



For the Wanderers

Finding Your Way Home

Chapter One: Stepping Off the Bus

You stepped off the bus. Maybe it was a deliberate choice—frustration, doubt, or hurt pushing you away. Or maybe it was gradual—life got busy, priorities shifted, and one day you realized faith wasn't part of your life anymore. Whatever the reason, here you are. And sometimes, in quiet moments, you think about it—about Jesus, the church, the way things used to be. Maybe you miss it. Maybe you don't. But something is stirring again.

And now you're wondering: **What would it even look like to return? Would Jesus welcome me back? Would I even fit in anymore?**

The tension is real. On one hand, there's the fear that coming back isn't even possible—that too much has changed, that God has moved on, that you're too different now. On the other hand, maybe you wonder if coming back would be *too* easy—if grace means skipping over the hard parts, ignoring the hurt, pretending like nothing happened. **What if faith isn't about forgetting? What if it's about finding a way forward that's honest, real, and healing?**

Maybe you had a good reason to step off the bus. Maybe faith once felt alive, but something happened—hurt, hypocrisy, suffering, disappointment. Maybe life simply pulled you in another direction, and faith no longer seemed to fit. You gave so much of yourself to God, and one day you stopped and asked: **What am I even doing this for?**

So you made the call. You stepped away. And for a while, it made sense. **But now, something in you is stirring again—not pressure, not crisis, just a quiet thought: *If I looked back, is He still there?***

A Story About Wandering

Jesus once told a story about a son who made a choice—he stepped off the path, walked away from home, and didn't look back. He wasn't forced out. He wasn't lost by accident. He **left on purpose, believing there was something better for him beyond the life he had known.**

Maybe that sounds familiar. Maybe, like him, you walked away for a reason. Maybe you were tired of the rules, disillusioned by the people, or convinced that faith just wasn't working anymore. Maybe you needed space to figure things out on your own.

But here's the thing: **The Prodigal Son's story isn't just about rebellion—it's about realizing that what he left behind still mattered. That he still mattered.** And maybe that's why you're reading this booklet—because somewhere deep down, **you wonder if there's still a place for you, too.**

When What You Ran From Becomes What You Crave

At first, leaving felt like freedom. The son spent his days chasing everything he thought would make him happy, certain that life outside his father's house would be better, fuller, more his own.

But eventually, the excitement faded. The things that once seemed thrilling left him empty. He had walked away to escape, but **the very thing he had been running from—the place he had left behind—became the thing he longed for most.** Home.

Not just the house, but the **security, the love, the belonging.** What once felt like a cage now felt like shelter. What once felt like a burden now felt like the very thing his soul craved.

Maybe you've felt that, too. Maybe the life you built apart from faith hasn't been all you'd hoped for. Maybe the idea of Jesus, church, and the life you once had **doesn't feel as suffocating as it used to.**

Maybe, like the son in the story, you're beginning to wonder:

**Could I go back?
And if I did, would I still be welcome?**

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Chapter 2

What Happened? Why We Walk Away

Do you remember what it was like in the beginning? When faith felt real—**alive**—undeniable? Maybe it was a season where prayers came easily, where worship stirred something deep inside of you, where Scripture seemed to speak directly to your heart. Maybe it was a time when you felt close to God, certain of His presence, confident in your purpose.

There was **joy, passion, excitement**—the feeling of **truly believing**.

But somewhere along the way, something changed. The fire dimmed. The certainty faded. And what once felt so real now feels like a distant memory.

Maybe, at first, you didn't even realize it was slipping away. When something has always been there—faith, Jesus, the people who walked with you—it's easy to take it for granted. You don't always see its impact until it's gone.

Maybe you imagined life without it, thought you'd be fine on your own, that stepping away wouldn't change much. But then the distance grew. The prayers stopped. The sense of purpose faded. The community you once leaned on became a memory.

And little by little, **the absence became real**.

Maybe you expected **freedom**, but instead, you found something else—**an emptiness you weren't prepared for**.

When the Life You Built Without God Falls Apart

That's the journey the Prodigal Son took. He stepped away, eager to chase something better, to build a life on his own terms. "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." (Luke 15:13)

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He wanted freedom, independence, something more than what he had at home. But what felt like possibility **quickly turned into emptiness**. "After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need." (Luke 15:14)

The life he built **without his father didn't hold up**. It left him with nothing—lost, hungry, alone. Maybe you've felt that, too. Maybe walking away seemed right at the time, but now, looking back, **you wonder if what you left behind actually mattered more than you realized**.

The Wake-Up Call

We don't always see it coming. When we step away, we don't expect to find ourselves in a place we never wanted to be. Maybe you thought you had it under control—that you could walk away from faith, from church, from Jesus, and things would still make sense.

But then life happened.

A crisis you weren't ready for.

A loss that shook you.

A mistake that spiraled.

A season of loneliness that hit harder than you expected.

Maybe it was an addiction that started small but grew into something you couldn't break.
A relationship that ended and left you shattered.
A sense of purpose that once felt certain but now feels lost.

The scary part isn't just that things didn't go as planned—it's realizing you're **in over your head**, that what you thought would make you free has only left you **feeling more trapped**.

What Now?

And that's the moment when a **choice** has to be made.

We can keep pushing, trying to fix things on our own, pretending we're fine even when we're not. Or we can stop and be honest—about where we are, about what's missing, about the fact that maybe we weren't as prepared as we thought.

The Prodigal Son reached that moment.

“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!’” (Luke 15:17) He had a decision to make: **stay in the mess he had created or turn toward home**. And that's where some of us find ourselves now—not sure if we're ready to return, **but knowing we can't stay where we are**.

Maybe it's time to admit the truth: Faith isn't gone - it's just under construction. And maybe the only way forward is home.

So what does it take to *come to our senses*?
Maybe it's time to admit the truth: Faith isn't gone—it's just under construction. And maybe the only way forward **is home**.

Chapter Three: Who Is Jesus Now? Meeting Him Again

There's a difference between knowing *about* Jesus and actually *knowing* Him. You can learn the stories, memorize the verses, even grow up in church and still **not know Him personally**. It's like hearing about a place you've never been—you can describe it, but you've never stood in its streets, breathed its air, or felt its warmth. Maybe that's how faith was for you once—something familiar, something you understood from a distance, but not something that truly changed you. Or maybe you *did* know Him, but over time, that connection faded. Either way, the invitation has never changed. **Jesus doesn't want to be a memory, a concept, or a past experience.** He wants to be real to you—right now. Not just someone you once believed in, but someone you actually *know*.

But now, there's water under the bridge. Distance. Choices you can't undo. Maybe you carry guilt for the things you've done, or shame for the person you've become. Maybe you feel unworthy, too far gone, too changed to ever fit back into the faith you once had. Regret whispers that you missed your chance. Fear tells you that coming back means facing everything you tried to leave behind. And yet—**something is pulling you forward.** Something stronger than the doubt, louder than the shame. Maybe it's the quiet hope that Jesus is still who He said He was. Maybe it's the longing for peace, for purpose, for the sense that you're not wandering alone. Or maybe, just maybe, it's Jesus Himself—calling you, drawing you, refusing to leave you where you are.

There was a defining moment for the Prodigal. He "**came to his senses**"—realizing home was still there and **returning meant everything.**

Then came the moment when everything changed. The Prodigal Son, lost in the mess of his own making, finally *came to his senses*. “*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*” (Luke 15:17-18). He realized something that had been true all along—**home was still there**. His father was still there. The **place he had abandoned hadn’t abandoned him**. Maybe that’s where you are now, standing in the tension between regret and return, wondering if it’s too late. But here’s the truth: Jesus never moved. His arms have never closed. The door is still open. But, it takes your decision to turn around.

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The Bible says that God doesn’t change—but the truth is, we sure do. And sometimes, that unchangeableness is what gets to us. It can be irritating because He doesn’t bend His Word to fit our wants. It can feel unbearable when we’re struggling, because we desperately want things to go our way. We want Him to adjust, to loosen the lines, to make it easier. But He doesn’t. And that’s hard—especially when we look around and see plenty of people who have gone their own way, doing just fine, seemingly without consequence. But **deep down, we know the truth**. God’s consistency isn’t the problem—our resistance is. And maybe that’s why faith feels so complicated—because surrender was never supposed to be easy.

God won’t waste a single part of your story—not even the chapters you wish you could erase. Even when you thought you were far from Him, He was still rescuing, still redeeming, still restoring. Some of our biggest messes become the greatest messages—not because we got everything right in the end, but because **God’s grace is big enough** to include even our worst moments. That means you don’t have to shy away from where

you've been. You don't have to be ashamed of what you've done or who you tried to become without Him. Every detour, every failure, every regret—God can use it all. Nothing is wasted in His hands.

It's like handcrafting your life with Jesus as the Master Carpenter, shaping and rebuilding what's been broken. The Bible tells us that Jesus Himself was known as the son of a carpenter: *"Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon?"* (Mark 6:3). And just like wood in a carpenter's hands, your life isn't discarded because of its rough edges or past damage. What has **happened isn't meant to be forgotten**—it's meant to be **forgiven** and **used**. Every mistake, every wound, every detour can become part of something greater when placed in His hands. He doesn't just repair. He repurposes, shaping our lives into something strong, something beautiful—a masterpiece and something that builds His Kingdom.

Chapter Four: What If There's a Way Back?

It's funny how we come up with our own remedies for restoration—how we convince ourselves that if we're ever going to make things right, we have to earn our way back. In the Prodigal Son's story, that's exactly what he did. He made a plan, rehearsed his speech, and settled on the idea that **the best he**

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could hope for was to be a servant in his father's house. *"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"* (Luke 15:18-19). It was deep, raw, and self-reflective—he saw his mistakes, owned them, and accepted that he had lost his place as a son. But here's the thing: **his father never asked for a plan. He just wanted his son back.** How often do we do the same—

thinking we have to fix ourselves before coming home, forgetting that grace was never ours to earn?

But before the son could even finish his plan, before he could prove himself or earn his place, something unexpected happened—**his father ran.** *"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"* (Luke 15:20). No hesitation. No demands. No punishment. Just a father who had been watching, waiting, longing for his child to come home. The son expected distance, maybe disappointment, maybe a test to prove

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he was worthy again. But instead, he was met with a **sprinting father**, arms wide open, overwhelming love silencing his rehearsed speech. Maybe that's the part that's hardest to believe—that God isn't waiting with crossed arms, but running toward you even now.

The son had his speech ready—his carefully crafted case for why he didn't deserve to be a son anymore, why he was only fit to be a servant. *"Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son"* (Luke 15:21). But before he could finish, before he could offer his plan to work his way back, **his father interrupted with grace**. The son thought he had to lower himself, to prove he was willing to be less than he was before—but the father wasn't interested in negotiations. He doesn't ask for our perfection—He asks for honesty. **He doesn't want rehearsed speeches or half-hearted attempts to fix what's broken**. He wants the real broken you, as you are, willing to come home with nothing but an open heart.

Coming home is one thing, being home is another—it starts with small steps. Maybe you're not sure how to believe again, how to rebuild what feels broken, but faith isn't about having all the answers. **It's about moving forward with Jesus, even with uncertainty**. It starts with simply talking to Him again—prayer, even if it's messy, even if all you can say is, *"Jesus, are You still there?"* It's opening Scripture—not out of obligation, but to see Jesus for who He really is, not just who you assumed Him to be. And it's finding people who get it—authentic community, no judgment, people who don't expect you to have it all together but will walk honestly with you as you figure things out. **You don't have to do this alone**, and

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you don't have to have it all worked out. You just have to take a step.

Coming back isn't always easy. The Prodigal Son was met with overwhelming love from his father, but **that didn't erase the reality of what had happened**. He had left. He had hurt people. His absence created a void, and his choices had consequences. And maybe that's what makes returning so complicated—it's not just about coming back to God; it's about facing the

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impact of our leaving. The father's love was immediate, but rebuilding would take time. The same is true for us. God greets us with open arms, just like the father in the story, but that doesn't mean everything automatically resets. **Healing takes surrender**. Restoring what's broken requires a willing heart to do the necessary rebuilding work.

Some relationships may need mending. Some trust may need to be rebuilt. But **grace doesn't erase responsibility—it gives us the strength to face it**. And if we're willing, God won't just welcome us home—He'll work alongside us as we learn how to build again.

Chapter Five: The Next Step is Yours

Not everyone celebrates a return. In Jesus' story, the father rejoiced when his lost son came home, but not everyone shared his joy. The older brother stood outside, arms crossed, refusing to join the celebration. He saw his brother's failure, his reckless choices, the mess he had made—and he couldn't understand how someone like that could just walk back in. Maybe you've felt that way, too—not as the older brother, but as the Prodigal. You wonder if people will really accept you, if they'll hold your past against you, if coming back will feel like stepping into judgment instead of grace. And maybe the hardest part isn't what others think—it's what *you* think.

Could God really take me back after everything? Is there such a thing as too far gone? The older brother thought so. But the father didn't. And neither does Jesus.

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Just like stepping off the bus was a choice, so is stepping back on. **Faith isn't a demand—it's an invitation.** No one is forcing you, no one is dragging you back. This is about building something with Jesus and about deciding what you truly want, about recognizing that home is still an option. Maybe you're not sure what it looks like yet. Maybe you're hesitant, afraid of what it means to believe again. That's okay. Faith isn't about having it all figured out—it's about taking the next step. The choice is yours, and Jesus is waiting—not with pressure, but with open arms.

Jesus is not disappointed in you—He welcomes you. But that doesn't mean the road back is always smooth. **Grace is imme-**

diate, but healing takes time. And sometimes, returning to faith isn't just about you—it's about the people affected along the way. Maybe there are relationships that were strained, trust that was broken, or wounds—yours and theirs—that still need healing. **Hurt can keep us apart, but grace calls us to rebuild.** Just as Jesus welcomes you, He may call you to help restore the faith of others, to show them that redemption is real, that coming home isn't just about being received but about learning to receive others, too. The same love that meets you where you are is meant to flow through you, making space for healing—not just for yourself, but for those around you.

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For those who waited, prayed, and longed for your return—this journey isn't just yours. Maybe there were parents who cried over you, siblings who felt the sting of your absence, or friends who never stopped believing God would bring you back. They rejoiced when they saw you take that first step home, but now comes the part that's harder to navigate—**how do you move forward?** How do you rebuild what time and distance changed? The Prodigal Son's father ran to him, but the journey didn't stop at the embrace. There was life to live again, trust to rebuild, relationships to heal. And that's true for you, too. Coming back to faith isn't just about reconnecting with Jesus—**it's also about walking in grace with the people who never stopped loving you.** Be patient. Be honest. Listen to what they have to say. Let them walk with you, and let Jesus guide all of you forward, together.

You may be reading this booklet not because you're the Prodigal, but because you love one. You prayed for them, cried over them, longed for them to come home. And now that they're here, you're wondering—what's next? **How do you move forward with Jesus and the one who once walked away?** The father in Jesus' parable ran to embrace his son, but that was just the beginning. Healing and reconciliation take time. Trust takes

time. Maybe you're overjoyed, but maybe you're also hesitant, afraid of being hurt again, unsure of how to rebuild what was lost. The good news? Jesus walks with both of you. **The same grace that welcomed them home is the grace that will guide you as you learn to love them where they are, not just where you wish they'd be.** It's okay to feel joy and caution at the same time. But don't let fear hold you back from celebrating what God has done. The Prodigal has come home. And Jesus is ready to lead you forward—together.

A quick word about reconciliation—grace opens the door, but you have to walk through it. Coming home doesn't erase the past, and it doesn't instantly restore every relationship. Healing takes time, and trust is something that has to be rebuilt. The Prodigal Son was welcomed back with open arms, but he still had to step into the life waiting for him. **Reconciliation isn't just about being received—it's about doing your part to rebuild.** Apologizing where it's needed. Owning what was broken. Showing, through time and consistency, that you're willing to rebuild. You can't control how others respond, but **you can control how you walk forward—with humility, patience, and a heart surrendered to Jesus.** He's not just restoring you to Himself—He's inviting you to be part of restoring what's been lost.

The last word is **forgiveness**. It's what makes coming home possible. It's what keeps bitterness from taking root. It's what allows healing to begin. Maybe you need to receive it—forgiving yourself for what's past, believing that God's grace really is enough. Maybe you need to extend it—to those who hurt you, to those who didn't understand your journey, to those who stayed when you left. **Forgiveness doesn't mean ignoring the pain or pretending nothing happened.** It means choosing to let Jesus carry the weight of it instead of holding onto it yourself. The Prodigal Son was embraced before he could even finish his apology—his father had already forgiven him. And Jesus has already done the same for you. **Now, the question is—will**

you step into the freedom that forgiveness brings? Will you let forgiveness be the last word?

If you've made it this far, maybe **something in you is stirring**. Maybe you're ready to take a step—not a perfect step, not one with all the answers, but a step toward faith again. Jesus isn't waiting for you to clean yourself up or prove yourself worthy. **He's waiting for you to turn to Him**. If you're not sure what to say, start here:

"Jesus, I don't have it all figured out, but I know I need You. I've walked away, I've wrestled with doubt, I've made mistakes—but I don't want to stay where I am. If You're still there, if You still want me, I'm here. Help me believe again. Help me find my way home. Teach me how to trust You. I surrender, even if it's imperfect. Thank You for loving me before I even took this step. Amen."

This isn't the start of the journey—you've already been on the road. You're somewhere in the messy middle, figuring out what comes next. But here's the good news: Jesus is right here with you. He always has been. And no matter how uncertain the path ahead feels, you're not walking it alone.

2 Corinthians 5:18-19 – *"All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation."*

Ephesians 4:31-32 – *"Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."*

Colossians 3:13 – *"Bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive."*

A Prayer for the One Who Returns

Father, You are the God who restores. You see every step that has been taken away from You, and You see every step that leads back home. Just as You ran to embrace the Prodigal Son, I know You run to embrace me now.

Lord, I come to You not with perfection, but with surrender. Your Word says, *“I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten”* (Joel 2:25). You don’t just forgive—you redeem. You don’t just welcome back—you rebuild. So I ask You now, Lord, restore what’s been lost. Heal what’s been broken. Strengthen what has grown weak.

I trust that Your love for me has never wavered. I trust that even when I was far off, You were still working, still waiting, still calling me home. Thank You for never giving up on me. Thank You for Your mercy that is *new every morning* (Lamentations 3:22-23).

Now, Father, lead me forward. Teach me how to walk with You again. Help me to trust, to grow, to become who You’ve called me to be. Let my life be a testimony of Your grace—a story of redemption, not just for me, but for others who need to know that coming home is always an option.

In Jesus’ name, Amen.



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