

***Have you ever felt so sure you're going in the right direction and really seeking God and then all of a sudden it's like the rug is pulled out from under you?***

What you have described is both very painful and, unfortunately, very common. We get to a place where we have begun to trust God and are actively seeking to do his will, and we are certain that this particular job or relationship or vocation is what he wants . . . and then everything crumbles. Maybe we lose that job, the friendship ends or our "grand plan" fails miserably.

And it's not necessarily because you sinned in some great way. It's not because "this is the lesson you need to learn." It's not for any obvious reason at all. But tragedy struck, and you find yourself wondering, "Where did I go wrong?" You think, "I was so certain this was what God wanted." Maybe you are even mad at God for not coming through for you.

Even though it can be difficult, I want to invite you to take this next step. It is humility. Humility is not moping around telling yourself how bad you are; it is simply being willing to acknowledge the truth: the truth about yourself, about God and about the situation.

In this case, it might involve acknowledging that you sometimes sin and you are sometimes wrong. When I look at myself, I realize very quickly that I am often mistaken in my decisions. I don't always see things clearly. When I look back, it sometimes becomes clearer that I need to adjust my vision to match up with God's.

I am certain that one of the difficulties comes from the fact that you had thought that you were discerning in the right way. Now, how do you trust your discernment? I know a young woman who was near marriage twice in the past three years with two different men (not at the same time). After the first break-up, it was painful, but relatively easy to say, "I should have listened to God more attentively." But the second time around, during a relationship where she thought she was doing everything right, the break-up was even more devastating. How can she trust the discernment process?

I don't mean to be insensitive to that situation. I feel terribly for her. But there is a crucial piece here: The break-up was part of the discernment process.

When we enter into a relationship or undertake any action that relies upon the choices of other people, we are automatically introducing the discernment of all those involved. The entire time she was listening to God, so was someone else. Ultimately, the voice of God took the form of the young man who told her that the engagement was off.

So what are we supposed to do in the aftermath? Three things.

First, please know that, in Christ, there is no such thing as wasted suffering. Broken dreams, a broken heart or a broken bank account can all be used. How we respond in disappointment can shape who we are more than nearly anything else. This is an opportunity to join your very real sufferings to Christ's.

Second, realize that God can use all things (even devastation and sin) for his glory and your becoming holy. Remember Mary and Joseph and their unforeseen trip to Bethlehem when Mary was nine months pregnant? Caesar Augustus "discerned" that he wanted to take a census, so the Holy Family (with Jesus in utero) had to travel 70 miles over rough terrain. I can imagine that Mary might have been a little nervous about this moment in God's plan. And yet, what happened? God wrote straight with this crooked line, and a Roman Emperor unwittingly assisted in the fulfillment of the prophecy that the Messiah would come from the "City of David" (aka "Bethlehem").

Finally, you said that you thought you were heading in the right direction. I like that. I hope that you were because that is the key: to keep walking toward God.

We can sometimes make this choice, this relationship, this vocation, this whatever the goal of God's plan for our lives. We may confuse the step God wants us to take for the path that he wants us to follow. It is possible that you discerned the step very well and only made a mistake when you thought that it was supposed to become more than a step. That can be hard, I know. But God has bigger dreams for you than a step or even a path. He has a destination for you. And the destination is not fame or wealth or success or a spouse. The destination is him.