

Consider this: Turning points are rare opportunities. The dissolution of our deeply held beliefs, the questioning of our basic fundamental thrust through life, the doubt that we are instilled with suddenly and profoundly is not something we would wish on anyone. These are all the characteristics of disillusionment. Disillusionment is not a rare occurrence. It happens to all of us at some point, and it can occur at every stage of life. The disillusionment of teenagers when they discover their parents are people and that society is not always just or fair, the disillusionment of those in their twenties when the job market is not kind and the future looks uncertain, the disillusionment of middle age when the life you've built does not feel like the life you hoped for, at least not completely, the disillusionment of later years when current demands and circumstances cause you to question everything you've put faith in. This list is only scratching the surface. On top of these generalizations we will most certainly encounter the particular disillusionment of unexpected emptiness or sense of loss, the particular and sudden feeling of disorientation and a loss of direction.

This is one of the most difficult moments, and one of the most profound. It can give birth to depression and a feeling of being stuck. It can also be a turning point.

There has always been a pretty high sense of disillusionment about politics, especially among people under 40. As we approach the November elections, there is a wondering again about an issue that has always been an issue - voter turnout. There seems to be agreement among many millennials that not only is there a sense of disillusionment about particular candidates, there is a mistrust of the whole establishment, the branches and daily operations of government. The disillusionment toward our complete way of life - socially, politically, and economically has never been as thorough. The disillusionment is crossing race lines, it's crossing class lines as the middle class continues to shrink, it's crossing religious lines. There are people gathering in living rooms, gathering in churches, gathering in bars and coffee shops, all asking the same question: Where do we go from here?

Religion is not just about church or denominations or clergy who wear stoles.

Religion is what we hold to be true and worthy. It includes our personal narratives - stories of who we are, where we've come from, and where we're going. It includes our vision for civic, economic, and political life. It includes the beliefs we've chosen intentionally, and the beliefs we've taken for granted growing up in the time, place, and circumstances we've found ourselves. It's not a surprise to me that the greatest surge of visitors to this church and churches in general occurred after the presidential election, a time when many felt they were losing their religion. They were losing confidence in the basic building blocks of our society, and there is a personal cost to this.

It's a scary thing to lose our religion. It's a scary thing to experience a loss of vision, and thus a loss of direction. It's actually unbearable to stay in that place of disillusionment. We were not to meant to stay there.

Did you notice how Saul got to Damascus after he temporarily lost his sight? People helped him. They literally carried him to Damascus.

He arrived to Damascus in the dark, disoriented, unable even to see or identify the people who were helping him. He knew he was safe, but he was in unknown territory, in an unknown house, taken care of by unknown people.

Most Christians will focus on the second part of this narrative, the part where Saul gains his vision, converts to Christianity, and begins his ministry. They focus on the transformation of Saul to Paul, a complete change of identity. But I find the first part of the narrative more compelling. I believe the change of identity is predicated on the thorough loss of identity, that a depth of vision only comes when you've been able to let go of illusion, and risk disorientation. I'm more interested in the temporary loss of vision that comes suddenly without warning, and only much later is seen for what it really is - grace, a gift, something that was given but not asked for.

Disillusionment is not on most people's wish list, but disillusionment is not a negative thing. One spiritual teacher told me: If you're disillusioned, it just means you were illusioned in the first place.

That being said, disillusionment is also a real pain. It's deeply unsettling, and breeds mistrust, fear, and the yearning for quick fixes.

It's especially a pain if we wish we could go back to the way things were, or more accurately to the way we thought things were.

It will be tempting to find a someone or someone's who will promise they can take us back to the dream, that place before awakening and clear seeing.

I think it is better to lose our sense of direction rather than continue down a road we know will never fully deliver us. It is better to trust that this loss of vision is not a permanent condition, but a prerequisite for something more real and expansive.

This is the time we are in, and make no mistake about it: it is a turning point. We are at a point where we are yearning for a collective vision that is more real, more worthy than the one we've been given. Instead of being sent out in the world to persecute like Saut, I think we are being asked to convert to a way of life that notices all the people that surround us, full of disillusionment, stuck in the road. It's a way of life that in humility says "I don't know the full and complete answer, but I do know this: you need sanctuary. Here, let me help you get there, because I need it too."

But in order to get there we must be willing to lose our religion. We must be willing to at whatever cost to give up any belief that falsely asserts that I am separated from you and thus more superior.

We must be willing to surrender the narrative that due to the color of my skin, or my level of education, or my level of ability, I deserve to have sanctuary while you toil on the road. This is false religion. We must be willing to go out on the road and meet the disillusioned with ultimate care and concern. And when we are the one disillusioned on the road, we must be willing to receive help as we stumble toward sanctuary.

Turning points are rare opportunities. They are opportunities to move forward in a way that we've never before considered. It is a time for tenderness and solidarity. In that tenderness and solidarity, we will find our religion.