

Column

Back in July, a certain segment of the Christian world was stung when best-selling author and former mega-church pastor Josh Harris announced he no longer considered himself a believer. The announcement came on the heels of another in which he said he and his wife were getting a divorce.

Harris' first book, *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*, was written when he was 21. Published, in 1997, it was a runaway success, selling 714,000 copies. In it, he argued that 'dating', as practiced on the American scene, often led to, among other things, intimacy without long term commitment and the bypassing of the friendship stage in a relationship. Instead, he argued for a "courtship" model.

What are we to make of Harris' departure from the Christian faith? In answering this question, I think we need to approach it with a certain caution and humility inasmuch as we don't have a window into this young man's soul – other than his words. Only God sees the heart . . . "unto Him all hearts are open, all desires known." With that said, however, I believe there are a few general observations we can make, perhaps leaving out direct references to Harris' situation.

The first is: a failure in faith is often preceded by a failure in morals. Put another way, behaviour and worship are closely linked. A woman, for example, begins to run around on her husband; then, almost immediately her interest in spiritual things wane. She stops going to church, stops saying her prayers and begins hanging around with a different crowd.

If this sin is persisted in, she may eventually say she no longer believes in God. Why? Because she has received credible information which makes God's existence untenable? No, because sin has created a barrier wall between her and her God. For friendship and communication to be restored, that wall must come down.

What is needed – using imagery found in Jesus' parable of the Prodigal Son -- is a return from the far country of sin. Then and only then, will she encounter the outstretched arms of the Father and a restoration of a marred relationship.

Another thought about apostasy (the technical term for renouncing the faith) concerns the American religious scene. Someone has said it is a mile wide and an inch deep. As long as the music throbs and the lights are bright, all is fine, but what happens when dark moments of the soul come? By dark moments, I am thinking of times of doubt, temptation and sorrow. Are there

resources for dealing with these moments in mega and other entertainment-driven churches? I wonder.

My last thought concerns ‘continuance’. When Jesus was in the midst of a hostile crowd in Jerusalem and some believed in Him, He told those with embryonic faith: “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed (John 8:31).

A burst of warm feelings when Jesus is encountered is wonderful, but more is needed if one is to be His disciple indeed. Continuing in prayer, in the breaking of bread (Holy Communion), in meditation on the Scripture, in doing Jesus’ works – these – are the only sure signs of genuine saving faith. Let us strive ‘to make our election sure’ (1 Peter 1:10).

O Lord God, when thou givest to thy servants to endeavour any great matter, grant us also to know that it is not the beginning, but the continuing of the same unto the end, until it be thoroughly finished, which yieldeth the true glory; through him who for the finishing of thy work laid down his life, our Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Amen.

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