

# **Return: How To Draw Your Child Back To The Church** by **Brandon Vogt**

“The Lord says... Stop your crying and wipe away your tears. All that you have done for your children will not go unrewarded... There is hope for your future; your children will come back home. I, the Lord, have spoken.” (Jer. 31:16-17 NIV)

## **Part I – Understanding the Problem**

### **Chapter 1 – Why Are They Leaving?**

#### ***The most Common reasons why people leave the Church***

The Diocese of Springfield, Illinois random survey of lapsed and former Catholics asking “Why did you leave?” Here are most common reasons given: Spiritual needs not met; lost interest; too many money requests; no longer believe; dissatisfied with atmosphere; too ritualistic; too formal; music not enjoyable.

From the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life larger study, most common reasons people gave for leaving the Catholic Church: just gradually drifted away from the religion; stopped believing in the religion’s teachings; spiritual needs not met; unhappy with teachings about the Bible; dissatisfied with atmosphere at worship services; dissatisfied with clergy; found a religion they liked more.

#### ***The power of the “Pelvic Issue”***

Issues revolving around homosexuality, abortion, contraception, divorce, and cohabitation. These may have played a large role in your child leaving the Church and may be great barriers to him returning.

#### ***A warped view of God = moral therapeutic deism***

This term can be summed in five statements:

1. A God exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth. This is the *deism* part; sees God as the watchmaker – got it all going then steps back to watch it work. Catholicism is a form of *theism*. If your child believes more in *deism* more than *theism*, it’s no surprise he has no personal connection to God or the church.
2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the bible and by most world religions. This is the *moralistic* part. It assumes the goal of religion is simply to be nice. If you child has this mindset, he will see your efforts to get back to Church more as an effort to change his behavior then establishing a personal relationship with God.
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself. This is the *therapeutic* part. The goal of life is not to feel good about oneself, but to find joy in knowing and loving God.
4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one’s life except when God is needed to resolve a problem. This is where the above three parts start to fit together. If we combine the deistic view of God with his therapeutic intention, we assume God exists only to solve our problems. Any relationship based only on begging and giving is not a mutual relationship.
5. Good people go to heaven when they die. This part assumes that we earn our way to heaven simply by being good people.

#### ***The ultimate reason why anyone leaves the Church***

The ultimate reason: because they’re not rooted in a living encounter with Jesus in the Church. We need to create a culture of encounter that unites young people to Jesus through his Church, not in spirit of it.

### **Chapter 2 – Where Are They Going?**

#### ***Where do former Catholics end up?***

1. Unaffiliated (49%). This term does not mean “atheist.” Seven in ten unaffiliated still believe in God.
2. Evangelical (25%). These display a deep spiritual hunger, strong appreciation for the Bible, dynamic prayer life, active in ministries and small groups – all good traits for coming back.
3. Mainline Protestant (13%). These are typically stepping stone before becoming unaffiliated.
4. Other (13%). Mormons or Jehovah’s Witnesses

#### ***Six main types of fallen-away Catholics***

1. Cultural Catholics – these identify as Catholic, but for all intents and purposes, they’ve drifted away. Their bodies show up for Mass (C&E Catholics), but their minds are far away. No real personal relationship with Jesus and his Church. May have some disagreements but are not hostile to the faith.

2. The Shruggers – Concerning the Big Questions of Life, they say: “Whatever.” They pretend to be open-minded but are not. They are lethargic. Indecisive on religious matters → “I don’t care.” → “I reject all.”
3. The Spiritual, But Not Religious – They reject formal religion, liturgy, doctrines, but still believe in God or a higher power, still pray and seek experience with God.
4. Moral Movers – They think the church is wrong in it’s moral teachings (too rigid). But most of these have a distorted idea about what the Church teaches and why.
5. Religious Switchers – These switch for not being spiritually fed, or for their spouse’s denomination; these are generally people of faith and left for a specific reason
6. Skeptics – atheists and agnostics

### Chapter 3 – The Five Big Myths About Fallen-Away Catholics

Myth #1: “They’ll come back eventually one they get married or have kids.”

Truth: As young adults increasingly delay marriage and childbearing, the chances decrease that they’ll return because of those events.

Myth #2: “I took them to Mass and sent them to Catholic School – that should have been enough, right?”

Truth: Simply moving through Catholic institutions doesn’t ensure a young person encounters the Lord or develops a strong, personal faith.

Myth #3: “They left because of me. It’s all my fault!”

Truth: You’re almost certainly not to blame, at least not completely, for him leaving the faith.

Myth #4: “They won’t listen to me; it’s just impossible to have a discussion about faith.”

Truth: Your first goal should be to listen to them, not talk at them. Through listening, conversations will start to bear fruit.

Myth #5: “It’s hopeless – no matter what happens, my child is never coming back to the Church.”

Truth: It’s never hopeless; God will never give up on your child, and neither should you.

## Part II – The Game Plan

### Chapter 4 – The Basics

The single most important factor determining the religious and spiritual lives of young people is the faith of their parents.

#### *Five mistakes that will almost certainly keep your child away*

1. Force him to Mass – Mass is the final destination, not the starting point. You have to lay down other building blocks first in order for the Mass to benefit your child’s soul.
2. Criticize his lifestyle – Do not lead with moral disapproval. Your first approach should be marked by gentleness and patience, not criticism.
3. Nag him – This never works and usually has the opposite effect.
4. Dismiss his objections – The more respect you grant your child’s concerns, the more open he’ll be to your responses. His objections may sound silly to you but they are important to him.
5. Assume you can change him – We cannot control when, how, or whether our seeds will produce fruit. Don’t give up, just let God control the results of your efforts.

#### *The five thresholds your child need to cross* (From Sherry Waddell, Forming Intentional Disciples, pp.129-130)

1. Initial Trust – A person is able to *trust* or has a positive association with Jesus Christ, the Church, a Christian believer, or something identifiably Christian. Trust is not the same as active personal faith. Without some kind of bridge of trust in place, people will not move closer to God.
2. Spiritual Curiosity – A person finds himself *intrigued* by or desiring to know more about Jesus, his life, and his teachings or some part of the Christian faith. This curiosity can range from mere awareness of a new possibility to something quite intense. Nevertheless, a person at the threshold of curiosity is not yet open to personal change. Curiosity is still essentially passive, but it is more than mere trust.
3. Spiritual Openness – A person acknowledges to himself and to God that he is open to the *possibility* of personal and spiritual change. This is one of the most difficult transitions for a postmodern nonbeliever. Openness is not commitment to change. People who are open are simply admitting they are *open to the possibility* of change.

4. Spiritual Seeking – The person moves from being essentially passive to actively seeking to know God who is calling him. It is, if your will, “dating with a purpose” but not marriage. Seekers are asking. “Are you the one to whom I will give myself?” At this stage, the seeker is engaged in an urgent spiritual quest, seeking to know whether he can commit to Christ and his Church.
5. Intentional Discipleship – This is the decision to “drop one’s nets,” to make a conscience commitment to follow Jesus in the midst of his Church as an obedient disciple and to reorder one’s life accordingly.

***Help him find the treasure***

The best thing you can do for rebellious children is to show him Christ. Our goal is to give your child all the gifts that Jesus offers through his Church and to save him from slavery of sin and death. When that happens, all the other positive changes you desire will follow like dominoes. You first need to help your child find the treasure – Jesus, the pearl of great price – and only then will he buy the field, only then will he buy into the way of life offered by the Church.

**Chapter 5 – Pray, Fast, and Sacrifice**

Jesus assumes that prayer and fasting are normal parts of a Christian’s life. For example, in his famous Sermon on the Mount, he says “*When* you pray...” and “*When* you fast...” He doesn’t say “If you pray...” and “If you fast...” Prayer, fasting and sacrifice are especially needed to draw your child back to the Church.

***How one mother’s prayer birthed a Saint***

(Story of illustration: the lives of Sts. Monica and Augustine) Don’t stop praying for your child. When Monica complained to St. Ambros that her son would not listen to her, he suggested that she speak less to Augustine about God and more to God about Augustine. Her persistence paid off!

We should also pray for an “Ambrose” to step into our child’s life to be of influence.

And pray to St. Monica for her intercession and motivation – (see prayer to her on page 59.)

***The most important way to spend your time***

Prayer. Do not underestimate the power of prayer – your prayer; intercessory prayer of others.

***What if I’m too busy to pray?***

If we skip out on prayer, our entire spiritual life is compromised, and all areas of life tumble with it. You must make the time for prayer. Determine the best 5 to 10 minutes slot that you can commit to every day. Make it a routine and commit to it. Prayer usually works behind the scenes, through imperceptible movements and invisible effects.

***Four powerful ways to pray for your child***

1. Traditional Prayers: The Our Father, Hail Mary, daily Rosary for your child’s conversion.
2. Spontaneous prayer: Talk to your “Abba” with confidence; lay out your concerns, feelings, angst; beg him to draw your child back to his Church.
3. Attend Masses for your child: This is the most powerful prayer because we unity our prayer to that of Christ’s
4. Formal Prayers: The Rosary, The Chaplet of Divine Mercy, Novenas, Adoration/Holy Hour

***It takes a village to pray for a child***

(See pp 66-67 to explain “Teardrops Prayer Service” and “Prayer Exchange Project” = Let’s do this!)

***How and why to fast for your child***

1. Fast for the right purpose: which is to orient our minds and souls more completely toward God.
2. Fast humbly: we should look and act normally, while inwardly seeking to face of God.
3. Fast from non-food items: From sarcasm, criticism, complaining, gossiping and the like.
4. Fast from things you enjoy: Fasting is helpful only if you actually enjoy whatever you are giving up.
5. Fast in small doses: Do small things with great love.
6. Fast especially for your child: Here you make a conscious choice to ask the Lord that your child will benefit from your sacrifice; you do the work – your child gets the merit.

***Offer up your sufferings***

Each time you face a difficulty at home or work, pray: “Lord, I offer this to you for the sake of my child.” In God’s spiritual economy, he always meets sacrifice with grace. When we make sacrifices for the sake of our children, new grace flows into our lives, grace that we can apply to our children through prayer.

Remember: St. Faustina said: Our prayer goes where we cannot go.

## ***Rely on the Holy Spirit***

Alone, we can do nothing; we must learn to cooperate with the Holy Spirit for ourselves and our children. The Holy Spirit will provide the right words at the right time. Working in your child, He will slowly prepare the way for his conversion, removing barriers and planting seeds of grace which He will water and grow.

## **Chapter 6 – Equip Yourself**

As a rule: you cannot give what you do not have. You may be excited about sharing your faith, but enthusiasm and goodwill won't get you far. You need to *know* your faith. The more you know and the better you know, the more effective you will be. St. Peter said: *Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope* (1Pt3:15). This does not mean that you have to be a theologian first. Sometimes a humble “I don't know” can be effective in getting the conversation started. But you should know where to go to find the answers.

### ***The two go-to sources***

1. The Bible: Catholicism has always been a Bible-based faith. It was written, compiled, and promulgated by Catholics. Prepare yourselves by committing to reading the Bible every day for at least 10 minutes. There are lots of resources to choose from: The Word Among Us, Magnificat, Ignatius Catholic Study Bible, Navarre Bible and Commentary, Fr. Schmit's Bible in a Year YouTube series, etc.
2. The Catechism of the Catholic Church: Promulgated by Pope St. John Paul II and compiled by Pope Benedict XVI. Prepare yourself by committing to 5 to 10 minutes a day reading it. Fr. Schmit also has a YouTube series on the Catechism in a Year as well.

### ***Read Good Catholic books***

1. Catholicism: A Journey to the Heart of the Faith (Image Books, 2011) by Bishop Robert Barron.
2. Fundamentals of the Faith: Essays in Christian Apologetics (Ignatius Press, 1988) by Peter Kreeft.
3. Essential Catholic Survival Guide (Catholic Answers, 2005) by Catholic Answers Staff.
4. How to Defend the faith Without Raising Your Voice: Civil Responses to Catholic Hot Button Issues, Revised and Updated (Our Sunday Visitor, 2015) by Austin Ivereigh and Kathryn Jean Lopez.

### ***Know where to find the answers you need***

Visit [Catholic.com](http://Catholic.com) and in the search box at the top of the page, enter the topic of question. You'll immediately find several helpful resources. This site is run by Catholic Answers apostolate. Some other sites: [StrangeNotions.com](http://StrangeNotions.com) by Vogt; [WordOnFire.org](http://WordOnFire.org) by Bishop Barron; [Vatican.va](http://Vatican.va) for Encyclicals and [usccb.org](http://usccb.org) for United States Bishops; you can always ask your own priest, etc.

### ***Be able to answer the most important question***

“Why are you Catholic?” Your child drifted away from the Church because he has not found a satisfactory answer to that question. (See GK Chesterton's answer to that question on pg. 87.) Resource: Why Be Catholic? Ten Answers to a Very Important Questions (Image, 2014) by Patrick Madrid.

### ***Know your story***

Your story, your account of how God has worked in your life, is an extremely potent tool to bring your child back, because in your child's mind, *your story* is especially meaningful. Reflect often on your own story and be able to give a 2 to 3 minute account of your conversion/reversion story – of how you met Jesus and came to love and follow him. Resource: [WhyImCatholic.com](http://WhyImCatholic.com) for examples to use as guidance while compiling your own story.

### ***Find a partner***

Find a friend, spouse, priest, spiritual director, not to help you your efforts to draw your child back, but to serve as an outlet for *you*. He'll ensure you are not alone. He can amplify your efforts. He can offer you an objective view of your situation.

## **Chapter 7 – Plant The Seeds**

Even before you move into substantial conversations about God, you must first plant seeds in your child's life, seeds that will eventually grow into the fruit you hope to see.

### ***Share unconditional love***

The first seed he needs, way before he's open to anything you say about God, is unconditional love. He needs to know that you love him and forgive him for any wrongdoing without qualification. (Recall: “Initial

Trust” from Ch. 4). Your child needs to trust that you that you love and care for him, and only want what is best. Here are some means to do that:

1. **Make Your Love Unmistakable**: Back your words with action – *show* him you love him unconditionally. Decide now that you are going to love him intentionally and unconditionally. Send a note: “I know we disagree about some things like religion, but I want you to know that no matter what you believe or choose, I will always love you. That will never change, no matter what you do or don’t do.” Expressing this no-strings-attached love does not validate his misguided choices or lower the moral bar. “Love is to will the good of the other – to want what’s best for your child” – St. Thomas Aquinas.
2. **Ask for and Express Forgiveness**: It is likely your child has disappointed you several times over the years. Forgive him anyway. Harboring a grudge will not facilitate his return. It’s not necessary to *verbally* forgive him. That could backfire if he doesn’t think he did anything wrong. But you must forgive him from *your* heart. Do not hesitate to ask for his forgiveness for what *you* may have done wrong – and be specific about it. Don’t require or expect him to accept your forgiveness immediately or reciprocate with his own apology.
3. **Take an Interest in His Hobbies**: Like most parents, you’re probably not thrilled with his music, hobbies, activities. Stive to find value in his interests and, if you can, encourage them. When you child was young you did show active interest to support him – you must do the same now that he is older. Find an activity you can both enjoy: tennis, fishing, basketball, theater, concert. Find something, anything, you can do with him to strengthen the bond of love.
4. **Cultivate a House of Hospitality**: “When the Father’s house is filled with the Father’s love, the prodigals will come home.” Because your deepest concern is your son’s heart, not his actions, don’t create too many requirements for coming home. If he any inkling to be with you, don’t make it hard for him.

### ***Plant “Seed Gifts” in His Life***

Slip good Catholic recourses into his life – CDs, DVDs, pamphlets, booklets, Matthew Kelly’s *Rediscover Catholicism*, let him catch you watching Bishop Barron’s *Catholicism*, Check out “The 12 best seed gifts for your child” at [ReturnResources.com](http://ReturnResources.com)).

### ***Share helpful articles and videos***

Online articles and discussion forums can help young people find faith. Your child likely feels more at home in the world of social media than anywhere else. Use that to your advantage. Some resources: [CatholicMemes.com](http://CatholicMemes.com), [WordOnFire.org](http://WordOnFire.org), [Catholic.com](http://Catholic.com), Bishop Barron’s YouTube videos. (I like daily emails from: The Catholic Thing, Crisis Magazine, The Loop from CatholicVote.)

## **Chapter 8 – Start The Conversation**

When Jesus said: *no prophet is accepted in his own native place*, He acknowledged that as God even He found it difficult to get through to those nearest him. Nevertheless, it is still possible *if* you know what your’re doing. Our approach is not in confrontation, but in friendly curiosity which is a kind of relaxed diplomacy. Tactics are not manipulative tricks or sly ruses, not designed to embarrass your child or coerce him to your point of view. Instead, they will help you gracefully discover his main objections, complaints, and accusations against Catholicism, and then effectively work through them.

### ***Create opportunities to chat***

Don’t begin with religious topics. Start by asking normal questions about his daily life. Show that you care for him – all of him – and not just his religious and moral dimensions. Your purpose in this beginning stage is just to generate dialogue about *anything*.

At some point take the risk and ask outright: “Can I ask you something? I was wondering if you’d be up for talking about spiritual things sometime. I know that you have a mixed relationship with the Church and I’d like to hear what you have to say about all that.” Phrasing the question like this shows you are not forcing your agenda on him and it shows that you respect his sensitivities. He may not be ready to talk at that moment, but it opens the door for a conversation down the road.

### ***Listen first, then listen some more***

Listening to your child has three advantages:

1. You immediately come across as agreeable. This can disarm him and make it easier for you to persuade him later on.
2. You get to hear your child’s genuine feelings and doubts, which may be far different than you imagined.

3. You give your child a chance to vocalize and clarify the reasons why he has drifted away from the Church. (See page 111-112 for a list of helpful question during this listening phase.)

As you listen, try not to think about what *you are* going to say next. Instead, think about what your child is saying, try to read between the line for what he is *not* saying. Once he is finished, try to repeat back his thoughts to him in your own words. (Eg, “If I understand you right, I heard you say...”) Show him that you get it, that you listened, that you have a good grasp of his thoughts and beliefs.

### ***The five most power questions you can ask***

By asking questions, you do not come off as “preachy”. Rather, it help your child see that his beliefs are not as firmly supported as he might think, causing him to reassess why he’s drifted.

The “Columbo tactic” = you go on the offensive in an inoffensive way by carefully selecting questions to productively advance the conversation. Never make a statement, at least at first, when a good question will do. Jesus liked to use this tactic: He started most conversations with a question, and when He was asked a questions He responded with a question of His own. Trent Horn, Catholic Answers apologist, suggests these 5 questions:

1. “What do you believe about \_\_\_\_\_?” Maybe he has never asked himself what he believe, so hearing you pose the question will allow him to identify and refine what exactly he does.
2. “Why do you think that’s true?” For a belief to be truly justified, we should have good reasons or evidence to support it. He may find that he has no reason to support his belief. If his beliefs about God and the Church are warped and unsupported, and you can help him see that, you are in a better place to show him the truth.
3. “How did you come to believe that?” Is his source reliable?
4. “What do you mean by \_\_\_\_\_?” Defining terms is a critical step in any conversation. Before discussing things like faith, religion, church, goodness, and belief, you should ask how he understand each term.
5. “What would say to someone who says \_\_\_\_\_?” Pull yourself out of the dialogue and make your point through a hypothetical third person. This makes him respond to a hypothetical third person instead of you, diffusing the chance that he will see the conversation as a two-way sparring match.

### ***Identify the big roadblocks***

Two more questions:

1. “What is the biggest thing keeping you away from the Church?” With this question you are inviting your child to hone in on his biggest, most troubling roadblock to returning.
2. “What is the one thing that bugs you the most about the Catholic Church?” This question will help draw out major emotional roadblocks he has to Catholicism. It may not be an intellectual objection, but if it bugs him, it is significant and must engage it.

### ***Absorb the criticism***

At this phase, you must be ready to absorb any frustrations your child has with the Church. Once you give him permission to speak honestly, there is a good chance he will respond with anger, sarcasm, or dismissiveness to all that you hold dear. Just assume that will happen. Let him vent, do not interrupt, no matter his criticism. If he has been hurt, let him describe the pain. If he thinks faith and/or morals are irrelevant, let him explain why. Don’t be defensive (even in your body language) – just hear him out.

Absorbing his criticism will give you a better sense of his main points of resistance of the Church. The venting will force him to clarify his own criticisms. By listening you will convey that you genuinely care about him and his concerns. In this phase, patience is the name of the game.

## **Chapter 9 – Move The Dialogue Forward**

If anyone in the discussion gets angry, you lose. When you get angry, you come across as a bully whose ideas are not as good as you thought they were. If your child gets angry, he’ll get defensive and not be in a position to think about whether your ideas are good one. To keep that from happening here are some practical tips:

1. Stay humble: - Consider that you too have made bad moral decisions in your life and you too have turned your back on God. Don’t talk down or insult him. Don’t speak from a privileged position
2. Use open body language: - Be aware of your facial expressions. Lean forward to express interest and use open-handed gestures to communicate warmth and openness.
3. Express empathy: - Respond in ways that show you are listening and you feel something of what he is feeling.
4. Restate your child’s thoughts: - Make sure you fully understand his thoughts. Restate them in your own words.
5. Share your feelings: - Prefacing your thought with “I feel...” a feeling is not a command, just an observation.

6. Don't be afraid to press "pause": - this is a long process. It takes many discussions before you notice any fruit. So, press pause when needed to help him feel less pressured and more likely, in the long run, to change his mind about Catholicism.

### ***Clear up misconceptions***

It is not uncommon to find significant misunderstandings about God, faith, Jesus, and the Catholic Church. Many who have drifted did so because of some strange distorted vision of the Church. (See some examples on pg. 123-124 for warped depictions of what the Catholic Church actually teaches.) If your child stumps you with an objection, say: "Hmmm. That's interesting. I hadn't heard that before. Let me do some research on that." Once you get the facts, gently share them with your child.

### ***Stay calm and find positive intention***

Most feel threatened when defending the faith and tend to blow up or raise voices. That never works and usually has the opposite effect. Look for the positive intention or moral virtue behind any criticism leveled against God or the Church. Focus on the value to which the criticism appeals. When you identify a shared value, you can diffuse the tension and begin to make headway. (See pg. 126 for examples.)

### ***Look for the seeds of the Word***

Before sowing the Word, we should look for seeds of the word already present among the people we hope to evangelize. What music does he like? What shows does he watch? What hobbies or passions interest him? The consider ways that you can mimic St. Paul in using these things as bridges to the true God.

### ***Introduce "shoe-pebble" questions***

What a pebble does to a shoe, these kinds of questions can do for your child's mind. They'll stick in his head and bug him until he resolves the questions. These questions are meant to provoke him to reexamine an assumption he has about God or the Church, and perhaps see it from a different angle. These are not to be "got-you" questions.

### ***Lean on the pope*** (John Paul II and Benedict XVI)

[I'm not a fan of Francis and would not look to any of his teachings to help win them back.]

### ***Speak with positivity and joy***

Some practical ways to make our joy for Jesus and the Church attractive:

1. Smile often: - Peace begins with a smile. Maintain a subtle smile while talking about your faith.
2. Emphasize the Church's "Yes!": - When the Church says "No" to something, she is saying "Yes" to something else. So, when she says no to premarital sex, she is saying yes to the privileged role of sex within marriage.
3. Share joyful stories: - Sincerely talk about the joy and peace your faith has brought you.
4. Let your passion shine: - Your child will be attracted to your message if it burns with conviction and passion. Jesus said: I have come that you might have life and have it to the full. St. Irenaeus said: The glory of God is man fully alive. So, be passionate about your faith, hope and love for Christ and his Church.

## **Chapter 10 – Invite and Connect**

### ***Invite***

One of the strongest ways to ensure someone becomes an intentional Christian disciple is to draw him into a community of other disciples. Once your child has expressed openness and curiosity toward returning to the Church, and after you've had some productive dialogue about the topic, you next want to invite him to communal events that will satisfy his new yearnings. Some examples:

1. Weekend Retreats: - Your child will encounter people who have been changed by Jesus. Participants talk about the faith and they demonstrate its effects in their lives. Your child will meet people who will help usher him into a deep relationship with God, and can help sustain and grow that relationship. The "seeds" you planted long ago will start bearing fruit.
2. Parish Study Programs: - Eg. Alpha for Catholics, Discovering Christ, Theology on Tap, etc. Joining a community of other serious-minded disciples will help him along the journey.
3. Parish Events: - Parish festival as a worker and/or patron.
4. Parish Community: - dinners, fundraisers, socials, join the choir or committees, become a lector for Mass, etc.

### ***Connect***

Sometimes connecting them to the right person or group can help. Some considerations:

1. Campus Ministry: - Newman Centers; student missionaries such as Fellowship Of Catholic University Students (FOCUS). Ask if they would reach out to your child. Using the “seed gift” idea, slip a flier for the campus ministry in his room or mail and hope he gets the hint.
2. Spiritual Director: - A good spiritual director will be able to answer his question, address his doubts, and help him discern how God is moving and speaking in his life.
3. Groups for Returning Catholics: - Eg. Catholics Come Home; Catholics Returning Home; Landings.

***Don't move too fast***

Pushing him too fast can have bad consequences and undo all of the progress you've made up to this point.

**Chapter 11 – Close The Loop**

***Gently pursue a commitment***

Even if your child comes 95% of the way back, he might slide back. You need to close the loop and get him all the way to a relationship with Christ and the Church. Try the straightforward question: “Would you be willing to invite Jesus into your life right now?” Or try the “if you are ready” tactic: “You might not be ready, but if you think you are up to it, why not turn your life over to God right now?” Saying “you might not be ready” issues a sort of a challenge, and can motivate him to make a positive decision, if only to prove he isn't afraid of the challenge. Pause and wait for a response. Waffling around the issue might be more comfortable, but without a direct and urgent invitation, you won't close the loop.

The worst outcome is that your child might blow up and end the conversation and walk away. If that happens, simply regroup and start fresh next time. Even if he says “no,” that 's fine too. Not everyone responded positively to Jesus either – eg, the rich young man. You can respond with: “I totally understand. It's a lot to ask, and you might not be ready yet. But do you think is holding you back?” This question reorients the discussion and moves it back to any barriers blocking his return path. Even if he cannot answer, your invitation has been extended for when he feels ready.

***Four key steps to returning with the Church***

Reuniting with the Church typically involves four key steps:

1. Connect with a local priest: -
2. Make a good Confession: -It's one thing to decide to come back home. It's another thing to journey all the way back to the Father and once more walk through the door. That's what Confession is for. You should accompany your child to Confession to offer your support. Schedule an appointment if need be.
3. Join RCIA at the local parish: - All seekers and curious people are welcome
4. Find and join a parish community: - He may have to “parish shop” to find a place that he can feel he fits in and is welcomed. Remind him that he is returning to Jesus Christ and his body, the Church, not to the person who answers the phone.

***Spiritual hurdles***

1. Cohabitation: - Many do so for various reasons, but it always ends in a sexually active relationship which the Church opposes. A person in this situation can be made to feel that he must choose between his sex life and God. This is not an insurmountable barrier to reconciling with the Church. Cohabitation is not an impediment to marriage and the couple cannot be refused if they refuse to separate. By supporting the couple's plans for their future rather than chastising them for the past, you can draw them more deeply into the Church and the practice of the faith.
2. Past Abortion: - There is no sin that God cannot forgive. If you confess with contrition, and if you are determined not to do it again, then a priest can offer God's forgiveness through the Sacrament.
3. Divorce and Remarriage: - This is probably the most common reason for people to drift away. The annulment process can remedy this situation (explain as needed).
4. Near Death: - If your child is near death, you'll have some last-minute questions, such as: “Can we call a priest for you?” Generally, a person's resistance is at its lowest. Many on their deathbeds want to be forgiven, but are too proud or scared to ask for it. (Read awesome story of illustration on pg. 161.)

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