

# On the Road: A Spiritual Awakening

Luke 24:13-35  
College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa

Rev. Todd B. Freeman  
April 19, 2026

There is something deeply spiritual—not just theological, but *soul-deep*—about this story. Two disciples walking along a road, carrying not just their conversation, but their inner lives. Their grief. Their confusion. Their disorientation. This is not just a physical journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus—it is **a spiritual journey through loss, through unknowing, through the collapse of what once made sense.**

And if we listen closely, we realize: this is not just their story. It is ours. Because **every spiritual life, if it is honest, includes moments when the path is unclear... when God feels hidden... when what we believed no longer holds in the same way.** And so we walk. We keep moving. We keep talking it through—sometimes with others, sometimes only within ourselves.

“We had hoped...” That is not just disappointment. That is a spiritual turning point. Because **spirituality often begins—not in certainty—but in the unraveling of certainty.** These disciples are in what many spiritual teachers would call a kind of *wilderness* or even a *dark night*. Not a place of punishment, but a place of transformation. They are between worlds: Between what they thought God would do... And what God is actually doing. Between the story they understood... And the deeper story still unfolding. And here is the quiet miracle of the text: **Jesus meets them there.** Not after they figure it out. Not after their faith becomes strong again. But **right in the middle of their confusion.**

This is the heart of a progressive spirituality: God is not waiting on the other side of doubt. God meets us *within* it. But notice how Jesus shows up. He is not immediately recognizable. He is present—but hidden. Close—but not obvious. And that, too, is deeply spiritual. Because the presence of the sacred in our lives is often like this—subtle, elusive, easy to miss. We tend to look for God in clarity, in certainty, in moments of emotional or theological triumph. But this story suggests something else: God often comes disguised. In the stranger on the road. In the question that unsettles us. In the conversation that lingers. In the slow unfolding of insight rather than the sudden arrival of answers.

Jesus asks them, “What are you discussing?” It is such a simple question. But spiritually, it is profound. Because it invites awareness. It invites them to name what is stirring inside them. And **perhaps that is one of the first movements of spirituality—not having the right answers, but being willing to tell the truth about where we are.** To say: This is what I hoped for. This is what I lost. This is what I don’t understand. And to trust that the sacred can hold that honesty.

As they walk, Jesus begins to reinterpret their story. But notice—he doesn’t erase their experience. He doesn’t dismiss their grief. He *expands* their understanding. And **this is what spiritual growth often feels like. Not a rejection of what we once believed, but an opening into something larger. A deeper, wider, more mysterious vision of God.** A God who is not confined to our expectations... A God who is not defeated by suffering... A God who is somehow present even in what looks like loss.

And still—they do not recognize him. Not yet. Because recognition, in the spiritual life, is rarely immediate. It unfolds. It deepens. It ripens over time. Then comes the moment at the table. They urge him, “Stay with us.” Even without recognizing him, something in them longs for his presence. That, too, is spiritual. There is a kind of knowing that comes before knowing. A pull. A hunger. A quiet sense that something sacred is near. And so they make space. They offer hospitality. **They create a place where presence can be experienced.** And it is there—at the table, in the breaking of the bread—that their eyes are opened. Not through argument. Not through proof. But through *participation*. Through a shared act. Through embodied experience.

**This tells us something essential about spirituality: It is not just about thinking differently. It is about encountering differently. It is about the ordinary becoming luminous.** Bread—just bread—becomes a revelation. A meal becomes a moment of awakening. And suddenly—they see.

But then, just as suddenly, he vanishes. And this is not a loss—it is a transition. Because now the recognition has moved *within* them. “Were not our hearts burning within us...?” **The external presence is gone, but the internal awareness remains. This is the movement from seeing Christ out there to experiencing Christ within. And this is the deep invitation of spirituality: To become aware that the sacred is not only something we encounter occasionally... But something that lives, moves, and breathes within us and among us.**

And so they return. They go back to Jerusalem. Back to the place they had left. But they are not the same. Because once you have glimpsed the sacred in this way—once your eyes have been opened, once your heart has burned—you cannot go back to seeing the world as empty or abandoned. Everything becomes charged with possibility. **Every road becomes a place where Christ might walk beside you.** Every conversation becomes a place where truth might unfold. Every table becomes a place where grace might be revealed.

So what does this mean for us, spiritually? It means that **the path of faith is not a straight line. It is a journey of unfolding awareness. It includes doubt, questioning, wandering, and even walking away.** But none of those things place us outside the reach of the sacred. In fact, they may be the very terrain where transformation happens. It means that we are invited to practice a different kind of seeing. To pay attention. To listen more deeply. To notice where our hearts are stirred... where something within us begins to burn... where the ordinary begins to shimmer with meaning. And it means we are invited to create space: Space for conversation. Space for honesty. Space for shared meals and sacred pauses. Because often, it is in those spaces that recognition comes.

So if you find yourself on the road today—uncertain, questioning, in between what was and what will be... as College Hill is at this moment in its history... do not rush past it. This, too, is holy ground. Walk it. Attend to it. Speak honestly within it. Because the story tells us: **Christ is already there. Walking beside you. Listening to you. Opening something within you.** And perhaps—when you least expect it—your eyes will be opened. And you will realize: **The sacred was here all along. Not just at the destination. But on the road.**

Amen.

Resources: Chatgpt