voice

and opens the door,

I will come in."

(v. 20)

Jesus longs to enter your life again-to be your greatest love. If you open the door, He will come in.

I suggest that you tell God-in your own words-how you feel in your heart.

4. If you invite Him in, you will always be glad you did.

He will give you a close relationship with Him here.

“I will come in and eat with him,
and he with me.’

(v. 20)

He will give you a place in heaven.

“I will give [you] the right to sit
with me on my throne.”

(v. 21)

EVANGELISM THROUGH A HOLINESS CHURCH

An Approach to Making Disciples

Jesus expressed His life's purpose to seek and to save the lost. He chose His disciples for the expressed purpose of sending them to the whole world to complete His mission. The New Testament Church internalized His identity and proclaimed His Good News empowered by the Holy Spirit. They, like we, faced outside opposition and internal fears, but witnessed to the transforming grace of God through Jesus.

The Church of the Bible employed a variety of methods and strategies such as compassionate, intellectual, invitational, relational and Body-life evangelism. They communicated the Good News via numerous metaphors. For example, they explained justification by faith, the Kingdom of God, new life in Christ, eternal life and agape love. The expansion of the Church revealed the leaders' ability to analyze spiritual receptivity and cultural openness. One church historian observed that the church out-thought, outlived and out-loved the world.

The American culture provides simultaneously threat to Christianity and opportunities to share the Good News. The post-modern world embraces pluralism and relativism that seem to militate against proclaiming Christ. Yet these ways of thinking promote tolerance and individuality. Both themes open the doors to personal testimony. The story of God at work in our lives forms convincing accounts of the availability of a forgiving God. The spiritual formation of a Christian prompts the believer to impart to others. Faith-shaping urges faith-sharing. Our God-sightings should result in God-citings.

While evangelism is typically considered to be the proclamation that brings a person to a moment of decision, evangelism should be viewed as a process. God initiates the process through prevenient grace. The Christian witness identifies and affirms God's work in the life of the unbeliever. The most effective evangelist first listens and learns from the unbeliever. Then as a spiritual guide, the witness moves the prospective believer into a deeper understanding, encourages spiritual searching and, when appropriate, invites the seeker into a saving relationship with Jesus.

The Christian worker encourages the new believer to fellowship with the church and to worship weekly. The corporate life of God's people is valued as a divine means of delivering grace. Individual disciplines such as prayer, Bible study, witness and stewardship should also be expressed through the body of Christ. New life in Christ continues to become new through the transformed mind and heart-felt love encouraged by the church. God's holiness enables and motivates the believer to Jesus-like living.

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