

FINDING

5 Awakenings
to Your New Life

YOUR

WAY BACK



TO GOD

“Absolutely life-changing! Dave and Jon Ferguson have written a book that could change how our generation thinks about God.”

—Rick Warren, author of *The Purpose Driven Life*

DAVE FERGUSON & JON FERGUSON

Praise for
Finding Your Way Back to God

“The Ferguson brothers are the real deal as movement leaders, and they have led a burgeoning church-planting network on the very principle outlined in this book. As such, it is a proven guide to aligning your community with the redemptive purposes of God.”

—ALAN HIRSCH, author and activist

“Even if you’ve never set foot in a church, you’ve probably heard someone say something like, ‘We’re all searching for God.’ But that search is not a one-way street. In their new book, my friends Dave and Jon believe that more than anything else, God wants us to find him. You need to read this book and rediscover the God who’s been searching for you all along.”

—GREG SURRATT, founding pastor, Seacoast Church

“Dave and Jon Ferguson are passionate about helping people find their way back to God. If you know someone who is far from God or you’ve begun to feel that way yourself, this book is for you. Take their thirty-day challenge and awaken to the journey of a lifetime.”

—LARRY OSBORNE, author and pastor, North Coast Church

“Sometimes we convince ourselves that people are hard to reach. We console our lack of spiritual fruit to a cultural malaise of all things spiritual. Dave and Jon Ferguson have another idea. They have somehow managed the incredible challenge to connect the dots of spiritual awakening in the culture and hearts of everyday people. Like expert craftsmen, they have made what is incredibly hard into real life possibilities and strategies that seem easy! I’ve read *Finding*

Your Way Back to God and have already considered buying a box so I can give it to all my friends and neighbors. You should too.”

—DANIELLE STRICKLAND, speaker, activist, author of *A Beautiful Mess: How God Re-creates Our Lives*

“This book is your invitation to start—or restart—your journey toward an authentic connection with God. The awakenings Dave and Jon Ferguson guide you through are nothing less than life changing. Don’t miss this book!”

—MARK BATTERSON, author of *The Circle Maker*

“Ferguson presents this complex issue in a clear, straightforward manner. I am going to give this book to people I love who want to find their way back to God.”

—PASTOR JOBY MARTIN, The Church of Eleven22

“Dave and Jon Ferguson provide a practical road map for any of us—whether we are distant, disillusioned, or far from God—to return to Him. This timely book is full of stories, personal reflection, and inspiring thoughts, and makes the road to be traveled and the journey to be taken both doable and enjoyable. I highly recommend it!”

—BRAD LOMENICK, author of *The Catalyst Leader* and *H3 Leadership*, past president of Catalyst, founder of BLINC

“All of us have a void in our lives that only God can fill. We need the forgiveness, hope, and purpose that only God can provide. Dave and Jon’s book points us back to the great promise that addresses this eternal pursuit—if we seek God, we will find him. Embrace the journey.”

—TONY MORGAN, founder and Chief Strategic Officer of The Unstuck Group

“One of the most helpful books I’ve seen in a long time, *Finding Your Way Back to God* is a practical and hopeful pathway for everyone seeking a close relationship with God.”

—LOUIE GIGLIO, Passion City Church/Passion Conferences

“My friends Dave and Jon have spent years focused on one compelling message: helping people find their way back to God. This book is full of inspiring stories, practical steps, and spiritual challenges to help anyone struggling with the journey. If you or someone you know is at a spiritual crossroad, I highly recommend *Finding Your Way Back to God*.”

—MARK JOBE, lead pastor of New Life Community Church; author of *Unstuck: Out of Your Cave into Your Call*

“I cannot imagine a better book for anyone who wants to find their way back to God or help others do so. It is full of inspiring stories that connect to the longings we all have. And the simple prayers and thought-provoking questions Dave and Jon suggest will change the way you look at yourself, God, and the purpose of your life.”

—DR. RICK RICHARDSON, professor of Evangelism and Leadership at Wheaton College and the Billy Graham Center; author of *Experiencing Healing Prayer* and *Reimagining Evangelism*

“In their new book, Dave Ferguson and Jon Ferguson have tapped into principles that ring true all across the world. From the US to India, this book can guide people on the Jesus mission no matter what country they may call home. If you are serious about helping people find their way back to God, or if you’re on the journey yourself, this is a must read! It can literally change the course of the rest of your life.”

—DR. AJAI LALL, director of Central India Christian Mission

“There is a constant gap in our lives between where we are and where we want to be. For years, I’ve longed to have a map to help me close that gap. This book is an answer to that longing! It’s a spiritual GPS to help you find where you are and to help you get where you’re going. It can help you find your way back to God over and over and over again. This book isn’t just for people seeking God for the first time—it’s also for anyone who wants to continue to get closer to God year after year. If you took the classic *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, boiled it down into the main principles, and added modern-day stories, you would have this book in your hands. It’s that good!”

—JOSH HOWARD, director of Leadership Training, Central India Christian Mission, and NewThing Network Leader

“Dave and Jon are treasure to Jesus’s Church. In *Finding Your Way Back to God*, you will discover why. Likewise, trusted friends, you will be awakened to the five Awakenings of your new life in Christ. You will be encouraged.”

—DERWIN L. GRAY, lead pastor of Transformation Church; author of *The High Definition Leader*

“I can’t think of a better journey to take than one that reconnects you with God and helps you to discover your purpose in life. Dave and Jon Ferguson lead you step by step in this awakening process, which will change your life.”

—JAMES T. MEEKS, senior pastor of Salem Baptist Church of Chicago; retired Illinois State Senator

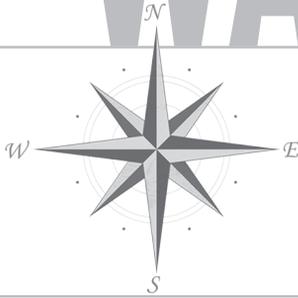
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DAVE FERGUSON &
JON FERGUSON



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*This book is dedicated
to the inspiring people of
COMMUNITY
and their relentless passion for hpftwbG!*

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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 point 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 here's 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 prayer. You ask God to show up. Then see if he responds.

Do you dare?

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

The fact that you are reading this book 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 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 has been 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 I always realized, eventually, 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 is not 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 outline 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 pasts. We can find meaning and redemption, even in the darkest parts of our stories.

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 with the question, Do you believe in God? with boxes where you would check "yes" or "no," most likely you would check the box for "yes." According to a Gallup survey, 92 percent of Americans would check "yes."¹ 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 told by author Dan Millman of a little girl named Sachi and her unforgettable request.

Soon after her brother was born, little Sachi began to ask her parents to leave her alone with the new baby. They worried that, like most 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—and her pleas to be left alone with him became more urgent. They decided to allow it.

Elated, she went into the baby's room and shut the door, but it opened a crack—enough for her curious parents to peek in and listen. They saw little Sachi walk quietly up to her baby brother, put her face close to his, and say quietly, “Baby, tell me what God is like. I’m starting to forget.”²

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, that point in time might have been in your childhood, 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 and your mom was crying; then 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.

Maybe it was during your growing-up years that you forgot about God. 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.

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.

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.

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 the time she was 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 could visit her Facebook page, you would 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 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.

Then one day I went to see her in the hospital; 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 of Alcoholics Anonymous. 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.”³ 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 as if 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”

For Ed Smart it was worse than a nightmare when he 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.” He fought back the tears and then addressed the kidnappers, “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 kidnappers 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. Experts believe it’s possible that, as sometimes happens in an abduction, Stockholm syndrome began to set in. Elizabeth 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 Smart was at a crossroads, literally and figuratively.

A police officer spotted a vaguely familiar teenage girl crossing an intersection in Sandy, Utah. After the policeman asked a few questions, the teenage girl blurted out, "I know you think I'm Elizabeth Smart, but I'm not."⁴ 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 kidnappers.

So lost, but so close to home.

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

Apparently, the painful events of the past 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."⁵ 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.⁶*

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 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 you if you want a power greater than yourself to make it through life.

Finding your way back to God *is* for you if you want 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 people who want a purpose for life that will get them 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 she went 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.”

Kelly broke down sobbing.

She 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’s 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,

Finding Your Way Back to God

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?



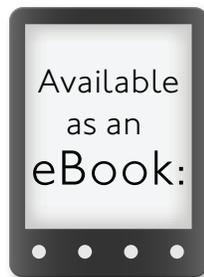
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