

The Long Walk Home

Discovering the
Fullness of Life
in the Love of the Father



Matt Carter

The Long Walk Home

Discovering the
Fullness of Life
in the Love of the Father



Matt Carter

Copyright © 2019 by Matt Carter
All rights reserved.
Printed in the United States of America

978-1-4336-9064-8

Published by B&H Publishing Group
Nashville, Tennessee

Dewey Decimal Classification: 226.8
Subject Heading: PRODIGAL SON (PARABLE) / GOD-
ATTRIBUTES / LOVE

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture is taken from
the New American Standard Bible, copyright © 1960, 1962,
1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by
The Lockman Foundation.

Also used: English Standard Version (ESV),
Text Edition: 2016. Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles,
a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

Cover design and illustration by Matt Lehman.
Photo © Blue Collectors / Stocksy

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 • 23 22 21 20 19

Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter 1: The Problem	7
Chapter 2: The Lie	33
Chapter 3: The Step	57
Chapter 4: The Consequences	77
Chapter 5: The Realization.	101
Chapter 6: The Speech.	123
Chapter 7: The Return	151
Chapter 8: The Reunion.	169
Acknowledgments.	195
About the Author	197
Notes	199



Introduction



Being a Christian is hard. There, I said it.

Some of you just read that first line and already are judging me.

Wait a minute, Matt; Jesus said, “My yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:30). And you know what? That’s true. When I’m fully submitted to Jesus and walking well with Him, that verse makes all the sense in the world. My problem is that I have a pretty good track record of not consistently walking well with Jesus. That’s when it gets hard. Not because of Him but because of me. Maybe that’s not your story, but it’s mine. Christianity is hard. Worth it, but hard.

There's an old Willie Nelson song that I remember hearing in my dad's pickup truck when I was a kid. Maybe you remember it. It's called "My Heroes Have Always Been Cowboys."

Why, for old Willie, have his heroes always been cowboys? According to those lyrics, it's probably not because of the horse or the hat or the gun but because cowboys live a life that makes sense to him. Willie lets us know that cowboys live a life of cold, lonely, nightmarish misery—and he can relate.

As a pastor for more than twenty years, I've been preaching the Bible for a long time—been reading it for even longer. And when it comes to my biblical heroes, the ones I have found over the years that I love the most, I love not because of the good they've done but, honestly, because of how they've failed. Why? Because I can relate.

I've personally never called down fire from heaven and burned up the offerings of pagan worshippers like Elijah. I've never parted the Red Sea or stood beside a burning bush like Moses. I've never walked down into the valley of the shadow of death and killed a nine-foot-tall giant like David. But, like Peter, I *have* tried to

walk on water (yes, I tried it once) and instead sank like a rock. Just like Peter, with my actions, I have denied Christ—more than three times. Like Peter, I’ve run from my calling and just gone fishing when I should have been standing firm and faithful. I’ve always liked Peter, not because he wrote part of the Bible or because he was a stalwart of the early church, but because I can relate to this flawed, battered, and bruised man who desperately loved his Savior.

There’s another guy in the Bible—I definitely wouldn’t call him my hero, or really a hero at all, but I can certainly relate to him. You may have heard of this guy in some Sunday sermon or in a Sunday school flannel board lesson of your youth. People often refer to him as “the prodigal son.”

If you grew up in church, you know the story, but if you didn’t, here are the basic plot points. A young man, the young man we come to know later as the “prodigal,” asks his dad for his inheritance, even though the old man is still alive. His father grants his wish, and the young man takes off to a foreign land where he squanders his inheritance and is forced to come home with his

hat in his hand. That's actually *not* how the story ends, but I don't want to get too far ahead of myself.

When I was younger, I couldn't relate to this guy. I thought, *How stupid do you have to be to ask for, then take your entire inheritance and blow it being monumentally stupid? Who would do that to their father? What kind of idiot would make all those poor decisions?*

But now, years later, unfortunately I can relate to the prodigal more than I ever thought possible in my youth.

The older I get, the more I'm aware of my flaws, my sins, my failures, and my shortcomings. They're many and they're ugly. Am I an abject failure as a believer? No. Are the words of the Scripture that say He who began a good work in me will be faithful to complete it (see Phil. 1:6) true? For me, yes they are. Do I see the fruit of the Spirit in me, and by the grace of God is it increasing? Yep. BUT I also know that as a man with a few years and few failures under his belt, I read the Bible differently now. I read it not as a young, self-righteous punk who thought he had the world figured out, but rather as a flawed, sometimes weary soul desperately searching God's Word for every drop of grace that can be squeezed out of it.

INTRODUCTION

If you're a Christian who has it all figured out, this book is not for you. If you're a Christian who has never really failed or fallen or struggled, there might be a better use for your time than reading these pages. But if like me, you love the Lord, but at times throughout your life you find yourself weary and broken, confused and questioning—maybe even hanging on by a thread—then this book *is* for you.

No matter how weary you are or how far you've fallen, your Father's love for you is greater than your wildest imagination. I wrote this book partly as therapy for myself and partly as a guide for people like us.

And hopefully it will guide you back into the arms of a loving Dad—maybe not the dad you had but the one you always longed for—a Dad who is ready to welcome you home, wipe you clean, and call you His beloved son or daughter.

CHAPTER 1

The Problem

One of my earliest memories was that of food and a great woman. It was 4:00 a.m. on Thanksgiving morning in 1978, and I was five years old. Dreary eyed and yawning, I got out of bed to go to the kitchen and get a glass of water. As I fumbled through the dark, I was surprised to hear noise coming from the kitchen that early in the morning. I walked farther down the hallway, shuffling my footie pajamas across the old hardwood floor, hoping I had simply imagined the sound.

Bang!

There it was again. My heart beat faster, and I was consumed by that sense of dread and helplessness only a five-year-old can feel in the dark. But then the

smell hit me. Corn bread. Yes—it was the sweet smell of corn bread, mixed together with the aroma of onion and sage. Your mind is a powerful thing, and I've read somewhere that your sense of smell triggers the most powerful memories. To this day, every Thanksgiving when I smell corn bread, onions, and sage, I am transported back to that dark hallway, shuffling along in my footie pajamas.

My little stomach immediately came alive and began to rumble. I followed the smells and the sounds until I turned the corner from the hallway into the kitchen. As my eyes adjusted to the light, I saw her—my great-grandmother. I instantly realized what was making all that racket. She was only five feet tall, and she was standing on her toes, reaching into a cabinet to grab a bowl she couldn't quite reach, banging pots against one another in the process. The smells? She was preparing corn bread stuffing that would soon join the yet-uncooked turkey in the oven. I remember thinking something in that moment that has stuck with me ever since: *My great-grandmother is up at four in the morning to cook for me. She really must love me.* And oh, she did. My great-grandmother was

crazy about me. She proved it time and time again, and I miss her.

Her name was Theodocia Blackburn, and she was born in 1902. She lived until the mid-90s, and I often think about the changes she saw in her lifetime. Cars, airplanes, television, air conditioning, spaceships, computers—it's staggering to think about how the world changed from her youth to her old age. Was hers the generation that saw the greatest change? Maybe, but there's another great woman I think might see an even greater change in her lifetime, and that's my daughter. If she lives to the age of her great-great-grandmother, what will she see? What changes in culture and technology will she experience? It's hard to imagine, but I would venture to guess it could be as dramatic, maybe even more so than any generation before hers.

My daughter was born in the year 2002. She will never know what it was like to live before computers, the Internet, social media, or smart phones. She has an access to the world with all of its allures that I simply could not have imagined as a teenager. She doesn't just hear her favorite pop stars on the radio, but through social media

and the Internet, she has daily access to their words, their thoughts, their homes, and even the routine of their everyday lives in a way that was unthinkable just twenty years ago. The twenty-four-hour news cycle and social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter provide real-time access to current events that previous generations would have found unthinkable. Yes, most assuredly, as Bob Dylan wrote, “The times they are a-changin’.”

Along with society, the American Christian movement is changing too. I pastor a church full of college kids and young adults, and I’m telling you, the church is changing. When I was growing up in somewhat rural East Texas, everyone went to church, or at least felt guilty when they didn’t go. But today that simply isn’t the case. I live in Austin, Texas, and the overwhelming majority of people I meet don’t go to church, nor does the thought of attending one ever cross their mind. In my city, especially in the urban core of Austin, most people you meet are skeptical—at best—when it comes to Christianity. At worst they’re hostile toward the idea of the existence of a God, much less the One who asks us to surrender our whole life to Him.

THE PROBLEM

One of the most challenging and truly interesting aspects of my job is pastoring millennials and helping them navigate this ever-changing cultural landscape. And one of the questions I'm trying to get to the bottom of is how this seismic cultural shift is affecting the current generation. While I'm no expert on millennials or generation Z, I pastor several thousand of them, and I'm the father of three teenagers. One of the greatest changes I see in young people today, compared to previous generations, is their innate skepticism of the basic tenets of Christian faith and, even more so, of the necessity of the church.

When I was growing up in the 80s, the theory of evolution was a subject addressed in just a paragraph or two in my science book. I remember vividly my teacher also putting forth the Genesis creation narrative as a completely acceptable option of belief. Today, every academic environment young people find themselves in takes evolution for granted as the origin of the universe, and the idea that God created everything in a matter of days is laughed off as an antiquated fairy tale.

Consider the current cultural debate on gender issues, same-sex attraction, and the biblical definition

of marriage. Earlier generations of Christians were never questioned or challenged on what were then socially acceptable positions. Today, to be a follower of Christ who believes in the historical view of marriage means being thought of as outdated, unloving, or even bigoted.

What about the Christian view of Jesus being the only way a person can go to heaven? Several decades ago in America, the majority of society were identified as Bible-believing Christians, so to claim that Jesus is the only path to salvation cost you nothing. Yet in today's world of cultural tolerance, to believe or teach that Christ is the *only* path to God will draw instant and sometimes severe consequences.

Another aspect of change that makes a significantly more challenging environment for young people is that they are growing up in the age of social media. I laugh sometimes when I think about my adolescence. I was just a normal kid. I was average at everything—sports, academics, and physical appearance—and because I was just an average Joe, I wasn't very popular. I had friends, but I was definitely not a part of the “in” crowd. But as I look back on that time, what makes me laugh is that I was blissfully ignorant as to how popular or unpopular

THE PROBLEM

I was. In today's society all a teenager or college student has to do is look at the number of followers they have on Instagram and they know exactly where they rank in regards to their social standing. We were the lucky ones.

In 1991, if a group of popular kids from my school were at a party and I wasn't invited, I had no idea. Today, the kid at home watching a movie with his parents knows exactly what the popular kids are doing because of their pics and videos being uploaded to Snapchat. Statistics show that this reality has created an environment where the younger generation is less happy and less content than possibly any generation before them.

Make no mistake, it's harder than it's been in a really long time to be a Christian, especially a young Christian—and many young people are facing challenges and being forced to answer questions about their faith that someone born in the twentieth century may not have ever had to deal with.

Questions like:

Since being a Christian in today's society creates such a cultural disadvantage, if I truly follow Christ, what will it cost me?

In a world where Christian principles are rapidly becoming the exception and not the norm, am I willing to be thought of as weird or different or outdated?

And arguably the question the younger generation is asking more than any other:

If I go all-in with living out my Christian faith, am I missing out on the best that life has to offer?

These and other soul-searching questions are at the forefront of the hearts and minds of the Christians I encounter throughout my ministry, and in my opinion we are in a place of crisis in the church. It's been well documented that the younger generation of Christians is leaving the church in droves. There are a lot of theories for this reality, but I'm utterly convinced it's because more and more people—really people of all ages—are being forced to count the cost of living out their faith, and they are deciding that it's simply not worth it.

Four Reasons People Are Walking Away

1. Growing Up in a Christian Home Is Not Enough for Sustaining Faith

Just last year I learned through an internal study at The University of Texas at Austin that the number of college students identifying as Christian has dropped to an incredibly low percentage. And that decline isn't just in my city; it is pretty much the same across the country. While many factors contribute to this reality, one of the primary reasons leading to this rapid decline is that kids growing up in Christian homes are showing up to college, then walking away from the faith, and never turning back. Why? Because their faith never truly became their own.

In the Gospel of John, there's a moment where Jesus looks at a huge crowd of people who were following Him because He was feeding and healing them. He pauses, looks at the crowd, and exclaims, "Unless you eat My flesh and drink My blood, you can have no part of Me" (see John 6:53). The crowd didn't understand what He meant, and they were offended. So they all turned around and walked away. His disciples were standing

there with their mouths wide open, stunned that the popularity of their leader just dropped by about 99 percent.

Jesus, unfazed, turned to his disciples and asked them a question: “Are you going to leave me too?” Peter answered, “Jesus, where are we going to go? You alone have the words of life.” Why are so many people leaving the faith when they walk out the doors of their Christian homes? I think the answer is simple: they have not personally come to the conclusion that Peter did—that life is found in only one place, and that is Jesus. Just like the crowds, they haven’t personally tasted and experienced the life-giving, world-changing love of Christ, so when mom and dad aren’t there anymore, they walk away.

2. The Allure of the Things of the World

Another reason for the decline of Christianity in our society isn’t just in the number of college freshman choosing not to live as a Christian but the increasing number of people of all generations who simply come to the conclusion that yes, following Christ means I am missing out on the best life has to offer. Of course, this is nothing new.

Jesus Himself told us that many so-called followers of Christ would get caught up in the “cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches” (Matt. 13:22 ESV) and walk away, but in today’s culture I’m seeing a disturbing trend. As each year passes, I see more and more people who once lived as Christ followers make the decision to leave the faith.

I could fill pages of this book telling you story after story of people in my church that started strong in their faith—they attended and served the church, strived for holiness, and worshipped the Lord with abandon, only to completely walk away from God a short time later. The reasons are countless, but there is always a similar theme. Their faith in Christ forced them to make choices they simply weren’t willing to make, and they walked away.

I could tell you numerous stories of young women committed to singleness in Christ until they fell in love with a nonbeliever and left the faith because following Christ meant not getting married. I know dozens of young men who were committed to sexual purity until they grew weary of the fight, fell into temptation, and, instead of repenting, walked away from God altogether.

I have far too many examples of women who were sick and tired of staying in a marriage with a man who didn't meet the expectations they had for him when they walked down the aisle, so they decided to bail. When confronted by their believing friends about God's design for marriage, they make statements like "I know God wants me to be happy" so they chose divorce—then not only walk away from their marriage but also their faith.

I've even seen several businessmen throughout the years who spent their careers amassing power and wealth, and when they encountered the Scriptures about generosity, instead of changing their lives according to God's Word, they simply walked away to live the life they want, unhindered by the "chains" of Christianity.

At the heart of every one of those stories and the many others just like them is an ever-increasing theme in our society—people who once walked with God decided that the cost of obedience was too high, and a better, easier, more fulfilling life could be found outside the family of God.

3. *The Shame of Failure*

This is a big one, and it deeply saddens me. I can't tell you how many folks I've encountered who choose to walk away from their faith because of the shame of past or current sin. Most of these folks grew up in church, so they know what God expects of them. When God saves us from our sin, He calls us to lives of purity. So when sin enters into some folks' lives, especially a pattern of sin that keeps reoccurring, the weight of that guilt and shame causes them to just give up altogether and walk away.

I recently talked to a prominent leader of one of the largest mission-sending organizations in the world. I noticed over the last several years that the overwhelming majority of young people going into the mission field from our church are women. Young men who answer the call to foreign missions are growing increasingly rare. I asked him what is the number one reason young men aren't going into the mission field, and he answered without hesitation, "Pornography."

He told me that the question on their entrance form is no longer, "Have you looked at pornography?" but rather, "How often do you look at pornography?" So

prevalent is this sin in our society that they no longer asked *if* it was occurring but *how often*. To me this is one of the saddest realities in Christianity. I am seeing more young people than I can recall, either because of the allure of sin or the overwhelming shame and guilt experienced because of their sin, simply quit fighting, give up, and walk away.

4. The Lack of True Examples of Committed Disciples

I remember being in seminary, and we were studying the book of 1 Timothy. My professor looked at us and made this statement, “The whole point of the book of 1 Timothy is that you can’t have one foot in the kingdom and one foot in the world.” In other words, the truest, most accurate definition of a Christian is a person who makes the decision that their life is not going to be built on Jesus + something else.

You see this in the life of the apostle Paul when he said, “I have counted all things as a loss compared to the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (see Phil. 3:8). Jesus, too, spoke of this reality when He said, “A man discovered a treasure in a field, and for the joy

over discovering this treasure, sold everything in order to buy that field” (see Matt. 13:44). The point? When people truly encounter the life-giving, soul-changing love of Jesus, they turn their backs on the allures of the world and go all-in.

I’m personally convinced we live in a country where people who have counted all things as a loss for the sake of Christ are becoming a rare species. Our churches are full of folks who love Jesus, but He is just *a part* of their life. They make their families, their jobs, their hobbies, and their relationships the central pieces of their life and then come to church on Sunday and worship Jesus.

Why, then, are these all-in type of Christians becoming so rare? The answer is that people are coming to the conclusion there is a more fulfilling life for them outside of God’s love. So instead of *first* pursuing Christ, they pursue the stuff of the world, and the result is our culture has perilously few examples of people who model the soul-satisfying Christian life. When young Christians see the older generation prioritizing the world over Christ, what possible conclusion can they come to?

The Problem and the Solution

I'm no statistician. I'm just a pastor in the everyday trenches of the church, but in my opinion the allure of the world is the greatest challenge facing Christianity. People are asking these questions sooner and more often than possibly ever before: "If I follow Christ, what will it cost me? If I fully commit to Christ, am I missing out on life's best?" And they're coming to the wrong conclusion and choosing the world over Jesus.

The reason I wrote this book is to help Christians of all ages better answer those questions. What is the correct answer to that second question? The correct answer is a resounding no. There is not a better life waiting for you outside of the love of your Father. The Bible is screaming from the rooftops that the greatest and fullest experience of happiness and blessing is found in only one place, and that is in a both-feet, full-hearted, total-life commitment to the person of Jesus.

I also wrote this book because I've wrestled with all of the same questions you are asking. My story is a story of discovery—most often learning the hard way—that there is absolutely no better life for me outside the love of my

heavenly Father. As a high school student I often watched the lives of my non-Christian friends and wondered deep down inside if by following Jesus, I was living a life that was not as fun or exciting as theirs. Sitting on the tailgate of my truck or on the locker room bench after football practice, I listened intently as my nonbelieving buddies told their stories of how far they had gone physically with a girl the night before, and I was curious. I was curious because I knew the Bible told me I was supposed to save myself for marriage. But man, their stories sounded like fun. I longed to experience what they experienced, and I wasn't sure I wanted to wait until I was twenty-four years old and married to find out.

During my college years I genuinely began to walk with Christ. As a freshman at Texas A&M University, Jesus won my heart, and I knew that I wanted to follow Him the rest of my life. Yet even in those days when I was caught up in my “first love” with Jesus, a small part of me saw the “fun” my nonbelieving buddies had at their parties, and it created in me a real sense of doubt. I secretly wondered if my commitments to purity and holiness were excluding me from some powerful

and mind-blowing reality that Christians simply weren't allowed to experience.

Unfortunately, these questions lingered long after college was over. Secretly I questioned, "Is a lower standard of living because of my financial generosity to the church *really* worth it? Are integrity and holiness *really* the best avenues for the 'life abundant' that Jesus promised us?" I've had these and a thousand other questions just like them, and I have felt guilty. Guilty for those questions that kept popping up in my heart and guiltier after the times I decided to find out for myself the answers to these questions.

As I write this, I am aware that there is a good chance I have less life ahead of me than I do behind me. If I've learned anything, I've learned this: the idea that somehow we are missing out on life's best by staying in the confines of our Father's house and living by His design is a lie—and it's a lie that comes from the pit of hell. Where this lie comes from and why we fall for it are the subjects of the next chapter. For now let's finish this one by helping you discover if this book is truly for you.

Becoming the Sixth

There have been a handful of older men who have made a huge impact on my life and ministry. My pastor in college, Chris Osborne, taught me to love the Word of God and helped me discover its unique power in preaching. Bob Swan—the oldest living youth pastor and my first mentor in ministry—taught me that humility and service are the best ways to pastor people. And then there are John Piper and Louie Giglio. These two men have arguably made the greatest impact on my generation of believers than any others. John Piper is a pastor and theologian who has written some of the seminal books that have influenced many of the pastors who are leading the church today. He taught my generation that God wants our happiness and joy and that joy is best found in Him. Louie Giglio is the founder of the Passion Movement. Through him I learned the value of excellent, God-centered worship and its power to draw our hearts to God.

Most people from my generation encountered the ministry and preaching of John Piper from Louie's Passion Conferences. And I remember the first time I

heard Dr. Piper. I was sitting in the seats at a Passion Conference, hearing this guy preach, and the next thing I know, I'm on the floor, on my knees, weeping from a gospel gut-punch that Piper had just delivered from the pulpit. I later asked a friend who knew both Louie and Dr. Piper how those two titans of the faith met, and it's a really cool story. It's so cool, in fact, that I wondered if it's the stuff of lore or urban legend, but the story has now come from some trusted sources. So before I go any further, let me give you some context.

Dr. Piper is the real deal. He's not Jesus, and he's not perfect. But he takes the Christian life as seriously as any human being I've ever met. He's sold millions of books, but he lives so modestly that you'd never know it. He gives the overwhelming majority of his money away, and his commitment to the words of Scripture is both challenging and convicting.

Louie Giglio had heard about this radical guy named John Piper and wanted to meet him. As the story goes, Louie walked into the cafeteria of the conference where they were both preaching and saw Dr. Piper sitting alone at a table eating his lunch. Louie approached him and

said something to the effect of “Dr. Piper, I’m Louie Giglio, and I just want you to know that I don’t know if there are more than five people in this country who live out the Christian faith the way you do.”

Now, if somebody were to say that to me, I would be floored with honor. I would blush and say something to the effect of “Wow! Thank you. That means so much that you would say that about me.” But that’s not how Dr. Piper responded. When Louie made that statement, Dr. Piper paused, turned his gaze from his lunch, looked Louie in the eyes, and said, “Thank you, why don’t you go and be the sixth?” What an amazing question. And it’s *the* question at the heart of this book. Are you willing to be the sixth?

There’s a song we’ve been singing lately at my church called “More like Jesus.” Interestingly, it’s from Passion Music, the guys from Louie’s Passion City Church. One line in that bridge stands out to me: “This world is dying to know who You are.” It stands out because unfortunately it’s literally true.

I recently read a book titled *Them* by Senator Ben Sasse, a strong Christian from Nebraska. In his book

he talks about the crisis of unhappiness currently facing our country. The book's thesis is that while we're living through a time of radical technological innovation that has made our lives easier than at any other time in our history, that same innovation isn't leading to greater connectedness or happiness. People are arguably more isolated and unhappy than ever before. He writes,

We've become accustomed to instantaneous answers and moment to moment connectedness. The digital revolution is making possible what was unthinkable just fifty years ago. We're the richest, most comfortable, most connected people in human history, yet in the midst of this extraordinary prosperity we are also living through a crisis. Our communities are collapsing, and people are feeling more isolated, adrift and purposeless than ever before. Despite the astonishing medical advances and technological leaps of recent years, for the first time in our history, the average life span in America is

in *decline* for the third year in a row. The culprit: Suicide and alcohol/drug related overdoses. We're killing ourselves, both on purpose and accidentally. These aren't deaths from famine, poverty or war. We're literally dying of despair.¹

“We're literally dying of despair.” That line stopped me in my tracks. It's true. We're all looking for happiness, and the world is convinced that being a follower of a dude who lived two thousand years ago is the last place you can find it. But here's the question: How's that working out? What's the result of the world's pursuit of happiness apart from Jesus? Well, they aren't finding it. As a matter of fact, the world's pursuit of happiness is actually producing the opposite result: people are so full of despair that they're turning to alcohol and drugs at a record pace to numb the pain. On top of that, the number of suicides is skyrocketing. Yes, people are literally dying of despair. Why? Because they are looking for happiness in people, places, and things that simply can't produce it.

You see, two thousand years ago, the King of kings and the Lord of lords made a bold claim that the fullness of life can only be found in following Him, and following Him completely. Friends, we live in a culture of dying people who are desperate for a different way, but there's a problem—How is the world going to know or see that better way if there's not a generation of Christ followers willing to show them? How are we going to turn the tide of death and despair riddling our culture if Christians live no differently than the world?

I'm convinced that what this world needs is not going to be found in better preachers. Through podcasts we have hundreds of anointed preachers whom people have access to twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Yet people are dying of despair.

I don't think what the world needs is better church programs. The church has spent the past 120 years creating countless events, programs, and nonprofits in an effort to reach the world for Christ—and while those are all good things, the world is still dying of despair. I'm also convinced that the world doesn't need more megachurches. Megachurches with right priorities can

be a great force for good in the world. But there are more megachurches today than at any other time in history, and at the same time there are, per capita, fewer people attending church than at any other time in our country's history. This world desperately needs to be shown a new way. More than new songs and preachers and programs, the world needs a new, fresh wave of ordinary people who make the decision to go all-in when it comes to following Christ. This world is desperate for a generation of believers who don't just make Jesus a part of their lives but passionately put Him first and show this world with their everyday lives that, yes, there is a better path—a path of peace and love and happiness.

That Passion Music song hit the nail on the head. This world is dying to know Jesus, and it needs people just like you to show them who He is. But before that will ever happen, you must first come to a place of absolute resolve on this question: *Am I missing out on life's best by following Christ?* My prayer is that the following chapters will help you answer that question once and for all, and as John Piper said, "Be the sixth." If you do, you'll become an agent of radical change our world so desperately needs.

The title of this book is *The Long Walk Home*, and I pray that regardless of where you are in your journey, the words in this book will help you come home and stay there. For many of us, it will be a hard journey, but it's a journey worth taking. I promise you.