

Finding Your Way Back to God



Christopher News Notes

MANY YOUNG PEOPLE GO TO CHURCH WHEN THEY'RE GROWING UP, but stop practicing their faith as they get older. Sometimes, it's because they get distracted with other things, such as school, career, or simply having fun. In other instances, life's challenges lead them to question God's goodness or even His existence. But moving away from God doesn't mean God moves away from us. He remains faithful always, inviting everyone back into His loving embrace.

An Actor's Faith is Reawakened

"I'm going to go play." That was actor John J. York's attitude when he got to college many years ago, despite his parents raising him and his five siblings in the Catholic faith. With his first taste of freedom being away from home, John felt too restricted by the Church's rules and traditions, so he put God out of his mind.

John went on to pursue an acting career in Hollywood, and in 1991, he landed a job portraying the character Mac Scorpio on ABC's *General Hospital*, a role he still plays today. In addition, he met and married his wife Vicki, with whom he had a daughter, Schyler. Throughout those many years, John paid no attention to his spiritual life—until Schyler began attending Notre Dame High School, a Catholic school. One evening, during dinner, she asked John, "Dad, what do I have to do to receive Communion? We always have Mass every day, and everybody's going to Communion, but I can't go."

Though John was culturally Catholic enough to have had Schyler baptized, he never followed through on any of the other sacraments. But in response to her question, he explained that she had to go through RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults) in order to officially join the Church. So, that's what she did.

John still didn't go to church every week himself, but he encouraged Schyler to keep nurturing her faith when she went away to college. "She did that," he recalled during a *Christopher Closeup* interview. "She had an encounter, and she became deeply immersed in her love for Jesus Christ and the Catholic faith—and she brought me along with her. So, I was just following her, following Him."

In essence, Schyler's blossoming faith became the impetus for John's long dormant Catholic roots to find new life. He found himself developing a fruitful prayer life, waking up early to pray the rosary, then adding numerous saints to the mix, such as St. Thérèse, St. Joseph, St. Philomena, and many others. "It's a good way to start the day," he

Planting Spiritual Seeds for Teens

Sherry Antonetti's teenagers attend Mass with her, but they don't particularly like it. Writing for *America*, she admits her kids struggle with their faith and often wear ripped jeans and shorts to church. Still, she is happy they show up at all and hopes that spiritual seeds are being planted that will eventually lead them to embrace God and faith.

Antonetti also knows it's easy for others in the pews to judge her teens by the way they're dressed. Yes, she wishes their clothes were more formal, too. But she suggests, "Instead of judging them, say a prayer to St. Monica for the family. In the meantime, smile each time you see a teen or college student in the pews, no matter how they look. Do not become the rationale they use to stop coming."

Regarding her hopeful approach, Antonetti concludes, "Light attracts. Joy invites. Love reveals. We must bring all three gifts to the altar. Christ will do the multiplying, and we will have a church brimming with squirmy teens and toddlers, and we will rejoice that we are overflowing with people."

noted. "It focuses me on trying to do good things...And many of the sermons that I hear at church on Sunday, it's simple. Start your day in a space of gratitude, a space of humility, being thankful for what's around you."

John's journey of faith has also helped him see the image and likeness of God in the people he encounters every day, whether they share his beliefs or not. In fact, simply praying, "Help me to see the face of God in the people and experiences of my life," allows him to stay focused.

While being a person of faith doesn't prevent John from experiencing dark times, his perspective on dealing with them is different than it used to be and in line with the Christopher ideal of lighting a candle rather than cursing the darkness. John concluded, "I know that I'm not alone. Even if I'm by myself, I'm not alone. For me, Jesus Christ is right there with me. The Holy Spirit is right there with me, and that's who I talk to. That's what gets me through...He's the light in my life. He's the light that's brought all these candles to me in my life."

Where is God in the Darkness?

Elizabeth Humphreys was introduced to loss at a young age. When she was 10, her brother Michael and her mother Madelyn were both diagnosed with different forms of cancer a few days apart.

While Madelyn survived breast cancer, Michael succumbed to Hodgkin's lymphoma.

Years later, when Elizabeth was a young wife and mother herself, Madelyn developed Alzheimer's, leading Elizabeth to be her primary caregiver. Alzheimer's and dementia are often portrayed as memory diseases, but there is more to them than that. The patient can also suffer from hallucinations, illogical anger, and an inability to grasp the most basic forms of reason. Dealing with this led Elizabeth to feel traumatized in her spiritual life. During a *Christopher Closeup* interview, she explained, "I was so angry with God, so I didn't lean on Him at all."

That was how Elizabeth lived for nearly six years. Finally, she hit rock bottom, admitting, "I need help." She contacted the Nashville chapter of the "Alzheimer's Association" and met with a young woman who recruited her to be on their Young Professionals Board. Despite some intense jitters the first few times she had to speak in public to share her story, Elizabeth soon thrived, becoming a prolific fundraiser. Beyond that, she also found healing because she felt part of a movement that was bigger than herself, a movement which brought support to the six million people in the U.S. who suffer from Alzheimer's or dementia, and their 11 million caregivers.

Elizabeth's efforts became so successful that she felt called to do more. That's when she created her own nonprofit, "Mind What Matters," to financially assist caregivers for dementia patients in their difficult work. In essence, 95 percent of the money raised by "Mind What Matters" is sent out in caregiving grants to people who apply through their website. Regarding her efforts, Elizabeth reflected, "This is what Jesus called us to do."

Speaking of Jesus, Elizabeth's relationship with God has improved. She said, "It must have been God's hand in some capacity [that] did pull me back in. I do know that He's working, somehow, through all of this, and maybe it will be my voice helping somebody else...I think this is where faith comes in. If you don't have it...to fall back on, the darkness can eat you. But to the extent you give it over, [you can] say, 'I'm never going to understand this, God. I just know that I trust You, and I know that no matter what, You'll carry me through it.'"

A Runaway's Return

Manndi DeBoef was fed up. She can't recall what exactly she was fed up about because she was only six years old at the time, but she decided to run away from home. She got her mother's red overnight bag, packed a few items, then told her mother she was leaving. "My mother didn't seem overly concerned," Manndi wrote at *BustedHalo.com*. "She said she would miss me and hoped I would visit."

**"It's better to light one candle than to curse the darkness."**

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After walking to the end of her street, Manndi sat down on the red suitcase, hoping her mom would come after her. She didn't. Frustrated, the six-year-old finally returned home where she was greeted by her mom, who knelt down and said to her: "Manndi, I watched you from the bedroom window. You were never out of my sight. Do you really think I would let my precious little girl run away? I gave you some space. But I am very happy that you came back home."

Those words taught Manndi that no matter where she went, her mother would always welcome her back with "open, loving arms." And as Manndi grew into an adult, that incident also taught her a truth about God. She wrote: "How many times have I packed my metaphoric little red suitcase full of guilt, anger, hurt, resentment, fear, and run away from God? Too many. And then wondered why He didn't chase me. Only, He did. But first, He gave me space. Time to reflect...But did He ever take His eyes off of His beloved child? Never."

Manndi recalled some of the dark spiritual experiences she has endured, including two miscarriages, an unwanted divorce, and the death of a loved one. Though God felt distant during those times, she now realizes He was there after all.

"No matter how much we screw up, how long we stay away, and how deeply our faith has fallen, [God] truly desires each of His children to come home; whether for the first time or the 10th," Manndi concluded. "Each time I have faltered or faced what I felt was bitter defeat, I found grace, peace, and healing when down on my knees in heartfelt prayers...In much the same way my mother served as an example of Christ's never-ending love for me as a young child, I am hopeful that my two sons know...that no matter how far they wander, roam, and explore, their mother's love will not only go with them, but be...waiting for them to find their way back home."

"I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed." —Ezekiel 34:16