

THE JOURNEY BACK TO GOD

Hosea 6:1-3

Isaiah 55:1-7

The journey back to God sometimes appears to be more difficult than the original journey to God. When one makes their first trek to God there is often the absence of baggage that he or she is bringing other than himself or herself. If that person is old enough to have committed a fair amount of sin, any counselor assures him that all of that is now taken care of by the precious blood of Jesus that was shed for those sins. If he or she were very young when given their heart to Jesus, there was basically no other frame of reference other than the familiar Christ-centered environment. D. L. Moody, the famed nineteenth century evangelist said, "For some, their conversion is like the flashing of a meteor. For others, it is like the rising of the morning sun and you cannot tell the minute it was light."

The journey back to God is (in my opinion) a bit more complicated. It is not complicated because God has made it that way; it becomes complicated because of the difficulties we invent. Let us jump these man-made hurdles today and see that loving path the Lord has made for His wandering children. Like Solomon's chariot, God also has your transportation ready for you "...paved with love..." (Song of Solomon 3:10)! Let's examine these hurdles:

1. I like what I am doing.

There is no argument; sin can be pleasurable, otherwise you would not have gotten involved with it to begin with. The Bible says Moses, "Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: "...for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward" (Hebrews 11:25, 26). We see four outstanding facts with these two verses: A. There is a cross that must be embraced if we follow Jesus. You see this in the wording "suffer affliction." It hurts! The cross, like a surgical knife, cuts you away from the carnal lifestyle contrary to God's plan and will and this is often done without any social anesthesia. B. Sin is fun. There is an enticement and thrill to choose and do the forbidden. This is how our first parents Adam and Eve were seduced. The Devil cleverly said through the serpent, "...Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" (Genesis 3:1). C. The pain is well worth the gain. "...Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt..." I have often said that the worst day with God is better than the best day with the Devil. D. There is an acknowledgement of the long-term reward that comes from obedience, "...for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward." We live in a world of instant gratification. Moses looked away from all this and gazed intently on the full compensation that comes with living for Christ.

Your first response to coming back to God may be like a child who was caught with candy, spoiling his supper. As you hand it over to parental authority, you may feel like angrily stomping your feet and crying out, "But, I like it!" I

understand, but go against your temporary cravings and decide today to do the right thing! It will pay off in this lifetime and definitely in the next.

2. I don't feel I am worthy.

Do you feel you have done so many things and been involved in so much activity contrary to God's plan, that He will not hear or accept you back? My friend, none of us are worthy to be saved! The fact that you are reading these words means that God is not finished with you. You are a perfect candidate for revival! Psalm 89:30-33 says, "If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail." God did not choose to love you because of any good that He saw in you: "The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people" (Deuteronomy 7:7). These words were spoken by God approximately 3,464 years ago and He still hasn't changed His mind. He still loves us in spite of everything! "We love him, because he first loved us" (I John 4:19).

Enough of the pity party; just come back to God! He will receive you. The Lord said, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (Isaiah 55:7). He will not only pardon you but He will do so abundantly, freely and happily. His joy is expressed in Zephaniah 3:17: "The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing." We hear a preview of this heavenly song in these words, "For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry" (Luke 15:24).

3. I have developed friends in the distant community.

The old crowd that facilitated your falling away from a righteous lifestyle often does not release their hold on you easily. Like an illegal drug, you are held in the grasp of addiction. The words of an old song say, "How can something be so wrong when it feels so right?" Well, I'll be glad to supply that answer; it is wrong if God says it is wrong! If whatever you are doing is wrong, it is wrong and whoever is tempting you to do wrong, they are wrong.

In Greek mythology, the Sirens were seductive females who make enchantingly beautiful music and bring sailors dangerously close to the rocky shores of their island only to be crushed and ruined. Walter Copland Perry observed, "Their song, though irresistibly sweet, was no less sad than sweet, and lapped both body and soul in a fatal lethargy, the forerunner of death and corruption." Odysseus in the Iliad ordered his sailors to tie him fast to the mast so that he could hear the song of the Sirens and yet not go to them. The sailors were ordered to pour wax into their ears to prevent them from hearing either the Sirens or their captain's screams to release him and let him go to these deadly temptresses. In the story the hero escapes. Perhaps you, too, want to be free

from the allurements of old friends calling you back to the ways of the world and sin. Your strength will not come in being tied down or having a physical impediment afflicted on yourself. Your strength will come in the close fellowship with Jesus. As the song says, "And the things of this world will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace." One of the hardest passages of Scripture a dedicated Christian must contend with are these words spoken by our Lord: "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household" (Matthew 10:34-36). Sometimes we must make a choice between friendship with Jesus and His servants and friendship with Satan and his crowd.

4. I believe I will fail again.

Don't worry about what may or may not happen if you get right with God. Make the decision to live for Jesus and take it one day at a time. That is all any of us can do. Every Christian must daily apply the principles necessary to stay on course or any of us will become backslidden. This is why our Lord said, "And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23). The word that arrests our attention in that verse is "daily." Life with Christ must be applied daily. The result is growth and development. "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ..." (II Peter 3:18).

5. I don't have the right feeling.

Come back to God with or without the feelings. You may not have the "feeling" because you have become calloused to what God is saying. Even the callousness and hardness you are experiencing should be a clarion call to return to Him. "For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. To day if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your heart..." (Psalm 95:7, 8a). I have observed when we do the right thing by returning back to God, those longed for sweet peaceful feelings come right along. "For thus saith the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel; In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength..." (Isaiah 30:15).

-Pastor Pope-