

COMING HOME

A Roadmap



John D. Beckett



PREFACE

This little booklet is about life.

One event in particular challenged me to write it. It happened over the state of Texas on the crystal-clear morning of February 1, 2003. Without warning, the jewel of the U.S. space program, the Space Shuttle Columbia, suddenly broke up into a million fragments, just minutes from touchdown in Cape Canaveral, Florida. Seven astronauts, six Americans and one Israeli, were coming home. Then, in an instant, they confronted death.



photo credit: NASA

Accidents happen every day, but for me this disaster was different. Certainly I was gripped by its suddenness, as were people worldwide. Perhaps my earlier involvement in the aerospace industry was a factor. But most important, I understood that I, just as the astronauts, would face the moment when life gives way to death.

I wrote this story for me, yet it's also a story for you. It begins with a question—the most crucial question we will ever ask ourselves: *How should I relate to God?* The next 20 minutes you will spend with “Coming Home” will unlock answers you’ve been seeking much of your life.

John Beckett, Elyria, Ohio, USA

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John D. Beckett is chairman of the Beckett Companies in Elyria, Ohio, and the author of *Loving Monday: Succeeding in Business Without Selling Your Soul and Mastering Monday: A Guide to Integrating Faith and Work*, published by InterVarsity Press. You are welcome to visit www.lovingmonday.com or www.beckettcorp.com or send comments to johnbeckett@beckettcorp.com.

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COMING HOME A ROADMAP

At some point in our lives we will ask:
How should I relate to God?

I believe this is life's greatest question.

Most people have some concept of God. Over the years my perceptions have covered the waterfront. I've viewed him as a higher power, a creator, a stern judge to be feared or a friend to be loved.

I've been a skeptic, a seeker, a cultural Christian and now...well, I'll save that for later.



MY STORY IN A NUTSHELL

My desire to know who God is and how to relate to him began early in life. It was a rocky and unrewarding road at first.

I was born in Ohio in 1938. My dad had recently begun his own business, a manufacturing company that made oil burners used in heating homes. The early years were tough. The company was under-financed, and with the onset of World War II, he had to make radical adjustments just to survive.

Even with the enormous demands of the business, my parents were deeply committed to my two younger sisters and me. They took us to the Episcopal Church in our small town and made family vacations a priority. We never doubted that we were loved.

I decided to follow my father into engineering, and was able to attend the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (M.I.T.) —the nation’s top engineering school. Boston held lots of attractions. Though church didn’t top my list, I regularly headed off to Sunday morning services.

Churchgoing filled a niche, but I sensed I was missing something. Many questions went unanswered, especially the most important question: how should I relate to God? Nor did I find answers in calculus classes or at fraternity parties.

Following my first year of college, I met Wendy during a summer vacation in Canada. She and her family were very special—and different! They were warm, engaging people who enjoyed life *and* spoke easily of a close, personal relationship with God. This stoked my curiosity. But their vibrant faith just didn’t square with my rational, logical approach. I kept searching.

After graduation, I began working in the aerospace industry in the town where I’d grown up. Wendy and I were married a year later, and we began a family. A few years after this, my dad asked me to join him in the family business—a small company with twelve employees. It was a big change, but I sensed it was the right thing to do.



A ONE-TWO PUNCH

Dad and I had been working well together for just over a year, he the mentor, me the understudy. I imagined learning from him for at least another decade—a dream that was shattered by a call I received from our local police on a chilly February morning.

Dad, age 67, had been found slumped over the steering wheel of his car, the victim of an apparent heart attack. Characteristic of my hard-working father, he was on his way to work. At age 26, I was suddenly thrust into the daunting task of leading the family business.

Then, only a few months later, another emergency call, this one in the middle of the night, brought the incredible news that our factory was on fire. Only a valiant effort by our local volunteer fire department kept the plant from being totally destroyed.

These two events had a huge impact on me. I had always been able to rally my own strength and abilities, but now my confidence was deeply shaken.

In spite of the great example set by Wendy and her family, I wasn't sure where to turn. God seemed so far away. Some said getting closer required "a leap of faith," but my mind firmly instructed my feet to stay put.

What held me back? Was it pride? Was it all the things I knew were wrong in my life? Could I ever be worthy of God?

Months passed without answers. Work challenges continued. I found myself discouraged and confused. But quietly, persistently, I sensed God drawing me to himself.

Small things happened to encourage me. Someone would give me a helpful book, or I'd hear a speaker who would answer a key question. Was I getting closer to seeing daylight?

The breakthrough came when I finally realized there was but one way forward and it *did indeed* require a step of faith. I concluded I wasn't going to resolve this dilemma in the way I normally handled problems.

For the first time in my life I let go, yielding to God as fully as I knew how. I said, in effect, "Lord, I don't believe I need to have everything figured out beforehand. I trust you, and I want to be fully yours. I release myself to your care."

What followed was amazing. I experienced a new kind of peace, certain that God had accepted me just as I was—my intellectual hang-ups, my sense of unworthiness and all. I hadn't earned it. I didn't deserve it. But he honored my cautious step of faith and, in response, welcomed me with open arms. He was no longer distant. I felt washed, clean—for the first time, rightly related to him. Though there was much I had yet to understand, I was convinced I had finally come home.

As I looked back I could see a clear pattern. God had been at work for as long as I could remember to bring me to himself, guiding choices I made, friendships I developed. His hand had been on me. He never imposed nor compelled but rather waited patiently for me to see my need and respond.

My world changed. It was soon clear this new relationship would reach beyond my personal and family life into every arena, including my work. To my amazement, I found I could integrate Sundays into

Mondays with great benefit to both! That practice, now spanning over 40 years, has reshaped our company's approach to everyday business—how we relate to customers, care for our employees, handle our finances, and integrate our core values.

Over the years our small business has grown to become the leader in our industry, and we've diversified by developing new companies. We now employ 650 people and generate over \$100 million in sales. Our "experiment"—bringing faith and work together—has enabled us to help other business leaders around the globe who are on a similar journey.

Now here is the key point.

Even though I had no idea how my life would be different, that step of faith—when I released myself to God and to his care—was a turning point with immense ramifications. That's what I want to focus on in this booklet. Join me in an examination of this most important of all journeys.



A BUSINESS ANALOGY

I have found an analogy from business helpful when it comes to understanding this idea of a turning point.

Suppose our sales people are seeking a new customer. They work hard to build a relationship and create a desire for that customer to do business with us. That process can take a long time. But nothing is ultimately accomplished until a particular event occurs—an order or a contract. That transaction is the turning point. From then on, of course, we work closely with the customer to meet his requirements.

Success involves three distinct phases: preparation, the transaction and fulfillment.

I noticed there were similar stages in my spiritual journey. Initially, there was a period of preparation during which God was drawing me to himself. He showed me kindness—his love—as when I met Wendy. He allowed difficulties. He brought me to the end of my own resources. But he had a goal in mind. It was to “complete a contract.” It was to bring me to a place where I could trust him and release myself to his care.

Then, in the most amazing way, a new and deeply committed relationship began. I can say he has done everything possible to fulfill the commitment he made to me when I committed to him.

Let me tell you why I’ve written this booklet.

I want to help you come to that turning point.

I went for years, searching and struggling. For me, the way home was neither clear nor compelling. I understand others who are confused. For the longest time, I thought it was enough to “be good,” to “do kind deeds,” to “be moral” or to serve others. Those are important, but I realized they are not transformational. They’re not the same as coming home spiritually. That only happens when we enter a personal, life-changing relationship with Jesus Christ.

At this critical transition in my own life, I understood very little about the profound change that was taking place. Now, through insights gained from the Bible, from sound teaching and the “classroom of life,” I have a much better grasp of how a person enters and walks out that vital relationship.

As I explain how you become properly related to God, I’m sure I won’t address every question. But I believe I’ve found a reliable roadmap. I know it would have helped me on my journey. I trust it will help you.



IN THE BEGINNING...

Every journey has a starting point.

Ours begins in Genesis, the first book of the Bible. The word Genesis means “beginnings.” There we get a glimpse of what it was like when Adam, the first man, walked closely with God. God deeply loved Adam, and Adam responded warmly to that love. They both took great delight in the openness, trust and companionship they experienced in their relationship with each other.

Work was different from today. It was productive and satisfying—free from stress, anxiety, corruption or ethical lapses.

But, sadly, Paradise was short-lived. What happened next has touched each of our lives.

We learn from the Bible that Adam gave in to temptation and rebelled against God. At the root was Adam’s choice to walk independently, forsaking the extraordinary bond he had with God at the beginning. Mankind inherited a fatal defect, and beginning with Adam and Eve’s own children, human nature has from that point been ruled by violence, greed, jealousy, hatred and rebellion. The Bible calls this sin. Its result: death.

The Old Testament is an account of man's struggle against sin and its consequences. God established temporary methods to cover for this now-fallen condition, but these methods did nothing to change our makeup. It remained the same. Nor has it been improved by the passage of time or increasing education or scientific discovery or economic prosperity. Man's basic or "fallen" nature is unaltered from the time of Adam.

Shortly after sin entered the human race through Adam, God foretold the coming of one who would remedy the fatal defect. He then identified a people group, the Hebrews, as the family from whom this person would come. Over hundreds of years, Hebrew prophets foretold one who would restore the fractured relationship.



THE REMEDY

Our journey now leaps forward in time. We find the account in the New Testament.

A unique prophet named John was born. John the Baptist called on people to change the way they were living (his word was “repent”), and to receive forgiveness for their sins. People responded by the thousands and were baptized as evidence they had turned away from their defiled way of living.

John came to prepare the way for the one who would bring full restoration. He took people as far as he could. But he clearly stated that, at God’s initiative, another would follow who would go to the root of the problem, the sin nature itself.

When people responded to John the Baptist’s challenge to repent, their hearts were prepared to deal with sin, the underlying problem. The true significance of Jesus—God’s perfect representative in human form—is that he, and he alone, had the credentials to deal with the root.

Jesus was like Adam in certain ways. Both men were born free from the defect of sin. Both were tempted and capable of sin. But here the two took radically different directions. While Adam succumbed to temptation, Jesus did not. He led a perfect life, serving as an impeccable example of how man should live.

Beyond the example he set, his death and resurrection form the basis for our personal transformation. Because it is so vital that we understand the uniqueness and scope of what Jesus accomplished, we will now take a fresh look at this watershed moment in history. It is, as one author described it, “The Greatest Story Ever Told!”



WHAT GOD DID IN JESUS

As we have seen—in the beginning God creates man. Almost immediately man falls through rebellion. Then after thousands of years of preparation, at just the right time, God impregnates a young virgin girl named Mary who was engaged to a carpenter named Joseph. A son is born, the Son of God himself.

As a young man, Jesus goes to work in his father's carpentry business. Facing the temptations each of us faces, he grows up without sin. About age 30, Jesus leaves his trade to begin proclaiming the message of his heavenly father's kingdom. Tens of thousands follow him, scores are healed, even the dead are restored to life.

Religious and government leaders see him as a threat. They collaborate and arrange his death on trumped-up charges. Jesus is betrayed, arrested, tried, whipped and nailed to a cross. His sentence of death by crucifixion is one allotted to common criminals. He does not fight back but goes voluntarily, though he could have summoned a huge number of angels to rescue him. In the words of the prophet Isaiah, he is led like a lamb to the slaughter. He dies.

On the cross Jesus says, "It is finished." This is the most dramatic point in all history, for Jesus is referring not only to his life, but to the problem of sin. Jesus has become God's remedy. By his obedience, he has satisfied God's requirement as "the perfect sacrifice for sin." This is why Christianity, stripped of the cross, is not Christianity at all!

Jesus is laid into the tomb of an influential Jewish leader. The tomb is sealed. Three days later, to the astonishment of even his closest followers, Jesus is raised from the dead. His disciples find the grave empty and are shaken to the core.

Next, Jesus appears to them, then to hundreds of others. He comforts and reassures them by affirming these incredible events have been at the very heart of God's purposes.

After 40 days he goes up to heaven where he is reunited with God, his father. The father then bestows on his son the supreme high honor of headship over everything on earth and in heaven. Jesus is made both Lord and Christ—positions he holds today. "Lord" refers to his rulership. "Christ" refers to his capacity to save. He and he alone becomes the savior of mankind.

From this place of authority, Jesus invites us to become his followers—new creations!

Who can say this is not utterly amazing? I'm not sure the human mind can fully take it in. What kind of love is this—a father sacrificing his only son? Yet this occurred, very literally, for one central, majestic reason—so you and I can reestablish the kind of personal relationship with God that he intended from the beginning. Through Jesus, he made it possible to come home.

That process—how we come home spiritually—is what we now want to look at more closely. It is the consummation and purpose of our journey.



BELIEVING

Thus far I have sought to establish two basic ideas. The first is how our lives were corrupted with inherited sin. The second is how Jesus came as the remedy. According to the Bible, these are completely dependable facts.

Now, I want to consider the relationship between these two realities and the possibility that we can build on them to be personally transformed.

The key in appropriating these truths is to *believe* them and *apply* them to ourselves. (The word “believe” conveys the same meaning as “have faith in...”) Let’s look more closely at the concept of believing as it is used in the Bible, for in the New Testament we find the word used nearly 250 times!

First, what believing is not. Believing is not wishful thinking or unfounded hope. It is not about earning a relationship with God. It is not about doing good deeds or just being a “good person.” We do not become believers simply by affiliation with a religious institution or by following tradition or by being born into a Christian family.

Believing requires an object. It is to place our confidence in someone or something. It is an action word. It involves making a conscious decision. We choose to believe—or we choose not to believe. Both involve a decision.

In the biblical meaning, believing engages the depths of our hearts, not just our minds. When we believe, we link the realities mentioned earlier with a commitment to anchor our hope in the person of Jesus.

When we believe, we are responding to God's love towards us. That love is so profound and so comprehensive it provides the overarching context for all he has done *for* us, and all he expects *of* us. Jesus passionately wants us to be complete in our relationship with him.



THE WAY HOME

Here are the key elements by which we become reconciled to the Father. Each is vitally important. Any, if absent, could keep our new relationship from being complete.

Our condition: First, we must understand that we are separated from God. The chasm dividing us is both wide and deep. We inherited a fatal defect at birth. As a result, we have lived our lives independently from him. The Bible emphasizes this stark reality: “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). If we can’t come to grips with the fact that sin separates us from God, we’ll never come home spiritually, for there is no need for a savior.

God’s remedy: Second, we need to have a clear understanding of who Jesus is and what he has done for us in order to confidently place our faith in him. He bridged the chasm separating us from God. In the apostle John’s words: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

Jesus was not simply a good man, a great teacher, an inspired prophet. He came to earth as the Son of God. He was born to a virgin. He led a sinless life. He died. He was buried. He rose again on the third day. He ascended into heaven where he became both Lord and Christ.

Jesus’ death and resurrection on our behalf satisfied God’s requirement. It was complete provision for our sin. This Jesus, and he alone, is qualified to be the remedy for my sin and yours.

Our response—to repent and believe.

Personal repentance is vital in the transformation process. Repentance literally means “a change of mind.” It is to say to the Father, “I want to turn toward you and away from the life I’ve lived independently from you. I am sorry for who I’ve been and what I have done and I want to permanently change. I *receive* your forgiveness for my sins.”

Many at this point experience a remarkable “washing” from a lifetime’s accumulation of all that can degrade a person’s soul and spirit. Whether or not we sense God’s forgiveness, we can be very certain that we’re forgiven. Our confidence is based on God’s promise to us, not how we feel.

We come into a personal relationship with the Lord when we make life’s greatest decision – the turning point referred to earlier. It is to *believe* in our hearts that Jesus is the Son of God, the One who died for our sins, who was buried and was raised from the dead—and to *receive* him as our Savior and Lord. When we *believe* in this way, we become God’s children. This is emphatically promised in John’s gospel: “To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12).

Would you like to receive Jesus Christ as your savior? If you would, you can pray a prayer like this:

“Jesus, I need you. I repent for the life I’ve lived apart from you. Thank you for dying on the cross to take the penalty for my sins. I believe you are God’s Son and I now receive you as my Savior and Lord. I commit my life to follow you.”

Did you pray this prayer?



THE NEW NATURE

Does this transformational step seem disarmingly simple? Unfortunately, the concept of coming to Jesus in this way has been so obscured, so wrapped up in extra ideas and extra words, that many have been robbed of the wonderful simplicity of its truth. How important it is that we not allow this to happen to us.

Personal transformation results in a completely new nature. It replaces the old, which had been corrupted from the beginning. The Apostle Paul describes it this way: “If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” Consider other terms used in the Bible to describe the stark contrast between the old and the new. A person, on becoming a believer, comes *out of* darkness *into* light (Acts 26:18); *out of* bondage *into* freedom (Romans 8:21); *out of* death *into* life (Romans 6:13).

In reality, the new believer has experienced a second birth. The first was a natural birth, which came with a fallen nature. The second is a spiritual birth, free of this basic defect. It is a brand new start. We become a new person!

Jesus says: “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life.” Something of heaven itself—alive, active and imperishable—indwells the new believer.

This, to me, is the greatest miracle we could ever imagine—truly coming home to our father in heaven—for all this means in this life and in eternity.



ENTERING A NEW ORBIT

D. Elton Trueblood, author, educator, philosopher and theologian, adds insight into the magnitude of change experienced by the new believer: “The new character, being finite, can still make mistakes and actually does so; but that is not the primary fact. The primary fact is that all of the person’s powers are employed in a new way and that his movements are dignified by a new direction. He is a wandering planet which becomes stable in its movements by entering a new orbit.”

I now realize this is what happened to me back at the point when I yielded my life to Christ. I had been a wandering planet, but through the generosity, patience and mercy of a loving father, my life was stabilized. I was brought into a new orbit—welcomed into, and made a member of, God’s own family.



A LIFELONG JOURNEY

Once a solid spiritual foundation has been set in place, we are able to grow into the new life God has promised us. The Bible calls this “maturing in Christ.” As I can readily attest, it is a lifelong process.

God’s intent is that as new believers, we become different people. We are “under construction.” We’re being transformed from the inside out. The chief architect of these changes is God himself. As a loving father, he comes alongside to personally direct our growth.

From my experience, and in observing others, some dramatic new patterns emerge. Harmful habits change. Attitudes, thinking and language move to a new level. Motives become more important. We ask, “Why on earth did I do *that!*” God shows us how to behave differently and we move on.

The process continues. Selfishness gives way to service. Relationships with others are restored. Bitterness, envy, jealousy and hatred diminish as love increases. We experience a new dimension of joy—not overnight, but steadily, progressively. Profound adjustments continue. We realize it is true—we really *are* new creations because Christ is living in us!

These inward changes soon become visible. The new believer wants to get together with others who also have a faith in Christ. We’re not alone! Fresh bonds of trust, love and mutual respect are forged.

The Bible, God’s own inspired word to us, becomes a newfound friend, now more relevant and understandable. We encounter the Holy Spirit, the indwelling presence of Jesus himself. We discover he is an incredible guide if we give him access.

But our new relationship also brings needed constraints. It is not “anything goes,” for we see that our God is a holy God. He is to be honored, revered and obeyed. As we embrace the high standards he has set for us, we realize even they are for our benefit. In fact, everything he provides us and does for us is for our good.

Our new life in Christ is not one of unbroken success. There are fresh challenges. Old habits and old associations don’t change easily. Conflicts arise. There are even spiritual forces that oppose us. We doubt. We become discouraged.

Yet it’s different. We’re not on our own. We have entered a new and living bond with Jesus Christ. He leads. We follow. Our faith is set on a new foundation—and that foundation is Christ. How wonderful and reassuring are his words to us: “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”

In time, the transformed life impacts everything we are and do. Recall the relationship Adam experienced with God before the fall. Would not the Lord want to see that kind of fellowship restored, even in our work? As one business owner commented in an interview with the *Harvard Business Review*, “I would love to get the workplace as close to the Garden as possible, knowing we can’t. But I shouldn’t stop trying.” (*HBR*, Jan-Feb 1999.)



ALAN'S STORY

When I think about the transformed life, I think of Alan, a colleague in our industry. While he was doing well professionally, he was struggling personally. Setbacks at home and at work had left him discouraged. As with myself years ago, Alan was searching.

One day when Alan was making a business call, a customer told him about the radical change that occurred when he yielded his life to Jesus. Alan listened respectfully, but didn't see how this applied to him.

Then, during a trade show, Alan and I arranged to meet over breakfast. As he poured out his difficulties, I could see that he longed for personal peace. I shared my own story. Then, right at the breakfast table, Alan took that same bold step we've been talking about. He acknowledged his fallen condition, asked for and received forgiveness for his sins and entrusted his life to Jesus Christ. He then broke into a broad grin and, with tears streaming down his face, said, "John, I don't think I'll ever be the same after this morning."

Alan and I have stayed in touch, enabling me to see his steady progress. Recently, we celebrated another anniversary of his coming to Christ—again over breakfast at our annual industry trade show. I continue to see in Alan a man whose life is peaceful, rewarding and purposeful. Though he still has to work through challenges, he knows he's a new person, experiencing a joy and freedom he never knew before.



YOUR STORY

It is no accident that you have received this little booklet. Maybe you've been searching for answers for your own life, including the answer to life's greatest question—how should I relate to God? Or maybe you've begun your faith journey but need to solidify basic understandings.

Perhaps you've been a long way from home as I was years ago—uncertain about life's purpose, its end, about eternity. Wherever you are, once a solid foundation is in place, the adventure of growing and living in Christ never ends.

The next step is yours. I urge you to rise to the challenge. If these thoughts and words are timely, please reflect on them and, with God's help, act on them. With all my heart, I believe they are your reliable roadmap—the way for you to come home.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John D. Beckett was born and grew up in Elyria, Ohio. He graduated from M.I.T. in 1960, after which he worked as an engineer in the aerospace industry.

In 1963 he joined his father's small manufacturing business, and became president in 1965 upon the death of his father. The company has grown to become a worldwide leader in producing engineered components for residential and commercial heating. The company, with its affiliates, employs some 650 people.

Mr. Beckett is a founding board member of The King's College in New York City, and serves on the board of Cru (Campus Crusade for Christ, International).

His first book, *Loving Monday: Succeeding in Business Without Selling Your Soul*, was published in 1998, and is now available in nineteen languages. His second book, *Mastering Monday: A Practical Guide to Integrating Faith and Work*, was released in 2006.

Mr. Beckett received honorary Doctor of Laws degrees from Spring Arbor University in 2002 and The King's College in 2008. He has also been named "Christian Businessman of the Year" by the Christian Broadcasting network (1999) and manufacturing "Entrepreneur of the Year" by Ernst & Young (2003.)

He resides in Elyria, Ohio with his wife, Wendy, to whom he has been married since 1961. They have six children and seventeen grandchildren.

