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This music may not be your cup of tea but when Tyler Joseph penned the lyrics in 2009, he was hoping that he would never fall away from faith in Jesus. In case you didn't catch the lyrics, here they are in print.

I don't know if I am dying or living
'Cause I will save face
For name's sake
Abuse grace
Take aim to obtain a new name
And a newer place

And I, I can feel the pull begin
Feel my conscience wearing thin
And my skin
It will start to break up and fall apart

I don't wanna fall, fall away
I don't wanna fall, fall away
I'll keep the lights on in this place
'Cause I don't wanna fall, fall away

Many of you probably don't know Tyler Joseph, the lead singer of twenty one pilots. These lyrics describe someone who is more concerned about his reputation in the world than he is his relationship with God. Or at least that's what he's worried about. Twenty One Pilots is not a Christian band but many of their lyrics has a distinct Christian theme.

Here's an obvious one from their song, Taxi Cab.

Then there were three men up front
All I saw were backs of heads
And then I asked them am I alive and well or am I dreaming dead
And then one turned around to say
We're driving toward the morning sun
Where all your blood is washed away
And all you did will be undone
And I said don't be afraid.
Don't be afraid.

Two weeks ago when I talked about Josh Harris' apostasy, I think it touched a nerve in many of us, so I wanted to circle back to the same topic. In John 16:1 Jesus said this to his disciples that is very relevant to us. *"I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away.*

I want to illustrate this principle with the lives of two men. One is Tyler Joseph who is concerned about falling away and the other is the English reformer, Thomas Cranmer, who almost did fall away but recovered at the last moment.

As I said two weeks ago, anyone can potentially fall away. Let me redefine the terms so we are all on the same page. According to Hebrews chapter six, “falling away”—and if you recall, Josh Harris applied this verse to himself—is the act of apostasy. The word apostasy comes from the Greek word apostasia, meaning a turning away; a revolt. Apostasy is the exact opposite of repentance. A repentant person changes their mind about their current direction in life. A repentant person changes the direction of his life. Whereas he was formerly living for himself and rejecting God, the act of repentance turns from self and toward Christ. But apostasy is repentance in reverse. The apostate person turns away from Christ—turns his back on Christ—and lives once again for himself. This is falling away in its most severe form.

We all know people—some of us, even in our own extended family—who we might say have “fallen away from the faith.” Their decisions and their life direction are not oriented toward Jesus Christ. But a great many of them would still call themselves a Christian. They still believe in God. We may not know for certain whether or not they are saved, but they are not apostate in the full sense of the term. They have not revolted and turned away from Christ.

Again, Hebrews 6 states that it is possible to turn your back so completely that you cannot be brought to repentance. So if anyone does fall away to this level of apostasy, they were never truly born again to begin with. So in this sense, anyone can fall away. That’s why Hebrews 6 is a genuine warning passage to the church. It could happen to any of us. Neither the author of Hebrews nor me want anyone to doubt their salvation but neither should we ever rest on a one-time decision to believe in Jesus. Also, do not forget that it’s impossible to tell if someone has truly fallen away while they are still living. We can’t know if they have fallen away or they are just living a worldly life. And since we can’t know, we also can’t judge. Therefore, we need to continue to love them, pray for them and proclaim the truth to them.

Now let’s get back to Jesus’ key statement in John 16. “I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away.” What is the first question we should ask ourselves when we read this verse? To what was Jesus referring when he said “these things”? The “these things” was obviously referring back to the warnings about persecution in the latter half of chapter fifteen, such as verse 15. “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.” But Jesus also spoke of persecution in chapter sixteen. Verse three is especially stark. “Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God.”

Now tell me this. Why was Jesus linking falling away to being persecuted? Before we answer this question, let’s remind ourselves what happened to these disciples.

Peter—crucified upside down

Andrew—crucified

Thomas—pierced through with the spears of four soldiers in India

James—first martyr, beheaded by King Agrippa

Philip—crucified

Matthew—killed with a spear in Ethiopia
Thaddeus—crucified
Simon—crucified
Bartholomew—martyred, unknown cause
Matthias—burned to death
Stephen—stoned to death
Paul—beheaded
John—died an old man, probably of natural causes

All but one of the men who heard Jesus' words died as martyrs. But that wasn't Jesus' concern here. He was more concerned about them falling away than he was their martyrdom. Jesus knew full well that the real danger of persecution is that it could cause you to fall away. I love how DA Carson put it. "The greatest danger the disciples will confront from the opposition of the world is not death but apostasy."¹ The fear of being persecuted and of suffering can cause a person to fall away. This was Jesus' chief concern.

And this is what almost happened to Thomas Cranmer. Cranmer was the leader of the Protestant Reformation in England. History does not look kindly on him due to the fact that he annulled the marriages of King Henry the VIII. Most great men and women have some skeletons in their closets but at the end of the day, he is credited with founding the Anglican church. He effectively brought the gospel to England. He was widely admired until Henry's oldest daughter became the queen. She immediately returned the nation back to the Catholic faith and executed almost 300 people for holding to their protestant faith. One of those martyrs was Thomas Cranmer.

Cranmer was arrested and awaiting execution when he smuggled out a letter to a friend where he wrote "I pray that God may grant that we may endure to the end!"² the 16th century archbishop and the 21st century singer have this in common. Neither wanted to fall away from God. Cranmer perfectly fits with Jesus' warning in John 16. "I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away." Jesus knew that even the threat of persecution could be enough to cause a person to fall away.

In a moment of weakness, Cranmer panicked and recanted his beliefs in writing. After privately recanting, he was required to explain himself in the pulpit of University Church, Oxford. Everyone expected him to publicly recant as he had done in private but instead, he reasserted his protestant faith and rejected the false doctrine of the Catholic Church. He finished his sermon talking about his almost having fallen away.

"And now I come to the great thing, which so much troubleth my conscience, more than any thing that ever I did or said in my whole life, and that is the setting abroad of a writing contrary to the truth; which now here I renounce and refuse, as things written with my hand, contrary to the truth which I thought in my heart, and written for fear of death, and to save my life if it might be; and that is, all such bills and papers which I have written or signed with my hand since my degradation; wherein I have written many things untrue.

And forasmuch as my hand offended, writing contrary to my heart, my hand shall first be punished there-for; for, may I come to the fire, it shall be first burned.³

Cranmer did stick his hand in the fire as he said his final words. “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit...I see the heavens open and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.”

In 2009 Tyler Joseph expressed the same fear of falling away but just last year another of his songs spoke of the weariness of this pursuit.

I'm tired
Of tending to this fire
I've used up all I've collected
I have singed my hands
It's glowing
Embers barely showing
Proof of life in the shadows
Dancing on my plans

The burning
Is so low it's concerning
'Cause they know that when it goes out
It's a glorious gone
It's only time before they show me
Why no one ever comes back
With details from beyond

Often all we can do is guess about certain song lyrics but this time, Joseph tells us exactly what the words mean.

“[The song is] definitely about losing faith, which I’ve been working through on this record. I still think I am going to answer that question, and I’m going to know, and when I know for sure...what’s the end goal? Where am I going? Is there heaven? Is there hell? Is there a God? And the process I’ve been on [for] this record is the closest I’ve been to...Entertaining a world where there isn’t a God. And that’s total transparency. And that is hard to say. It’s a new struggle for me. But I really want to own it. I still believe in God. I still want to call myself a Christian—because I am a Christian. I don’t know how to talk to people about it yet.”⁴

Doesn’t this make you want to sit down and have a conversation with him? He didn’t want to fall away but he seems like is closer than ever to having that happen. He’s a superstar performer so we will never have a conversation but I did get to talk with someone who was struggling in their faith. She gave me permission to share part of her journal with you all. Before I read it, please note that this person grew up in a strong Christian home and knows the Bible very well.

I am so aware of my failures; how I fail as an employee, a daughter, a sister, friend, wife and most acutely as a Christian. I see God’s standard and how far I am from it and I try so hard to reach it. Even though my striving is built around “spiritual practices,” it is nonetheless a trap of Satan. I cannot meet God’s standard. God knows it. Satan knows it and tries to trap me in this never ending cycle of resolve to do better and despair when I

can't do it. I know salvation is through faith alone, by grace alone, in Christ alone and yet I've limited that theology to the one-time even of salvation and moved on to trying to please God through my will power to change. I can't change myself. There isn't a better version of myself out there in the future. Christ died for me so that he could live his life through me. "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, BUT CHRIST WHO LIVES IN ME. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the on of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians w:20). I don't need to strive to find favor in God's eyes through my self-wrought obedience because when he looks at my life he sees Christ's life, His righteousness. God knew I couldn't live the Christian life so he gave me Christ to live his life through me. What freedom! Peace! Relief! Joy! Thank you, Father, for giving me Christ. Thank you Jesus for sacrificing your life so you could live it through me.

Can you see yourself in some of her experiences? It's a very transparent telling of a painful season in her life but the resolution was beautiful! It reminds me of Psalm 77. There are many songs of lament but this one has a higher level of pain in many ways.

I cry aloud to God,
aloud to God, and he will hear me.
² In the day of my trouble I seek the Lord;
in the night my hand is stretched out without wearying;
my soul refuses to be comforted.
³ When I remember God, I moan;
when I meditate, my spirit faints.

Right here the Psalmist could almost have said, "I don't wanna fall away." He wanted to feel God's presence, but he also felt that presence slipping away. When he remembered God, he moaned. When he meditated, his spirit fainted. This is very similar to the experience of his woman. She regularly engaged in "spiritual practices" but they did not satisfy.

⁴ You hold my eyelids open;
I am so troubled that I cannot speak.
⁵ I consider the days of old,
the years long ago.
⁶ I said, "Let me remember my song in the night;
let me meditate in my heart."

The Psalmist was physically impacted by this longing. He couldn't keep his eyes open. He had trouble speaking. His sorrow is shared in such poetic language. "Let me remember my song in the night; let me meditate in my heart." He longs for God. He doesn't want to fall away but he can't seem to change his circumstances. Then, not unlike our journal writer, something radical occurred.

Then my spirit made a diligent search:
⁷ "Will the Lord spurn forever,
and never again be favorable?"

⁸ Has his steadfast love forever ceased?
Are his promises at an end for all time?
⁹ Has God forgotten to be gracious?
Has he in anger shut up his compassion?"

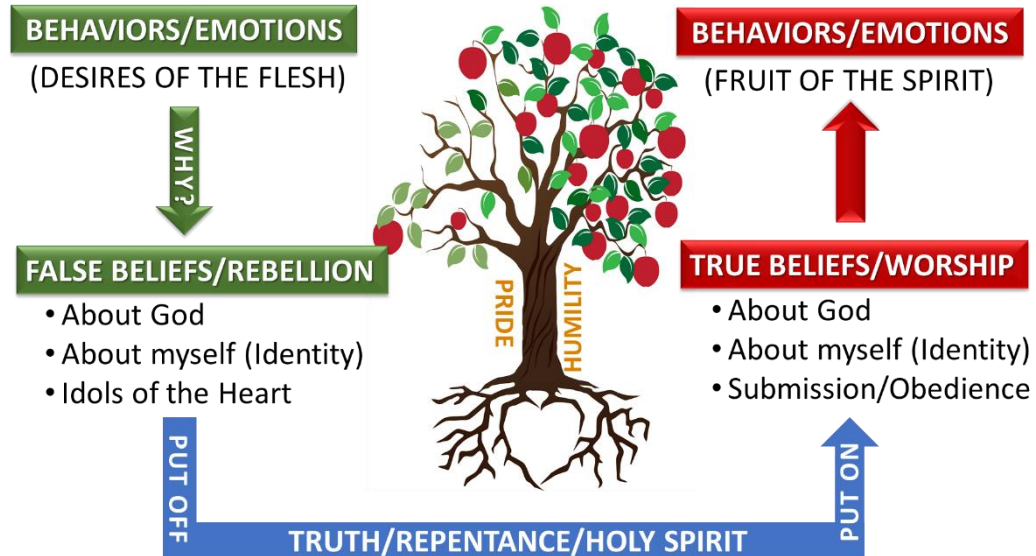
It's almost like he was coming awake again. He was asking all the right questions. He was appealing to God's character and being. Does God spurn forever? Of course not. Does his steadfast love cease? Will his promises fail? Does he forget to be gracious? No. No. No. Then came the final breakthrough.

¹⁰ Then I said, "I will appeal to this,
to the years of the right hand of the Most High."
¹¹ I will remember the deeds of the LORD;
yes, I will remember your wonders of old.
¹² I will ponder all your work,
and meditate on your mighty deeds.
¹³ Your way, O God, is holy.
What god is great like our God?
¹⁴ You are the God who works wonders;
you have made known your might among the peoples.

What just happened to this man? How did he go from not being able to meditate on God to flourishing in his faith? In a word, he did what this woman did. She gave up trying and relied on what was true about God and upon his strength and not her own efforts. It should be no surprise to us that Christian habits and service in the church often do not bring about joy and contentment. It is so easy to fall into the trap of self-effort.

Here is my visual representation of what happened. For those who have attended LEAD you will recognize this as "gospel fluency." Both the woman who wrote the journal and the Psalmist struggled with emotions about God. They both started with false beliefs about God and false beliefs about themselves. Once they realized the false beliefs, they put them off and put on right beliefs. In turn focusing on these right beliefs leads to right emotions and behavior.

DISCIPLESHIP PROCESS (MATT. 7:16)



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¹ Carson, D. A. (1991). The Gospel according to John (p. 530). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.

² <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/thomas-cranmers-complicated-death/>

³ <https://virtueonline.org/death-archbishop-thomas-cranmer-williams-sermon>

⁴ <https://www.altpress.com/features/twenty-one-pilots-leave-the-city-meaning-interview/>