

A Faith Journey's First Steps

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His piercing blue eyes studied my soul. My son had looked at me often, but suddenly he saw me. Through the window of my eyes, his searching gaze measured my heart. Forever I will treasure the moment my son first realized that I loved him and would give my life for him.

Forever I will also treasure the moment I first gazed into the heart of my God; when I first saw Jesus with the eyes of my spirit. Deep within my soul I suddenly realized His love was beyond measure and He had given His life for me. Grace embraced me and carried me from Atheism to faith.

If you share this joy of finding and being found by God, then along with millions of others you have begun a *wonder-full* journey that leads us from *finding* to *following* to *fruitfulness*.

On any physical journey, certain items are obviously indispensable—you must have them to survive and succeed. Other items are surprisingly useful—they make the journey more enjoyable and fruitful. Likewise on our spiritual journey, certain choices are essential and certain efforts are surprisingly rewarding.

I would like to offer a checklist of choices to assist us in our journey toward deeper relationship with Jesus.

Choice One: Search for and commit yourself to a local church.

Many today believe that we can know God without being known by the people of God. But Jesus does not offer Christianity for independent study. Jesus Himself was committed to the gathered people of God in His day. Luke 4:16 records that, “on the Sabbath day Jesus went into the synagogue, as was his custom.”

Why did Jesus make it His habit to be a part of the church? Because the synagogue was filled with happy, healthy, holy saints? Because the synagogue had a cutting edge worship band and excellent activities that catered to His age group? Doubtful.

Jesus was committed to the gathered people of God because God is committed to us and He has committed us to one another. Christianity is lived in the plural, not the singular; with others not alone.

We tend to select churches like we are walking through a box of assorted chocolates. This one? No, not enough substance. This one? No, too many nuts...As we discard unwanted pieces on the ground, is it really any wonder why the lost often find the church so unattractive?

Become an active member of the living Body of Christ, the Church. I guarantee it will be filled with imperfect and in-process people, just like you and me. And God guarantees that as we walk *together* the world will know of His love! (John 17:23)

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Choice Two: Grow toward a daily discipline of meditating on the Bible.

My guess is that you just breathed. Whether or not you felt or could measure the benefits of your last breath, you just took another one.

As air is to us physically, so God's Word is to us spiritually. Whether or not we feel or can measure its immediate effects, reading and listening to the Bible nourishes our spirit and grows Truth in our minds.

God's Word is called a lamp for our feet and a light for our path (Psalm 119:105). Are you in need of direction? Are there dark corners of your heart or memory? Continued exposure to the Bible creates within us a storehouse of light—a treasury of Truth to draw from in decision-making and daily living.

Choice Three: Cultivate a private prayer garden.

My amazing son is an active, analytical explorer. But before he falls asleep, all he wants to do is be still and hear the heartbeat of mommy and daddy. We call it “cuddle time” and that sacred space is one of the precious jewels of my life.

God wants “cuddle time” with you. He longs for you to daily reserve a sacred space to simply be with Him. Think of this space as a secret garden tended by only you and Jesus.

Mark 1:35 states that, “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.” Though Jesus spent countless hours teaching, healing, and sharing life with others, He prioritized and carved out a sacred space in His heart and day where He met alone with His Father.

Without a secret prayer garden, we tend to wearily rush through our increasingly noisy lives viewing God as more of a business partner than our Love; viewing faith as more of a job description than our path Home.

Choice Four: Actively pursue accountability relationships.

When wolves are hungry, do they attack a sheep in the center of the flock or one on the edge of the pasture? As smelly and messy as sheep are, the fact is they are safer together than alone.

For the safety of our souls, you and I must live emotionally near others who follow Jesus. We must invite others into our lives and give them permission to help us grow in truth and love.

Nurture friendships in your home church. Join a small group or Bible study. Meet regularly with a Christian friend. Share prayer needs. Discuss a good book. Risk relationship—God did not design us to walk alone.

“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work; If one falls down his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!” Ecclesiastes 4:10-11

Choice Five: Partner with God in His global mission.

As His primary strategy for revealing His love to the world, God selected a Life: *Jesus*. Jesus mourned with us at our funerals and rejoiced with us at our weddings. He went fishing with us and paid taxes with us. He talked with us in the marketplaces and held our children in His arms.

God does not shout at us from a distant cloud. He walks with us as a Personal Savior. You and I have the joy and responsibility of walking as Jesus walked—near broken humanity as lights that lead the way Home.

Partner with God in His global mission by praying for the lost, giving to the needy, and using your gifts and abilities to serve others. May Jesus help us live for what He died for!

Every day my son grows in knowledge and experience. How I long to bottle each moment and always breathe its unique fragrance! Jonathan is not now what he will be. That is not a reality I regret; it is a process I treasure.

Likewise, our heavenly Father does not expect us to be today what we will be tomorrow. He too treasures the process. The choices on this checklist are disciplines to grow toward and God finds delight in every step we take.

In a physical journey, our destination is a place. But in this spiritual journey, our destination is a Person: God Himself. God is our Guide, our Companion, and our Goal. Jesus is our joy in this journey!