

## Articles and Sermons :: Choosing Not to Return by K.P. Yohannan

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After we are saved and begin our relationship with God, we learn that our journey with Him has just started. We discover every day that the ordinary components of life—relationships, emotional security, accomplishments, our profession or position, financial stability or even our cultural or national heritage—can hinder us from fully giving our lives for His purposes and growing closer to Him. One by one, God calls us to walk away from these things.

Abraham, Moses and Joseph—all those in the “cloud of witnesses” who have gone before us—were also called to walk away from their “normal” lives (see Hebrews 11:4–12:1). Let us see how they responded:

All these people . . . admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them (Hebrews 11:13–16, niv).

The “opportunity to return”—what a significant phrase this is!

It is a challenge to follow His call to walk away from these things—but it is an even greater challenge to realize we always have the chance to turn around, to go back to a life that is more comfortable.

Our Enemy, the devil, knows this, and he works hard to persuade us to do so. Let us look at what he uses to try to make us return:

Material things. Demas, one of Paul’s co-workers, had this problem. This man traveled so many miles with Paul and shared hardships with him; he could have become another Timothy, but Paul says of him, “Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world” (2 Timothy 4:10). We will face financial struggles of some sort, have friends who are better off than we are, and feel the need to do something to improve our lives or take better care of our families. The devil will use this. It’s a strong pull, but we must make the decision: Life or death, we will not return.

The fear of the unknown. The children of Israel suffered under terrible slavery in Egypt. Yet after God led them out and did mighty acts on their behalf, they longed to return, remembering the leeks and the garlic. What happened? They were afraid of what would happen to them in an unfamiliar land filled with giants. We, too, face unknowns; what we must remember is that God is bigger than the giants, our problems and our fears.

Losing our focus and vision. Paul’s earthly journey was marked by his passion to know the Lord intimately. He said he counted everything as a loss compared to knowing Christ (see Philippians 3:8). Those in the cloud of witnesses had one thing on their mind—their desire to be in heaven with the Lord. Our aim is the Lord Himself. Hebrews says, “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus” (Hebrews 12:2, niv).

And out of that pursuit of Him, who first loved us, comes a heart to reach the lost. Jesus came to seek and save the lost (see Luke 19:10). And as we grow to know Him more, what is important to Him becomes important to us. Out of Paul’s pursuit of the Lord came an undying passion for the lost. He was constrained by his love for Christ to live a life of incredible suffering, from which many heard the Good News (see 2 Corinthians 5:13–14, kjv).

Paul kept his focus and was able to say near the end of his life, “I have finished the race” (2 Timothy 4:7). You and I will stay faithful to continue on this journey as long as we keep the end in mind. Don’t let the devil use day-to-day discouragements to take you off course.

Spiritual deception. So many Christians lose sight of God’s call when they become ensnared in self-focus and introspection—all in the name of godliness, deeper life and devotion.

Only one theme runs through the entire Bible: Christ, the Savior of the world. The Old Testament promises the coming of the Redeemer. The four Gospels narrate the fulfillment of Old Testament promises through Jesus’ birth, death and re-

surrection, thus completing the work of redemption. The book of Acts is the account of those who knew Jesus as Lord and as they went about preaching the Good News of Christ throughout the whole world. The Epistles instruct believers on living and demonstrating Christ's life to the world. And the book of Revelation is the final chapter in which we, the redeemed, will meet at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb and will be with Him forever and ever.

Knowing Christ and walking intimately with Him will produce a love and passion for the lost world. In more than 40 years of serving the Lord, I have found that the more I get to know the Lord, the more concern I have for the lost. It is no longer about the need, but it is for the Lord's sake. If our so-called "deeper life" doesn't have this result, it is a counterfeit and a distraction.

So as we face the pull of this world and the pressure from the devil to walk away from God's call, let us remember that we are on earth for only a short time. We are strangers and aliens to this world. We only have a visa for this life, but our passport is from another country.

The men and women of Hebrews chose not to return to their earthly country because they recognized that God's work went beyond time and space. Their true country was a heavenly one. May the Lord find us, too, focused on what is real and authentic—beyond circumstances, what we feel, what others say or what the Enemy throws at us. And if He were to write another chapter like Hebrews 11, may He use your name and mine as examples there for others to follow.

This world is not our home—let us journey toward that eternal city.

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