NAVIGATE YOUR FAITH
A Christian's Field Guide to Not Getting Lost
RON PRATT
@PapaBearAlaska
I’m pleased, proud, and thrilled to have known the Pratt family for years. Ron and his wife, Yolanda, are amazing missionaries touching many lives in the far northwest wilderness, in Alaska. Ron’s newest book, *Navigate Your Faith*, is a monumental resource to help the Christian family to “navigate” through the world as we know it today. It challenges the reader to navigate through news and social media, as well as various other issues, and grow genuine devotion to God. It is a book that will become a guidebook in your library for the time that we live in.

—Jim Bakker  
President, PTL Television Network  
www.ptlnetwork.com

This book will capture your attention, captivate your mind, and convict your spirit. Every chapter is informative and impactful, causing you to make a personal assessment on the condition of your heart and purity of your life. It feels like reading a map or an inspiring life checklist that will leave you feeling confident in the Father’s grace while encouraging and empowering you stay on course and continue to strive for a higher level of excellence and holiness.

—Beckah Shae  
Shae Shoc Records  
beckahshae.com

In his new book, *Navigate Your Faith*, Ron Pratt combines a compelling narrative with unerring truth from God’s Word. In a day when solid dependence on truth and traditional values seems unheard of, the story line in this new book weaves in Biblical truth that will help any wanderer find appropriate questions and observations that will assuredly provide direction and guidance. Ron’s history and life experiences make him a perfect storyteller who will inspire the
reader to evaluate their motives and decisions. A great read for the young people of this culture.

—Scott Erickson
Lead Pastor
Peoples Church, Salem, OR

I have had the honor of knowing and working alongside Ron Pratt for over fifteen years. He is a powerful communicator, a loyal mentor, a passionate minister of the gospel, and a father to a fatherless generation. Ron addresses hot-button issues in the church with humor and creative storytelling, speaking transformational truths to a world full of compromise. In *Navigate Your Faith*, you will be captivated by the tale of Jason and Cindy as they face various challenges in their marriage, family, and beliefs. There are so many nuggets of truth to discover as you weave your way through this book! I fully believe that the powerful message contained in these pages will inspire, challenge, and motivate you to pursue a life more devoted to Christ.

—Charis Lincoln
Social Media Influencer
Charisma Star
www.CharismaStar.com

We are living in such confusing times. Many believers have struggled to understand and balance today’s culture with matters of faith and traditional values. However, here is a refreshing message of reason and clarity that helps translate spiritual concepts into a language everyone can comprehend. Ron Pratt’s book *Navigate Your Faith: A Christian’s Field Guide to Not Getting Lost* tells the story of a young couple’s search and discovery of truth in our world of conflicting ideals. The reader can quickly relate to their questions and struggles and how they found their answers in God’s Word. This
well-written, easy-reading guide enables anyone to learn how to live the Christian life, without being misled by modern trends of compromise and corruption. I’ve known this author for over twenty-five years, and I enthusiastically endorse the discoveries and insights he shares in all his writings.

—Dr. Dale A. Robbins
Pastor, Author, Speaker
President/Founder of the International Prayer Network

I have known Ron for many years. His heart for the lost and his unique ways of ministering to the wonderful people of Alaska are an example to all who know him. *Navigate Your Faith: A Christian’s Field Guide to Not Getting Lost* will encourage and give you insights about the exciting life of living by faith. The stories that Ron so aptly tells bring the reader deep insights about God’s loving hand on their life.

—Dr. Wayde Goodall
Executive Director, Compassion Consortium,
Convoy of Hope
Strategic Pastoral Advisor, Focus on the Family
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Often a book will be dedicated to the one who most inspired the writing or to dear friends or relatives who align themselves with the concepts of the story. In the case of *Navigate Your Faith* my inspiration came from many unsuspecting people from my past and present.

Although the idea and content came as a direct download from the Holy Spirit in the middle of the night, I recognize that such downloads from heaven come from consistent investments of prayer.

Many have invested in prayer over me through the years, but there is one person who stands out in a lifelong prayer commitment. My heart is filled with great love and appreciation for this special woman of God. It is my profound honor to dedicate this book to my mother, Betty Jean Pratt.

My parents regularly committed to lift me up in prayer, whether I thought I needed it or not. I will forever cherish their combined support.
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INTRODUCTION

They wanted the blessings of God in their lives without any personal sacrifice. *We live under grace and how we live is up to us* was their heart view. They believed their job was to enjoy the lifestyle they desired. Jesus’ job was simply to stamp His approval on every expression of that lifestyle. The cultural posture that protected this perspective came easily until the careful weave of their world began to fray.

The foundational beliefs of the Western church have undergone major changes over the past few decades, with those changes accelerating in recent years. Where the American church once influenced our culture, it has now relinquished its influence to the culture. Heroes of the faith have been replaced by the heroes of entertainment. We have forgotten the words of our church fathers and placed commensurate value in the words of professional athletes and Hollywood actors.

Although marriages within the church are stronger than those outside of it, the enemy targets the family unit in alarming and relentless ways. Christian families have gradually abandoned biblical values and all too often have fully embraced worldly beliefs and a high tolerance of sin. The Western church aids and appeases these altered values and
helps in selling Jesus as an add-on to a preferred way of living within the culture.

Father God desires true freedom, real healing, and heavenly blessing for each person and family on this earth. Just maybe that freedom should start with us, the Christian family, which consists of people like you and me who live one day and one decision at a time.

Come and journey now with Jason and Cindy Smith as they navigate life’s alluring pressures and find their way to the very real and loving Creator.
CHAPTER 1

THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY

If you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.

—Colossians 3:1–2

They went to church most Sundays but largely out of obligation. This Sunday was not much different from the rest. They dragged themselves out of bed, told each other they wouldn’t be late again—but who were they kidding?

Their Saturday ritual was no help. After a trip to the mall they attended the last showing at the cinema, so a late Saturday night was to be expected. If they did make it to Sunday morning service, the afternoon football party at the Johnsons’ would be on their minds. The Johnsons always threw a great party for their “inner circle” from the church. Oh, they were open to newbies joining the group as long as they were open-minded and not all bogged down by religion.

You see, the Johnsons and their friends were “free” and living the good life.

Today was a particularly important Sunday for Jason and
Cindy: their NFL team was contending for a playoff spot. They conspired ahead of time to slip out of the service early in case their pastor got a little too anointed and went long. “We aren’t going to be late for this game day,” Cindy thought as the pastor preached through his notes.

She and Jason had invested much planning and anticipation in the game. Their new football jerseys alone cost more than they ever expected! But the investment was well worth it. After all, football was their “thing,” and they were convinced their priorities made perfect sense.

“Let’s stay on schedule, babe,” Cindy whispered to Jason as she pointed to her Rolex. “We can slip out when they pray.”

“The Johnsons snuck out a few minutes ago,” Jason whispered back.

**“Trained Up”**

Jason Smith met Cindy Walters in college shortly after he moved from the Bible Belt to the West Coast. He grew up in a very strict religious home but never really understood the King James Version of the Bible, the only translation he was allowed to open. He had struggled in high school English class and never caught on to the archaic dialect of the King James.

Jason was turned off by a religious system that forced him to carry a Bible he didn’t understand. He was equally turned off by a church that failed to understand him. He had heard far too many sermons preaching against other Bible versions and other Christian beliefs. As far as Jason was concerned, church was dead and pastors spent more time publicly criticizing other ministries than helping those around them.

Jason’s move to the West Coast and his breaking away from all that controlling religiosity felt liberating! This “fresh” Christian perspective seemed so opposite to his upbringing.
He recalled the weirdness he felt when Grandma Taylor looked over her reading glasses with a disappointed glare if he dared to speak out of turn in Sunday school class. She was so different at home, always cooking and seeming to enjoy having kids around. In the classroom, however, she transformed into a frustrated old woman who apparently felt called to portray the anger of God, especially toward little boys. Jason’s gang of young peers secretly referred to her as “The Transformer.” While the homemade cookies she brought to the monthly church potlucks were absolutely heavenly, the boys were convinced the ruler she wielded in Sunday school had been made by the devil himself!

Unlike Jason, Cindy was born and raised in Southern California. As was common in many families, her mother was the only spiritual figure in the home and was 100 percent devoted to the “religion” of shopping! If the mall was a church, Cindy’s mother would be considered a faithful pillar, investing her time, passion, and resources with great devotion.

Cindy’s father was virtually nonexistent in her life. He would not be burdened with religious obligations or tedious family functions but kept his focus where it should be—on money, making money, and making more money. His investment firm had done quite well, often keeping him away from home and for the most part distant from his daughter’s life.

When she lived at home, Cindy went to church with her mom as faithfully as their social and shopping life would permit. She had a Bible and enjoyed reading it on occasion, especially The Message, which was much easier to grasp than her old Bible from childhood. Cindy was fairly familiar with its pages but was much better versed in the sport of online shopping. The credit card her father provided to compensate for his absence made shopping easy. At a young age she learned the power of that magical piece of plastic. She believed it was
her responsibility to shop. Paying off the bill was not her concern; that was Daddy’s problem!

The Bible says that if you “train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it” (Prov. 22:6). I have often wondered whether a child is influenced only when trained up in the way he or she should go or also when trained in the way he or she should not go. Cindy was definitely “trained up” but more effectively by Hollywood than by the church. Her favorite movie stars had more influence on her desires, directions, and dreams than Jesus did.

After her parents dragged her through their painful divorce, Cindy felt numb to life and had little reason to trust others. Like every young girl she wanted to be loved and protected by her dad. Now that he was out of the house, she had more freedom than ever before. He had never given her any real restrictions or guidelines, and he never screened her boyfriends. On the outside she might have resisted such constraints from her father, but in her heart she wanted someone—especially her daddy—to care enough to create a safe zone.

Deep within the heart of a young girl is the desire for Daddy’s protection. When this foundational need is unmet, others tend to fill that position. Most of these people go by the title boyfriend, but whatever their titles, they are underqualified and ill-equipped for the task. In the absence of a dad’s impartation in the spiritual role of “training up” the child, the child’s heart becomes open to training from others. In the crucial adolescent years the child becomes a sponge, quick to absorb love in any available form.

Trained up—Cindy surely was! She was trained with excellence by a world focused on entertainment. She had learned to make decisions from the perspective that asks, “Will it be fun
for me? Will it be entertaining? Did Sunday’s sermon suit my taste?”

The “spirit of entertainment” (as I like to call it) promotes self-focus and personal indulgence. This faulty training develops a mind-set that measures all activities and relationships by the standard of self-gratification. To Cindy, Jesus didn’t seem to offer much of that. While she tried to make a little room for Him in her life, the concept of His lordship was far too radical and was reserved for “overzealous” Christians.

In much the way early Christians were trained up by the Torah (the first five books of the Bible), many like Cindy have been trained up by media. Early Christians talked about Scripture and prophecy; modern Christians are more prone to discussing their favorite movies, even reciting lines from them word for word. If the movie theater were a church, then its success in growing a congregation would be second to none.

Jason and Cindy each brought their life training into their marriage. Shortly after their wedding Jason agreed to go to church with Cindy. The church was growing rapidly and was made up of mostly younger families close to their age. What a refreshing change it was from his past church experience! This “seeker-friendly” setting was casual and inviting. The social opportunities were endless, and no one ever got in your face with religious pressure.

*Nothing is worse than mixing church with your personal life* was this couple’s view. That belief worked for Jason, who wasn’t really concerned with the confusing details of spiritual
growth. Because of his strict religious upbringing he believed he was “good to go.” In other words his eternal future was secure no matter how he lived. “What’s the point?” he often wondered. If his confession at Bible camp many years earlier was all it took, then he was sure no lifestyle adjustments were necessary. Nothing needed to change.

Predictably Cindy connected with several like-minded shopping enthusiasts from the church, which kept any potential boredom from creeping into her life. The shopping was not limited to the mall. Cindy also “shopped” the church services she attended and gave each of them a rating. It was like a sport to her! The first and most important factor in rating the service involved who was in attendance. Nearly as important was what they were wearing and how the interaction went.

For Jason it was all about how well the band performed. He had dabbled in music as a teen and occasionally strummed a few chords on the guitar. On Sunday, music was what captivated his attention. If the sounds were good, Jason was satisfied.

I would propose that what I call the spirit of entertainment might be a more widespread addiction than any other substance abuse or bad habit in the church. Although Christians don’t wear “Entertain Me!” T-shirts to Sunday service, the spirit of this desire is alive and well.

One element of the entertainment mind-set is revealed in the tendency to criticize. The art of critique has its place, especially when it is invited. The critique of an editor, for example, is essential in helping authors to clearly deliver their messages (so true in the case of this book!). However, unsolicited
critique can be out of place and is often fueled by a spirit of criticism.

I’ve heard it said that “the habit of criticism grows as faith declines.”¹ According to the dictionary, to be critical is to be “inclined to find fault or to judge with severity, often too readily; occupied with or skilled in criticism.”²

Just to clarify, criticalness is not one of the spiritual gifts. Furthermore, where criticism is found, generosity is often lacking. I truly believe faith and giving are linked. Christians with a strong faith in God’s Word are also strong believers in the heart of giving who demonstrate generosity through their lifestyle.

Stay with me. I’m heading somewhere.

**Give or Take?**

When the early New Testament church gathered, it was more like a potluck and less like a restaurant. Everyone at a potluck brings something to the table. The focus is not on what you can get but what you can give. The Christian mind-set today often resembles the restaurant model—no preparation is needed! Just come through the door, bring nothing but yourself, find a good seat, place your order, and rate the meal (and if warranted, complain about the service). This selfish appetite for personal entertainment has infiltrated the church at every level.

In counseling a young lady who was completely submerged in the world of entertainment, my wife and I challenged her to a thirty-day “media fast”—no television, no movies, no downloads, and no social media. She resisted strongly and refused to consider such a challenge. Even after we reduced the abstinence to a single week, she looked at us with tears in her eyes and said, “I can’t do that.”
What an eye-opener it was!

This spirit of entertainment is fueled by fierce and unhealthy selfishness. A self-centered heart always makes life decisions by asking, “What will be the most fun for me?”

One Sunday after service at a church where I served on staff, I approached a longtime church leader to solicit his help with an evangelistic youth event. I explained that the outreach would require a few adults assisting in a variety of areas. Without any hesitation he answered, “I’ll pray about it.”

Being well-versed in “Christianese,” I understood what he was really saying: “I’m not interested, but I want to appear spiritual. So to buy myself some time and to (hopefully) give you a chance to forget that you ever asked me, I will tell you that I’m making this a matter of prayer.”

Amazingly, as he turned around to leave, another man in the church approached him and asked, “Would you like to join our church softball team? We meet twice a week in the evenings for practice and every Saturday for games all summer.”

The man quickly answered, “Sure! Sounds great.”

It was obvious the youth outreach pegged lower on his “fun meter” than softball did. It is funny how a season of “prayer” is needed to obey the command of God, but for entertainment’s sake we pull instantaneous decisions out of thin air and see no need to run them through any God-approved filters.

I can recall many conversations over the years along these lines:

“Will you be signing up for our summer mission trip?”
“Maybe, unless something else comes up.”

The *something else* was not referring to a work-related assignment but an entertaining activity of some sort. The issue was which activity would score highest on the person’s fun meter. That is the thought process for those influenced
by the spirit of entertainment. The biblical thought process is quite the opposite and leads to this warning: “Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15).

Jason and Cindy wished their pastor would make life easy for them and close the service “on time.” Then they could catch their breath and stop at the house to change into those new jerseys before each game. As it turned out, the pastor did not preach long on this particular Sunday. During the short drive to the Johnsons’ house, Jason surmised, “Maybe Pastor ended on time because his team is playing this afternoon.”

Everything was what Jason and Cindy hoped for that Sunday: The football party could not have been better. They spent the day with great friends and plenty of delicious food, and to top it off, their team was still in the running and would be playing the next Sunday!

The Smiths eagerly agreed to host the following week’s party at their house. They could do it as well as anyone, but there was no time to waste and much planning to do. Of course some shopping would be in order, so within three minutes of walking in the door, Cindy started a list of party supplies and mapped out the game room. Meanwhile Jason attacked the next level of his new race-car video game.

Little did they know that the next game day would have a major impact on their lives.
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