

From Prodigal to Pastor—God's Not Done With You Yet

As a Southern California corporate executive for the fastest-growing fitness company in the world in the mid-1990s, I had the opportunity to experience the devastating effects of life in the fast lane without rules or boundaries. As a result, I often went with the flow of society and focused on everything that the world had to offer.

Throughout my 20s, I continued to run from God, searching for identity and truth in everything but His Word. By age 28, I had climbed the corporate ladder. Money and success became my gods and ultimately controlled my life. I was driven but for the wrong reasons. I felt a sense of purpose, but it often left me empty. I was passionate but for the wrong things.

Strength, to me, was bench-pressing over 400 pounds, drinking a 12-pack of beer and winning most of the fights that I was in. What I failed to realize was that I was weak. I was dying spiritually. I didn't have control of my life—my life had control of me. As a result of my misguided focus, my life took several unnecessary turns for the worse. By then, alcohol, anger and arrogance had taken their toll. My life was crumbling around me.

Depressed and desperate for direction, I began to thumb through the pages of my Bible that was shelved long ago. Two Scriptures seemed to jump from the pages: "For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world, yet loses or forfeits himself?" (Luke 9:25), and "Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts" (Ps. 95:7-8). I suddenly realized just how far I had drifted from the truth. I was at a turning point. I could choose to humble myself and turn to God or continue to reject Him. By God's grace, I put my complete trust in Him—joy, happiness and peace filled my heart. Within

the months that followed, my passion and purpose for life became clearer than ever.

Looking back, I realize that I may have had religion but not a relationship. I lived in a Christian home. I attended a Christian school, went to a Christian church, read the Bible and prayed from time to time, but I was confusing religion and rules with a true relationship with Christ.

I would “say” that I believed in Jesus when asked, but I’m not convinced that I ever truly repented and put my trust in Him. I thought I was a Christian because I was basically a “good person.” This is a major distinction between religion and a relationship. Religion focuses on what “we” do, but a relationship with Christ focuses solely on what “He” did. We are declared right before God when we put our trust in Christ, not in our “good” works. This is often referred to as justification by grace through faith alone.

Is your current belief system producing assurance, purpose and peace, or is it bringing discouragement, disappointment and despair? Why do many leave church services no different than when they arrived?

In many cases, it’s because they have religion and not a true relationship with Jesus. No wonder Jesus said, “These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me” (Matt. 15:8).

A.W. Tozer states it best: “Millions of professed believers talk as if [Christ] were real and act as if He were not. And always our actual position is to be discovered by the way we act, not by the way we talk.”

Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters” (Matt. 6:24). Charles Spurgeon adds, “We cannot follow two things. If Christ be one of them, we cannot follow another.” If He’s not Lord, it may be because we have not yielded. Change occurs when there is a strong conviction of sin and genuine repentance.

This shouldn't be discouraging but very encouraging ... God has provided the way.

We hear a great deal about God's judgment and what can keep us from heaven, and rightly so, because "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (Prov. 1:7). But we also need to reflect on God's goodness, love, mercy and grace. It's difficult to transmit my love for Jesus in this short article. He healed my brokenness and restored my life, and He can do the same for you. There is a deep longing inside all of us that cannot be satisfied until we recognize our need for a Savior and turn to Him.

If you feel that your relationship with Christ is not genuine, or if you've never repented and trusted in Him as your Lord and Savior, now is the time to take that step and fully commit. This is often referred to as being "born again." Romans 10:9 states that "if you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (also see John 3:1-21).

You may be in your fifth recovery home, on your third marriage or living with a past full of regret, but God can rebuild and restore. He can bring peace in the midst of pain and joy in the midst of regret if we call on Him. Regret, pain, depression, fear and anxiety are often the result of wandering from God, much like a ship that has drifted off course. But as soon as the correct course is set, hope, peace and joy return.

Don't let discouragement and failure stand in your way. God's not done with you yet. I could write an entire book on my failures, but instead I try to follow the apostle Paul's advice, and I encourage you to do the same: "Forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead" (Philippians 3:13). Forget your past mistakes, but remember the lessons learned because of them. We overcome the pain of regret by allowing God to rebuild our life.

Your past is forgiven, your present secure and your future certain. Through Christ, you are a brand new person. If you truly grasp hold of this truth, it can motivate and encourage you beyond measure. Though the road ahead may be uncertain at times, the solid ground beneath will never shift. It's all about who you know.

*Shane's testimony is here on YouTube – "How Steroids, Alcohol, and Partying almost took his life, but GOD..."