

FINDING

5 Awakenings  
to Your New Life

YOUR

WAYBACK



TO GOD

DAVE FERGUSON  
& JON FERGUSON

# GET CHURCH RESOURCES FOR FINDING YOUR WAY BACK TO GOD

Sermon manuscripts, small group curriculum, graphics, video bumpers, and concept videos based on the book *Finding Your Way Back To God* (FYWBTG) will be available for use in March 2015, in conjunction with the book release. Be one of the first to gain access to these products (and get some free resources!) by signing up for more info at **[bigidearesources.com/fywbtg](http://bigidearesources.com/fywbtg)**.

*Finding Your Way Back to God* by Dave Ferguson and Jon Ferguson

**Available everywhere books are sold | March 2015**

Publicity inquiries: contact Lynette Kittle, WaterBrook Multnomah Publishing Group Publicity, at (719) 264-5661 or [LKittle@penguinrandomhouse.com](mailto:LKittle@penguinrandomhouse.com).

Purchasing inquiries: Retailers, please contact WaterBrook Multnomah Publishing Group Sales at [Booksellers@WaterBrookmultnomah.com](mailto:Booksellers@WaterBrookmultnomah.com). Churches and ministries, please contact WaterBrook Multnomah Publishing Group Ministry Services at [ministryservices@WaterBrookmultnomah.com](mailto:ministryservices@WaterBrookmultnomah.com).

# Finding Your Way Back to God

## *5 Awakenings to Your New Life*

Dave Ferguson & Jon Ferguson

UNCORRECTED PROOF



MULTNOMAH  
BOOKS

FINDING YOUR WAY BACK TO GOD  
PUBLISHED BY MULTNOMAH BOOKS  
12265 Oracle Boulevard, Suite 200  
Colorado Springs, Colorado 80921

Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. [www.zondervan.com](http://www.zondervan.com).

*Italics in Scripture quotations reflect the author's added emphasis.*

Details in some anecdotes and stories have been changed to protect the privacy of the persons involved.

Hardcover ISBN 978-1-60142-608-6

eBook ISBN 978-1-60142-610-9

Copyright © 2015 by Dave Ferguson

Cover design by Mark D. Ford

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Published in the United States by WaterBrook Multnomah, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Random House LLC, New York, a Penguin Random House Company.

MULTNOMAH and its mountain colophon are registered trademarks of Random House LLC.

Printed in the United States of America

2015—First Edition

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

# Contents

The Journey Starts Here

1. When Did You Forget About God?
2. The Wager

**Awakening to Longing: “There’s got to be more.”**

3. I Want What’s Coming to Me
4. Looking for Love
5. What on Earth Am I Here For?
6. Those Unanswered “Why” Questions

**Awakening to Regret: “I wish I could start over.”**

7. Zoe Kind of Life
8. Doing a 180

**Awakening to Help: “I can’t do this on my own.”**

9. I Want to Come Home
10. The God Who Runs
11. Help Has a Name

**Awakening to Love: “God loves me deeply after all.”**

12. The Shadow That Follows You Home
13. You Have a New ID

## Awakening to Life: “Now this is living!”

14. Partying at the Lost and Found
15. Better Together
16. Your Part in God’s Dream

Find Our Way Back to God...Again and Again

30-Day Wager

## The Journey Starts Here

You can find your way back to God.

You're invited to go on a journey, one that could change your life in big and significant ways. This journey, like every other, is ultimately about closing the distance between where you are now and where you want to be.

*Finding Your Way Back to God* is a map for every traveler on this journey. All of us feel lost on this road at some time in our lives—sometimes really lost, and sometimes for a really long time. Whatever God-talk people use to describe the experience of this journey, most would agree it comes down to a simple yet overwhelming longing:

We want to find our way home.

We want to feel personally connected to the one who made us, who knows us for who we are. Who might even be able to help us. We feel powerfully drawn to move toward God, even when we fumble for words to explain it. Or him.

Does any of this ring true for you?

This book is based on a principle that may surprise you. *Not only is the longing to find God a universal experience, but there is also a universal pattern for what a journey in his direction looks like:*

What twists and turns, what long, dark stretches you can expect.

What mile markers—in this book we call them *awakenings*—to watch for.

What home actually looks like, so you'll know it when you get there.

The best account of this finding-your-way-back-to-God experience comes in a story. We'll show it to you. It's a story Jesus told about a young man who set out to find the good life, only to end up lost and lonely.

You don't have to know much about Jesus today to make the wisdom of his story work for you.

And one more principle: *God wants to be found even more than you want to find him.*

Now, if you've been distant from God for years, you're not likely to believe that. Not for a minute.

But we do. Based on our experience with thousands of travelers much like you, and based even more on the story Jesus told, we believe that God wants to be found. We believe, actually, that before you make your first move in his direction, he's already moving in yours.

We believe this so much that we're willing to put it to a test. We call it the 30-Day Wager. You take the risk to begin each day with a bet. You ask God to show up. Then see if he responds.

Do you dare?



## Chapter 1

### When Did You Forget About God?

Nick is a big, tough blue-collar guy who grew up in an equally tough neighborhood of Chicago.

A few months before he was born, his dad left the family for another woman who had her own little boy. Nick told me, “I can remember growing up in a nasty, bug-infested apartment with my mom and two older brothers. Meanwhile, on the other side of town, my biological father, his new wife, and his stepson lived in a nice house with no bugs. I remember asking, ‘God, if you are so good, why would you let this happen to a little kid like me?’ ”

Nick’s confusion turned to doubt, his doubt evolved into indifference, and then his indifference turned into amnesia. Nick forgot about God and moved on.

Several years later, when Lisa came into Nick’s life, she brought a spiritual curiosity that Nick had long lost. She was the best thing that had ever happened to him. As Lisa began her own search for God, Nick saw her changing for the better. She was more patient, worried less, and was clearly full of life.

Nick wanted some of that and decided to give God one more chance. Without telling anyone, he secretly started praying, “God, if you are real, make yourself real to me.” He said that prayer every day, and he noticed changes in his life. He felt more at peace, more hopeful. He found that he was having conversations about God and meeting people who believed in God. Occurrences took place that he called “God things.” It seemed that God might be answering his prayer, but he was still waiting to be sure.

Nick was like many people who are trying their best to find their way back to God.

Maybe he's a little like you.

## **A Findable God**

Since you are reading this book, it suggests to me that you or someone close to you has an interest in spiritual matters. You may feel distant from God yet not sure of how to close the gap. You might be reaching out to God for the first time, or you might be reaching out again.

I—Dave—know what that is like. So does my brother, Jon. We have both made and continue to make our own journeys back to God. And we are writing this book equally and together (even though for convenience, we'll mostly be writing as "I").

I have personally seen God's faithfulness as I seek him, not once but over and over again, and not just a long time ago but recently. Here's how it works. I find myself far from God. Then, like a little kid who is lost, I cry out, and my heavenly Father always responds, "Here I am."

When I was in grade school and afraid of dying, he was there.

When I was a teen and never felt good enough, he was there.

When I was a young adult, feeling beat up by doubts and failures, he was there.

When I have made choices that are opposite to what I say I value, he has been there.

When I have been alone and needed guidance, he was there.

When I feel like giving up, he is there.

Sure, there have been times when I haven't *felt* like he was there. But eventually I have always realized that he actually *was* there. The whole time.

For more than twenty years, I have been a pastor of a church, and I have seen thousands of people from every walk of life travel the journey that I have taken and that I am about to take you on. It's been such a

privilege. And it has cemented my conviction that God is a God who wants to be found and welcomes all who return to him.

I'll be telling the stories of many of these people throughout the book. This isn't to entertain you but to give you pictures of what it looks like to return to God. The stories and testimonies of those who have gone before us on this journey are like a well-worn path across an open field. Each adventure is personal, but we can see the path ahead because of others who have traveled before us.

I'm not saying it's always easy. But it's so worth it. The journey back to God promises freedom, grace, and forgiveness for everything in our past. We can find meaning and redemption, even in the darkest parts of our story.

Does that sound appealing to you? If so, then let me ask you a question: How did you forget God?

## **Spiritual Amnesia**

If I were to give you a survey that had two boxes asking, "Do you believe in God? Yes? No?" most likely you would check the box that says, "Yes." According to a Gallup survey, 92 percent of Americans would check "Yes."<sup>1</sup> So the great majority of us do believe in the existence of God.

The problem is that we forget him.

You may have heard the story of a little girl named Sachi and her unforgettable request.<sup>2</sup> Soon after her brother was born, Sachi began to ask her parents to leave her alone with the new baby. They worried that, like many four year olds, she might feel jealous and want to hit or shake him, so they said no. But she showed no signs of jealousy and she treated the baby with kindness. Yet her pleas to be left alone with him became more urgent. Her parents decided to allow it.

Elated, she went into the baby's room and shut the door. But the door swung open a crack—enough for her curious parents to peek in and listen. They saw little Sachi walk up to her baby brother, put her face

close to his, peering through the slats of the crib, and softly say, “Baby, tell me what God is like. I’m starting to forget.”

For many of us, there is a point in time we can look back on and say, “That is when I forgot about God.” Others of us would say, “That’s when it felt like God forgot about me.”

For you, it might have been as a child when God should have been there and he wasn’t. Behind closed doors you were left vulnerable to the kind of treatment no child should ever endure. It felt as if God were locked out of your house and couldn’t get in.

Or maybe you remember the day the fighting escalated. Your dad was yelling, your mom was crying, the door slammed, and your father left. You didn’t see God leave, but as a kid, it felt like that was the moment he walked out too.

Or maybe it was during your growing-up years that you forgot about God. In a time when you most needed to be accepted and included, you were left all alone and on the outside looking in. It made sense even then that, if there were a God, he wouldn’t have abandoned you.

So often you sit in that sacred space, waiting, anticipating, sometimes praying, but nothing changes. You keep showing up for the religious service, but it seems like God never does.

Or there was a loss or a death that you know God could have prevented, but for reasons you still don’t understand, he did not.

Perhaps right now it feels to you as if God has forgotten about you. Something has gone terribly wrong in your life. You have prayed and prayed and prayed—and nothing has changed.

Or you’ve done something wrong, and you know you have put distance between yourself and God. But you don’t know how to bridge that gulf.

Or you have objections to doctrines, intellectual doubts you have no answers for, or disappointments about religious people that put you off. Maybe these are obstacles you can never get over.

Whatever your reason for feeling distant from God, it's possible for you to start the journey back to him.

### **“God, If...”**

Kelly would tell you that she gave up on God when she was fifteen. Her mom pushed her to go to church, forced her to go through confirmation, and made her go to her first Communion. In spite of her mother's good intentions, none of it made sense to Kelly. By fifteen, she says, she'd had enough.

I know Kelly, and I think she actually forgot about God long before she turned fifteen. If you visit her Facebook page, you'll see that the cover photo shows Kelly holding her two-year-old son while sitting in a graveyard in front of her father's tombstone. Kelly's dad died when she was only four months old. Kelly told me, “I think, in some ways, I didn't want to believe in God—my dad died, my brothers didn't really look out for me, and my boyfriend was abusive. It was hard to believe that there was a good guy out there. And since God was supposed to be a ‘Father,’ I didn't want to let him in.”

So she started forgetting about God, and by the time she was fifteen, she said, “God was far, far, far away.”

When I first met Kelly, she had just graduated from high school, where she had been a cheerleader, was on the dean's list, and had lots of friends and a life full of promise. Kelly decided not to go to college and started waiting tables at a breakfast restaurant I frequent. At the time she didn't know me as the pastor of a church. I was just a guy named Dave who happened to sit in her section on Wednesdays.

Over the next several years, Kelly dated several men who gave her nothing, with the exception of a beautiful baby boy. Her youthful exuberance, her hopes and dreams gradually all wore away. Through it all, her constant friend was a bottle.

Last year, I went to see her in the hospital, where she looked like

death. She had drunk herself into a coma—whether by accident or in a deliberate attempt to kill herself, I didn't know. Although she was conscious by the time I visited her, the staff at the hospital still weren't sure she'd make it. I wondered if I would ever see her again.

A few months later, I got a text and then a call from Kelly. She told me she always felt comfortable talking to me about spiritual matters and wanted to know if we could meet. So we met at Starbucks the next Thursday. She told me that she had been sober for a few weeks and was working the Twelve Steps. Then she looked at me with a deep sincerity and said, "Dave, can you help me believe in God?"

I said I would try my best, and we agreed to meet the following Thursday. It was the first in a long series of weekly conversations. The second week I bought coffee and showed her a Bible verse that was meaningful to me. In it God promises, "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."<sup>3</sup> Then I advised her, "Every day, ask God to deliver on this promise. Just say to him, 'God, if you are real, make yourself real to me.' And let's see what happens."

She looked at me like she wanted to trust me on this but didn't know if she could.

I'll tell you the outcome of Kelly's story before this chapter is done. But first let me point something out. Kelly was a lot like Nick, and she was a lot like many of us, in one sense: if she ever understood her identity as God's child, she had forgotten it.

It's strange how people are capable of forgetting who they are.

### **"I Know Who You Are"**

It was worse than a nightmare when Ed Smart faced a horde of reporters and television journalists who had camped out on his front lawn. Overcome with emotion, this father stepped up to the battery of microphones and spoke directly to his daughter. "Elizabeth," he said, "if you are out

there, we are doing everything we possibly can to help you.”<sup>4</sup> He fought back the tears and then addressed the kidnapers, “Please let her go. Please!” People all over the country felt anxiety for the Smarts and their fourteen-year-old Elizabeth, who had been abducted from her bedroom the night before.

For the next nine months, her kidnapers held Elizabeth captive. Forced to wear a wig and a disguise, she would often be close to her Salt Lake City home, but no one ever recognized her. On occasion, she and her abductors would eat at restaurants her family frequented, but no one identified her. As sometimes happens in an abduction, Stockholm syndrome began to set in. She no longer identified with the Smarts as her family and their home as her true home. Instead, she began to sympathize and identify with her oppressors.

Nine months later, Elizabeth was at a crossroads, literally and figuratively.

A Salt Lake City police officer spotted a vaguely familiar teenage girl crossing an intersection. After the policeman asked a few questions, the teenage girl blurted out, “I know you think I’m Elizabeth Smart, but I’m not.”<sup>5</sup> The police officer asked about the wig she was wearing. She insisted that it was her real hair. The officer questioned her about the couple she was with, and she was adamant that they were her parents, even though they were in fact her kidnapers.

So lost, but so close to home.

So close to being found, but not even knowing it.

The painful events of the past several months had been too much for her. She had either repressed the memories of the rapes, captivity, and indoctrination she had been through or simply couldn’t deal with them. It was as though she didn’t even know she was lost anymore. She had forgotten who she really was and to whom she belonged. It almost kept her from being found and going home.

But then the officer looked her in the eye and gently said something along these lines: “I know who you are. You are Elizabeth Smart. You’ve been lost. And I’d like to take you home.”

Silence.

He showed her a missing-person poster featuring a photograph of herself.

Then she looked up with tears brimming in her eyes and said, “Thou sayeth, I’ll say it.” In other words, “If you say so.”

### **Your Life at the Crossroads**

I believe God has you reading this book right now because he wants you to hear him gently speak to you, “I know who you are. And I know that your journey has taken you to places where I never intended for you to go. Life has brought you pain I never wanted you to feel. You have experienced regret that I hoped you could have avoided. You feel lost. Now I would like to bring you home.”

Sometimes it’s the disappointments and tragedies of life that leave us feeling lost. We often get ourselves lost too. We make wrong turns or take detours and end up in places we never wanted to go and never thought we would be. One of the ancient prophets compares us to wayward animals, confessing,

*We all, like sheep, have gone astray,  
each of us has turned to our own way.<sup>6</sup>*

Some of us have been distant or lost for a long time. We’ve been lost for so long that we have started to identify with our own lostness.

“I’m a relational failure.”

“I am a workaholic.”

“I’m an addict.”

Identity always precedes behavior. What you need is for someone to



come alongside you and help you remember who you are and to whom you belong.

You are a child of God.

You belong to God.

Remember?

For more than nine-tenths of us, believing that God exists is not the problem. The real issue is belonging. We have lost track of how to be in relationship with God. Because the truth is that, no matter who you are or what you've done or what's been done to you, you are a child, away from home, who belongs to a Father who wants to help you out of your lostness.

### **What the Journey Is, What It Isn't**

Before we go any further, let Jon and me be as clear as we possibly can about what finding your way back to God is *not* and what it *is*.

Finding your way back to God is *not* about getting your act together or getting more religious.

Finding your way back to God is *not* about cleaning yourself up or just becoming a better person.

Finding your way back to God is *not* about eliminating all your doubts. That won't happen in this life.

Finding your way back to God is *not* about cutting a deal with God or figuring out a way to get him to accept you so that you will go to heaven when you die.

Finding your way back to God *is* for anyone who wants a power greater than yourself to make it through life.

Finding your way back to God *is* for anyone who wants to discover an unconditional love so powerful that it can transform how you think and feel every day.

Finding your way back to God *is* for people who desire a way to love others the way they need to be loved.

Finding your way back to God *is* for anyone who wants a purpose for life that will get you out of bed excited to meet each day.

Finding your way back to God *is* for anyone who wants a hope for this life and the next.

If that sounds good to you, let me assure you that finding your way back to God is possible. But I won't lie to you. There's no guarantee. It can go either way.

Do you remember Kelly the waitress? It was one year after almost dying of an alcohol overdose that she went back to the same hospital. But this time as a visitor to say thanks to the doctors and nurses who had cared for her. When she walked into the intensive care unit, one of the nurses welcomed her with a hug, saying, "Kelly, it's so good to see you."

She broke down sobbing.

Kelly recalls, "It just hit me that I was really alive, and I could have been gone. Forever. I would have missed so much. I realized that it was something more than the medicine, monitors, and doctors that kept me alive. It was God. He kept me alive because he loves me and he wants me to be there for my little boy and to help others."

I still meet with Kelly every week, and it is so good to see her taking those first steps back to God.

But tough-guy Nick's story is different from Kelly's. Despite asking God to make himself real, and despite God showing up in ways that Nick himself described as "supernatural," he headed in the direction of home only to drift again. It can happen to any of us. I'm hoping that if Nick should ever read these words, he will keep reading and eventually find his way back. At least for now, he's still on the road.

The rest of this book is written for people like Nick, Kelly, Jon, and myself. People who find themselves, for a variety of reasons and in different seasons, having forgotten about God.

Whether you call yourself Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu, or "none of the above," this book can help you find your way

back to God. It doesn't matter if you are straight, gay, lesbian, or sexually questioning—if you want to find your way back to God, this book is for you. You can be a tight-fisted conservative or a bleeding-heart liberal or somewhere in between, and it doesn't matter—you can find your way back to God. Whether you are young or old, single, married, divorced, or widowed, there is a God out there who wants to know you, love you, and give your life purpose and meaning.

To get there, though, you're going to have to take a risk.

Maybe you're not so sure God is out there and waiting for you to come back to him. You want to bet?

## Chapter 2

### The Wager

Conor Murphy's whole life changed with a single wager.

He was twenty-nine years old, working at a horse barn, and he wanted more out of life. He hated his job. It was like being a hotel housekeeper, except the guests were fifteen-hundred-pound horses. Instead of cleaning up after horses, what he really wanted to do was to train and race them.

In what seemed like a crazy bet, he wagered \$75 that all five of his boss's horses would win in a single day. The type of bet he made is called an *accumulator bet*. If all five horses won their races, Conor would win big, but if any of the five lost, he would lose his \$75.

All five horses crossed the finish line first that day! That single wager paid Conor Murphy \$1.5 million. "Pure luck!"<sup>7</sup> he called it. He put down his manure shovel, bought a house in Louisville, and pursued his dream of training horses.

We love those kinds of stories. We dream of a huge win like that one being our story and a Hollywood production company making a movie about us. We know, however, that the house always has the odds in its favor, so we figure betting is a losing proposition. As we've all been warned, "If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is."

But what if there were a single wager that really would change your whole life? What if there were a way for you to win big and change everything?

#### **Betting on God**

The seventeenth-century mathematician Blaise Pascal is considered to have had one of the greatest intellects in the history of Western civiliza-

tion. He was raised in a religious home but found it too suffocating and rejected any kind of organized religion. Then, in a profound middle-of-the-night experience of God, he had a change of heart. That experience ignited Pascal's passion to help people find their way back to God.

Pascal began to challenge his fellow intellectuals to a wager on God. He would dare them to step into a belief about God and see if it didn't change their life. Pascal explained his wager like this: "Let us weigh the gain and the loss in wagering that God is. Let us estimate these two chances. If you gain, you gain all; if you lose, you lose nothing. Wager, then, without hesitation that He is."<sup>8</sup>

In finding your way back to God, here is your first step: make Pascal's wager. This is a gamble where you have everything to gain and nothing to lose. Consider the upside. If you find God, you may also find the source of unconditional love for which you have always longed. Finding God might offer you a life-giving purpose and a genuine cause for your life. God is the one who can take your past and make sense out of it. That's a big-time payoff! And the downside? Nothing! Nada!

So place a bet on God. A bet is simply the decision to risk something on a possible positive outcome. The risk I want you to take is this—pray to God. It may seem awkward at first, but I want you to try it. Talk to God and be open to the possibility that God is waiting, listening, and eager to respond.

If you will risk praying to God and inviting him into your life, the possible outcome is that God will show up. In fact, God is so passionate about having a relationship with you that I *promise* you will encounter him. Jon and I have seen it happen so many times. When you reach out to God, he responds. I'm telling you, he will. This is a bet worth making!

I have selected several prayers that I will ask you to say as a way of making the wager. Each of them will be an expansion on the first prayer. It's the same prayer that Nick and Kelly spoke in the first chapter:

*God, if you are real,  
make yourself real to me.*

Every time it comes to mind, speak this prayer to God and make the wager that he's listening. I promise he is! We have his word on it.

### **“When You Seek Me...”**

What do you think about the Bible?

You may think it's outdated or full of inconsistencies. But more likely, if you're similar to most people, you have respect for the Bible, maybe even thinking it is one of the best sources of spiritual truth available to us. Just as the great majority of Americans believe in the existence of God, so fully three-quarters of us believe the Bible is “in some way connected to God.”<sup>9</sup>

Throughout this sacred text, God promises that, if you will seek him, you will find him. Let me show you how God makes this promise over and over again. The first promise is one you'll recognize, because it's the one I quoted to Kelly in the last chapter:

*“You will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,” declares the LORD.*<sup>10</sup>

Many more verses make the same promise in different ways. Here are a few:

*If...you seek the LORD your God, you will find him if you seek him with all your heart and with all your soul.*<sup>11</sup>

*“I love those who love me,” [says the Lord,]  
and those who seek me diligently find me.*<sup>12</sup>

*Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.*<sup>13</sup>

Did you hear the theme in each of those sacred verses? Over and over again, the Bible tells us that our sincere seeking results in us experiencing and finding God. When we pray, “God, if you are real, make yourself real to me,” he does it!

So make the bet. Wager on God. I dare you.

### **Thirty Days to Try it Out**

There’s nothing magical about the wording of the “God, if you are real...” prayer wager. But there *is* something supernatural about the way God responds to it.

To help you not just say the words of the prayer with your mouth but also work the intent of it into your life, Jon and I are providing a 30-Day Wager guide for you at the back of this book. If you’re the kind of person who likes a specific plan to grab onto, you’ll be glad to use this guide. It gives you simple activities and a short—but not too short—horizon to see your wager with God pay off.

If you will follow the 30-Day Wager faithfully, you will pray each of the five “God, if you are real...” prayers for six days at a time. In addition, you will apply the meanings of those prayers to your own life through reflection and journaling. Put your finger in the book right here and flip to the back to check out for yourself what the 30-Day Wager looks like.

Our suggestion is this: keep reading the book at your own pace. But however long it takes to read the book, also be working through the thirty days methodically. The 30-Day Wager may be just the tool you need to help you get started on a journey with higher stakes than even Conor Murphy gambled for—finding God!

## **hpftwbtG**

Jon and I have seen firsthand how thousands of people have made the wager on God, and when they decided to seek him, found him. When they drew near to God, God drew near to them. In the pages to come you will hear from people whose stories begin like this:

- Holly saw her husband disabled from depression and her family disintegrate and felt her whole world was collapsing.
- Jeremy and Melissa, two beautiful people, could never find love.
- Rich was a successful megachurch pastor, until his wife left, taking the kids and saying, “We can do just fine without you.”
- Aaron claimed to be an atheist, and had no time for God.
- Jeff’s life was all about moving from one buzz to the next.
- Rick nearly lost his wife on their wedding night, due to a stroke, and kept asking, “Why?”

Each of these people, for a variety of reasons, made a bet on God, and God came through. Not all their stories have a fairy-tale ending, but when they grasped for God, he embraced them. He always does.

Because of the profound and positive life change I have experienced in my own life and have seen in these people, I have made it my life’s mission to help people find their way back to God. If I were to put it on a t-shirt, it would look like this: “hpftwbtG.” That is what I love to do. It is what I’m doing in this book.

## **Five Awakenings That Change Everything**

In my observations and interactions with thousands of people, I have seen five different awakenings that almost always occur in a person’s journey back to God. Where people start and what motivates them to begin this journey are often different, but the stages they go through are remarkably similar. The most common reaction I receive from people as



I share these five awakenings is something like “Yeah, that’s me, all right” or “How did you know?”

The five different “God, if you are real...” prayers are intended to arouse in you the five awakenings. Here’s how you go from just feeling sad and discouraged about the distance between you and God to actually making progress in finding your way back to him.

An awakening is sort of like an *Aha!* epiphany, but it doesn’t necessarily happen all of a sudden. It’s often more like a person emerging gradually from sleep. Something enters your consciousness. You become aware that you have moved from dark to light, from old to new. Where before you didn’t have an insight, now you do. And the result of it is that you have a breakthrough in understanding that enables you to get unstuck and move one giant step closer to God.

The truth behind an awakening is not something we simply comprehend, like “Paris is the capital of France” or “Cubs fans don’t know when to give up.” We don’t just *understand* such a truth. If it is going to make a difference in our lives, we have to *realize* it—literally, see it become *real* in our own experience. It becomes a part of us.

In the rest of the book, we’ll be exploring the following awakenings:

1. *An awakening to longing*: “There’s got to be more.”
2. *An awakening to regret*: “I wish I could start over.”
3. *An awakening to help*: “I can’t do this on my own.”
4. *An awakening to love*: “God loves me deeply after all.”
5. *An awakening to life*: “Now this is living!”

I have great confidence that these five awakenings will resonate with you, not only because I’ve seen them happen in many people’s lives, but also because they are found in Jesus’s famous story of the lost son who finds his way home. The parable of the lost son (also known as the par-

able of the prodigal son) is widely considered to be one of the greatest short stories in all of literature. The reason Jesus told this story is to show us how to find our way back to God. After all, that was Jesus's life mission—"to seek and to save the lost."<sup>14</sup>

The lost son's story is my story. It's your story. It's our story.

Even if you're already familiar with the story, please read it again, seeing if you can spot the turning points in the son's journey for yourself. Afterward, let's get started on the first awakening. I know the awakening to longing will tug at something deep within you.

### **The Story of the Lost Son**

*Luke 15:11-24*

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."

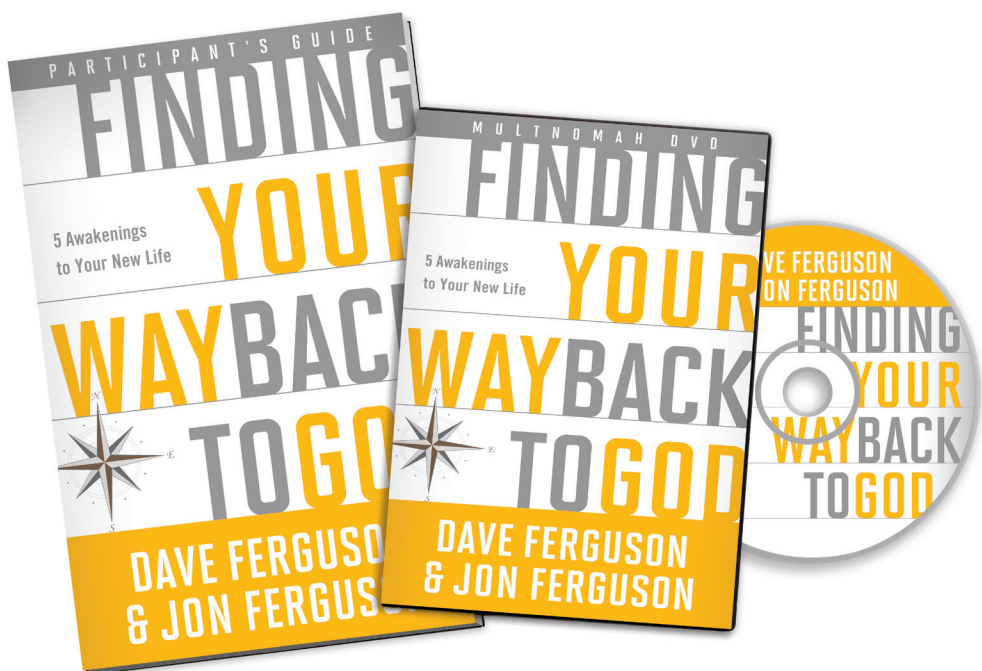
But the father said to his servants, "Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." So they began to celebrate.

## Endnotes

- 1 Frank Newport, “More Than 9 in 10 Americans Continue to Believe in God,” Gallup, June 3, 2011, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/147887/americans-continue-believe-god.aspx>.
- 2 Dan Millman, “Sachi,” in *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, eds. Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen (Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, 1993), 290.
- 3 Jeremiah 29:13.
- 4 “Father Pleads for Kidnapped Utah Girl,” CNN, June 6, 2002, <http://edition.cnn.com/2002/US/06/05/utah.teenager/index.html?related>.
- 5 Oliver Libaw, “How Did Abductors Control Elizabeth Smart?” ABCNews, March 13, n.y., <http://abcnews.go.com/US/story?id=90754&page=1&singlePage=true>.
- 6 Isaiah 53:6.
- 7 Joe Drape, “With One Bet, Stablehand Becomes Stable Owner,” *New York Times*, May 3, 2013, [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/04/sports/conor-murphys-big-bet-bankrolls-horse-training-career.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/04/sports/conor-murphys-big-bet-bankrolls-horse-training-career.html?_r=0).
- 8 Blaise Pascal, *Pascal's Pensées* (New York: Dutton, 1958), 67.

- 9 Lydia Saad, “Three in Four in U.S. Still See the Bible as Word of God,” June 4, 2014, Gallup, [http://www.gallup.com/poll/170834/three-four-bible-word-god.aspx?utm\\_source=alert&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=syndication&utm\\_content=morelink&utm\\_term=All%20Gallup%20Headlines](http://www.gallup.com/poll/170834/three-four-bible-word-god.aspx?utm_source=alert&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=syndication&utm_content=morelink&utm_term=All%20Gallup%20Headlines).
- 10 Jeremiah 29:12-13.
- 11 Deuteronomy 4:29, 1984<sup>NIV</sup>.
- 12 Proverbs 8:17.
- 13 James 4:8.
- 14 Luke 19:10.

# Additional Resources Available



Go further with the *Finding Your Way Back to God DVD & Participant's Guide*. Ideal for individual study, small groups, or church teams.



**Dave Ferguson** is founding and lead pastor of Chicago's Community Christian Church, a multi-site missional community considered one of the most influential churches in America. Dave is also the visionary for NewThing, a global network of reproducing churches. Dave and his wife, Sue, have three children.



**Jon Ferguson** is founding pastor of Community Christian Church, a teaching pastor for their Chicago network, and movement architect for NewThing, an international church-planting movement. He and his wife, Lisa, have two children. Brothers Dave and Jon are the co-authors of three books on church leadership.

# “God, if you are real, make yourself real to me.”

**D**o you believe God exists but struggle to connect with him? Do you feel like you’ve forgotten a God you used to know? Or that he has forgotten you?

*Finding Your Way Back to God* puts you on the road of authentic spiritual discovery—starting wherever you are right now. Step by step, you’ll leave behind what’s no longer working, and move toward what matters most. You’ll make a 30-day prayer wager on God to see if he shows up in your life. And he will.

Writing from their own lives, the stories of others, as well as drawing insights from an unforgettable story Jesus told, Dave and Jon Ferguson lead you through the five awakenings everyone experiences on their way to a new life. *Finding Your Way Back to God* will move you from confusion to purpose, from regret to love, and from distance to closeness with God.

Want to find your way back to God? Start where you are, take that first step, and watch what happens next.

