



Many times parents are very much worried about their children who have left the practice of the faith. This certainly is a holy concern. For a person's choice to leave the faith is not simply one of preference as if it were some small matter. Rather, this kind of choice has eternal consequences, heaven or hell forever.

So certainly these kinds of things should be of great concern and parents should continually pray and fast for their children's salvation. Of course, this situation arises not only with parents and children, but also with siblings, co-workers, friends, even spouses.

However, there is a reality about the situation that we must always keep before our eyes — Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He goes after the lost sheep and in the mystery of divine providence, He uses all the circumstances of life gently to lead the straying sheep back to the fold.

For our part, there are three things that we must exercise in this regard. So that you'll remember them, I'll call them the three P's: **perseverance**, **patience**, and **prayer**.

1. **Perseverance** involves trusting the Good Shepherd. It means never giving up hope. No matter how far a person seems to be away from God or the Church, no one is ever so far that the Good Shepherd cannot get to them. Trust in the Good Shepherd to reach out to the lost. Persevere in your hope in Jesus.
2. **Patience** involves understanding that God's ways are not our ways. God's timetable is not our timetable. We want everything that we want now and in this case of a lost soul that's not an unholy desire. We want people to be in the fold as quickly as possible.

But I think sometimes God would say to us, "Don't worry. I've got them in my sight." Jesus knows when the most perfect time is to reach out to them. He knows how to prepare them little by little so that they will say yes to Him. This may take years and it may take difficult circumstances for them to open their hearts and repentance may not even come until just before their final breath. But Jesus knows what He is doing. He is the Good Shepherd and He asks us to be patient as He works and goes after the lost sheep.

3. Closely tied to both perseverance and patience is **prayer**. Through prayer we can lift a lost soul to God and in the mystery of the mystical body of Christ, this intercession that we make for others can have powerful effects. Mysteriously, God has made it so that our prayers can open the doorway of salvation to others. God has made this to be because He has made us to help each other even on the road to salvation.

So persevere, have patience, and pray always that the lost will be saved.

Is it really possible for souls to be lost to hell forever? Yes, it is. This is the teaching of Jesus in the Gospel. This is the teaching of the Church. But again, the Good Shepherd works without pause to save all. The only one's who aren't saved are those who fight against Jesus' work of salvation, actively pursuing their own ends to the very end. They fight God at every step and their decision to abandon God becomes definitive forever.

But Jesus' mercy reaches out at every step in a person's life. The Good Shepherd speaks and they can hear His voice. For those who turn to Jesus even in the least little way, Jesus rushes in to save. Jesus wants to save!

So for those you have counted as lost — maybe your family, your friends, your spouse — persevere in hope, be patient in trust and pray unceasingly, for the Good Shepherd will not abandon those who are lost. He will call out to them until their final breath, that they would turn to Him and be saved.

**Father Mark Gurtner at St. Anthony de Padua Church
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