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Wayfaring to Wayfinding: From Measuring Up to Accepting Grace



Wayfaring

Grandmother used to give me graham crackers to munch on in church to keep me quiet. In her church—or any other at that time—there wasn't much to interest children. But I was a fairly calm child so I did a lot of listening, especially to the hymns. I remember one that went, "I am a poor, wayfaring stranger, traveling through this world of woe." The idea is that here on earth we walk dusty roads as wayfarers, lost from our homes. Around us is sin, woe, and all manner of unpleasant experiences. But if we'll just hang in there eventually we'll get to a different place—heaven presumably, although the word is never mentioned—where we'll see our deceased loved ones and then we'll be "...over Jordan... home." When we find that heaven, we will be dead according to this hymn.

Well, I've done my share of wayfaring. That is I've learned what is needed for success in this world, as I define success. First, I learned to walk, feed myself, dress myself, talk, and then read and write. Along the way I learned how to keep myself reasonably safe and get along with other people reasonably well. Also, I made reasonably good grades in school and completed advanced degrees. I've held responsible positions without ever getting fired and have led efforts for change. People familiar with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (see p. 87) might say I reached the level of Self Actualization, or becoming all that I could be.

At one time—not too long ago—I read as many as five books a week in a quest to know more. At other times I became very confused about which road to take. In my darkest time, I woke up living a life I hated—violating even my own principles, values, and standards for living. I had gotten lost while wayfaring. I had read the "signs" incorrectly.

The idea of having to die before I can reach anything resembling a state of joy and peace isn't very attractive to me. I began to feel very strongly that there must be more I could do right here on *terra firma* to improve my state of mind and find a more meaningful purpose for my life. So I took stock of myself.

Junctures

Junctures—that's what they are—
The intersections of life
With no street names
And no road numbers—

Or different road numbers.
Is this A2?
Or is it N11?
Or are they the same?

And where the hell am I,
Anyway?

At a juncture—
On the roadway of life.

Do I go on?
Or turn back?

I was a performer. If people wanted to get something done, they asked me. Do you know what people do for performers? They applaud them. So I had received much positive reinforcement for doing what other people wanted me to do—so much so that those other people had, in effect, become my gods.

My life was out of balance. According to Loehr and Schwartz (2003), the human system has four sources of energy: physical (including health, food, exercise, rest), mental (where I had overdosed), emotional, and spiritual. I discovered that I had “shut down” my emotional system many years before in order to avoid pain. I have learned that the emotional center of the brain doesn't have “switches” for every emotion. Instead, it has one master switch labeled “emotion.” So when I unwittingly told my brain to turn off pain, it heard, “Turn off emotion.” I even used to take pride in the fact that people could not hurt my feelings.

Some people say we change only out of pain. This was true for me. As I look back at the poetry that flowed so freely at the time, I remember the pain.

Protection

Pins can't penetrate my business suit,
Not even for beauty's sake.
Sharp Lines
Dr. Executive
No Adornment
Everything Perfect
Business Suit Protection
From Pain.

Years after I wrote this poem, when I found myself longing to buy new clothes but unable to find anything in the stores that was different from what I already had, I hired a wardrobe consultant to help me. Her first step was to interview me about what I did in every part of my life—personally as well as professionally. Then we went to my closet to find what was there to fit my needs. After a morning of sorting, I discovered I had very little in my wardrobe that was suitable for relaxation and recreation. Three large plastic lawn bags of excess professional clothing went to Goodwill. That afternoon I returned to my office and began returning telephone calls. In the middle of one call I was overcome with nausea and felt that I might faint. At that moment, I recognized the symptoms of withdrawal and realized that I had overdosed on my addiction to clothing. Unable to find the sensation or “high” that I had previously reached from a new outfit, I had, just as alcoholics do, “bottomed out.” I just no longer got a kick out of going shopping as I had before.

Self-Deluded

How self-deluded can you be?
Sister, let me tell.

Anesthetize yourself with work
And get your kicks from migraines.

Insulate yourself from friends,
Pretending you don't need them.

Alienate as many as you can
So they don't get close.

OD on food or clothes or pills or sleep,
Pretending that you need them.

How self-deluded can you be?
Sister, let me tell.

Why don't more people make needed change? Throughout history there have been fewer pioneers than settlers. Shakespeare offers this explanation, transposed from Act III, Scene I of *Hamlet*: "Thus... [what we know] makes cowards of us all—and makes us rather bear the ills we have than to fly to others that we know not." A scientific term for the phenomenon Shakespeare describes is inertia—the tendency of a body to keep on doing what it has been doing.

Hitting Bottom

I bottomed out.
I hit the wall.
And no one even knew.

My face was the same—
My hair—
My hands—

The work went on,
And I smiled.

Although I was very active in my church, even my spiritual life wasn't spiritual; it was superficially religious with the same intellectual approach that I had learned so well in school and that served me well in my career.

I began to realize I had to make a change when I drove into a parking space at 7:30 on the first morning of a new project. Early morning is my best time of day and I love new beginnings. Yet, on this morning when I normally would have been full of energy and excitement, I heard an inner voice say, "I am *so tired*." For the first time this voice got my attention.

The next time I "heard" my inner voice, I was driving home from work in the late afternoon. This time its message was more disturbing. "If you don't get out of here, you're going to die."

Simply stated, I had been living someone else's life. Whose life? The life of the woman I thought I ought to be based on some notion of what was acceptable to other people. But this woman I had concocted was not in alignment with what was in my soul, and some perceptive people saw the symptoms of my pain—allergies, debilitating migraines, workaholism. Increasingly, something inside told me things had to change. Granddaughter of one of the last pioneers who settled the territory that is now called Oklahoma, I felt the strong pull of my ancestry to leave that which was comfortable, secure, and safe to venture into the unknown.

A Prayer for Transformation

Freight trains are heavy, important, on track.
They're noisy and fearless and prompt.
They carry the freight that runs the world.
And they're indispensable.

They're hunched from stuffed cases;
Their planners are full.
Respected, revered, and admired.
You can count on them solid to get the job done.

Sailboats are open and friendly and free—
Flowing with current, catching the wind,
Eyes to horizon and on,
Gliding toward vast father sky.

A sailboat is what I aspire to be,
But can there be metamorphosis
From steel rail to white wind?
What cocoon—will do?

So I struggle on the banks,
Magnets in my pockets,
Pulling me toward important tasks.
But the sail in my soul wants the wind.

Beneath my pain, I was yearning for a better life for myself and those I loved. Love is the most powerful force in the universe. When our yearning grows from love, nothing can stop us. Pain may be an incentive or a by-product of breaking the barriers—but if we love, we are safe.

In a segment of *Family Ties*, the television show that catapulted Michael J. Fox to stardom during the 1980s, the character of Alex P. Keaton asked, “How do you know if you’re good?” The clearest answer he got was, “You know if you’re good from what other people tell you.” But this answer is incomplete. Which other people? If people are giving you conflicting information, which ones do you listen to? And what about the danger of becoming dependent on other people to the detriment of listening to your own inner voice?

On a journey of self-discovery how do you know if you’re on the right track? Out of all the self-help books, spiritual teachings, and conflicting religious beliefs, how do you know which ones are right for you?

Not through wayfaring, but through wayfinding.

A Meditation on Lightning

I drove out of the car lot
Onto rain-slick pavement,
Gently gliding that gray Lincoln
Toward almost-exhausted
Gray clouds.

It was our last dance,
And the skies
Threw silver streamers
At forked angles—
In celebration.

This was the car
I drove to freedom,
And I grasped—hard—
The padded, elegant wheel,
Wanting not to turn loose,

Knowing it was time
For us to part.

I needed You then,
And You were there.

Transition from Wayfaring to Wayfinding

To make the transition from wayfaring to wayfinding, I stopped looking to other people for affirmation. I stopped following prescribed courses of study or career paths. I started paying more attention to the voice within and sought the solace of nature.

Sunset #1

Soft, end-of-day light
Beyond the hills
Beckons my soul fully
To sense, feel, and know.

With the kind guidance of Mother Nature, I began to feel safe enough to release all the pent-up emotion that I had blocked for decades. It came out of me in cascades of grief and anger.

Love, Not Adore

Please don't adore me—
Not even admire
Or deign to call me "bright."

Now, I don't want scorned
Or rejected
Or dumb.

But "adore" is so distant.
"Admire" lacks warmth.
And bright? Well,

I'd rather be close,
Accepted, and loved.

Can I be bright
And be loved?

After I stopped being a wayfarer looking to people, work, places, and things for meaning, after I accepted the humanity of my own deep feelings, after I started observing Nature and listening to her voice, I became calm enough to become a wayfinder.

Wayfinding

The Hawaiian Islands rose from the ocean floor, through volcanic activity over a period of hundreds of thousands of years. When they appeared in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, of course, they were uninhabited. They were lava. They were more remote and isolated than any other archipelago on earth. Yet, by the time Captain James Cook arrived in 1731, people had been living on the islands for generations. Where did they come from? Their ancestors arrived in these islands long before they had the compasses or sextants that had aided Captain Cook and his crew. What tools, then, did they use, besides sheer courage?

The people who first found the Hawaiian Islands most likely came from Asia, Indonesia, and Africa, navigating unknown waters with paddles and canoes, using the ancient art of wayfinding that had been passed down through the generations. Simply stated, the wayfinder knew how to read the stars, the winds, the waves, and the behavior of such animals as dolphins and seabirds to determine where land was. They knew the time of year and the time of day when the winds would be most favorable for sea travel—and the direction in which they were blowing. Memorizing the star

pattern in the sky at the time of their departure, they kept that pattern in mind to know how far and in what direction they had traveled. Uncertain of exactly what they would find, they envisioned an area where they most likely would find land, in much the same way that a golfer tries only to get onto the green before aiming directly at the flag. Similarly, once they got close to land, from the behavior of birds and the nature of the water, wayfinders could find the land.

Similarly, the wayfinder on a journey of self-discovery also learns to receive feedback that lets her know whether or not she is staying on course to reach her goal. Following are the feedback sources I learned to trust:

Insight from Contemplation and Journaling. When I began the practice of contemplation, I called it “meditation,” not knowing the difference between the two. The practice I have today has evolved. In the beginning, I was terrified to look so deeply within, so at the suggestion of a friend, I followed Steinbrecher (1988). I remember the Saturday morning vividly, when I finally found the courage to try the technique suggested in the book. As I remember, the method was something like this: Close my eyes. Imagine I am going into a cave. I turn slightly to the right, then make a “hard left.” Go through the door that is there and wait for a guide to come and lead me. Expecting the worst, I entered the cave of my mind, turned slightly to the right, then made a hard left and slowly, hesitantly, went through the opening that was there. In my mind, I opened my eyes. In reality, my eyes were closed, but as the eyes of my heart opened, tears coursed down my face. I was looking at the most beautiful beach I had ever seen—blue waters, blue sky, gentle breeze, pristine sand. Looking down, I immediately spotted my guide—a happy, chattering crab, scurrying toward me, smiling at me, and beckoning me to follow.

That was how I began the practice of meditation. My experience was beautiful and peaceful. I realized the innermost part of me was sheer joy. For the first time in my life, I knew that the universe is a friendly place.

Since that time, my practice has changed as I have changed. What I do today technically is not meditation, which is meditating on a scripture or a phrase. Instead, I practice contemplation, which is emptying myself to be in the presence of God, alternatively writing and listening. Today, I simply sit quietly and let my mind settle. I “listen” to my inner “guidance system,” known variously as the “still, small voice” or “soul” or “Holy Spirit.” Some mornings, it has nothing to say. Other mornings, it does. I journal what my inner voice says. I trust it. I act on it.

Silence

I extinguish all the voices.
I turn out all the lights.
I lie down and listen to the silent silence.
I hear the silent drip of raindrops,
The silent call of wind.
The silent course of teardrops.
The silence of the void.
Then from the silent silence, I hear a silent voice.

Readings. In earlier times, I read as many as five books a week in an effort to stay current. I no longer do that. Instead, I read when directed by my inner voice. I consider carefully what other people—even people I admire—tell me I “must read.” Instead, I’m more likely to pick up a book after contemplation and open it randomly. Or, after seeing a book often referred to, I consider that it might be something I want to learn about. After I’ve seen the reference three times, I buy it. Now I am reading books about people I would like to become more like. When certain passages *resonate* within me, or stir my heart, I know they are teaching me what I need to learn at that moment. This same voice informs me concerning other media—movies, television shows, plays, musical performances. But I’m also free to turn off the voice and simply enjoy anything I choose.

People I Trust. Fortunately, there are a few people who want the best for me, who understand my life’s path and goals, and who act as a mirror for me when I need a reality check. Often, I simply tell them what has happened and ask them to tell me what they heard. If I’m acting out of anger, they tell me. If they hear sadness or despair, they tell me. If I am violating my own principles, they tell me so. I heed what they say. As I learn and change, I accept new advisors who have experienced what I want or something close to it. If you choose to become a wayfinder, find others to go on the journey with you. Become each other’s trusted advisors.

Art. The art I am attracted to often shows me where I am on the path. For example, early on my journey, I was on the highway, traveling back to where I live. I was driving west, into the sunset, which is sheer beauty and delight for me. But on this day, my inner voice said, “I want to go *home*. But I don’t even know where *home* is.” Not too long later, visiting the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, the painting I was most drawn to was *Christina’s World* by pre-Raphaelite artist Andrew Wyeth. This painting shows a girl on the ground, crawling and reaching toward a house that is still some distance away. This experience let me know I was still pretty early in the journey.

Nature. In a sense nature, like art, has exactly the right lesson for me. My job is to sit, look, listen, experience, and pay attention to what my heart is doing. Often, my inner voice delivers the message from the experience I'm having, as illustrated by this story, which appeared in *The Systems Thinker* (2006):

"This morning as I sat on the deck, sipping a mug of coffee, listening to morning sounds and delighting in the coolness that promises summer won't last forever, I spotted two wrens in the tree between our neighbor's deck and ours. For some unexplained reason, this tree has shed leaves throughout the summer; now, only the tips of the branches are green.

"Before I see the two birds, I hear them. First a melodic, ten-note song. Then a shorter, monotone trill. My eyes follow my ears, searching the bare branches for the source, which turns out to be two small wrens. The wren on the tree's right sings. The wren on the tree's left emits the monotone trill. They repeat their duet. Then again. And again. Over and over again.

"Same species. Two completely different sounds, but clearly connected to each other. They continue for several minutes, their timing impeccable, as if flawlessly following a composer's invisible score. Then, after a long pause, they change the order of their songs. The second bird starts first, with its monotone trill, followed by the first bird's melodic, ten-note song. 'So,' I thought. They know their part, and they sing their part, only varying the order in which they do it.'

"As they flew away, I realized that, since they are the same species, either bird can probably sing either part, depending on some unknown "signal." But they can't "sing the part" of cardinals, because they are wrens, limited and defined by a narrow set of characteristics and capabilities that are described in only 14 lines of print in Peterson's *Field Guide to the Birds of Texas*. Wrens follow patterns. That's all they can do."

Thinking, "There's a story in this," I went to my computer, intending to write it. But first, I checked e-mail and discovered there was more to the story than my experience with two wrens. This message from a client was in my inbox:

"I've realized that I have lived most of my life feeling miserable, and I think I'm too comfortable with that. Comfortably uncomfortable. It's a pattern. The truth is, I don't want to be miserable—to create drama and crises. Every time I take steps

forward, I discover old footprints that reveal a little more about myself. Not pleasant, but good to be aware of so that I can step in a different place and not just keep retracing the old. I know that I want to be content, fulfilled, and peaceful. To get there, I have to make it simple. I'm stepping forward, slowly."

When we are young and impressionable, patterns form within us, from our experiences. As we grow older, we repeat those patterns, both the patterns we love and the patterns we hate. But within each of us is an Authentic Self—the person we are in our hearts—the Truth that transcends the patterns. When we choose to live, think, speak, and hear from our hearts, we transcend limiting patterns. Wrens can't do that, but people can.

The client who e-mailed me the message above has decided not to be defined by other people's actions and behaviors. She has decided to be the person who is in her heart. Her first steps are tentative, unsteady, as first steps always are. But the heart is the home of courage, so slowly, inexorably, she moves forward to live the life she truly wants.

If Alex P. Keaton asked me, "How do you know if you're good?" my answer would be that I don't focus on whether or not I'm "good." What's more important to me is this question, "Am I in alignment with the highest and best intent for my life? Where am I in my journey? What feedback am I getting?"

Feedback from Nature

My friend Jane told me the following story about feedback that came to her from nature, encouraging her not to give up and assuring her that, in the long run, everything would be all right.

Jane knew that all had not been well in the school district before she agreed to be superintendent, but she had no idea of the extent of the problem until six weeks after her arrival, when the business manager brought three fat portfolios to her office that implicated board members in illegal activity. Because the district desperately needed new school buildings, Jane decided to wait to act until after a bond election, which passed. She did, however, call the board president to inform him of what she intended to do, giving him time to think and the chance to turn himself in. Immediately after the successful bond election, she again called the board president to tell him she was on her way to the district attorney's office. This time, he told her she would be fired, adding, "The only way you can save your job is to sleep with me."

Jane realized, in addition to the legal issue already in front of her, she would also have to file a sexual harassment lawsuit, to add to the turmoil.

As if that weren't enough, her husband had suffered a closed head injury a few years earlier and now, disabled, was losing his sanity.

In the midst of the quagmire, Jane took solace walking the land she and her husband had bought in this breathtakingly beautiful part of the country that belied the corruption and difficulty she had found there. On an especially stressful day, she walked all the way to the back of the land, along a small creek swollen by a recent rain. She sat on a rock, looking at the rushing water, crying out to God, "Why am I in this mess? What am I supposed to learn from this awful experience?" When she opened her eyes, she saw something she had never seen in that little creek before—three minnows, swimming frantically in a small whirlpool. "They must have come from the waterfall created by the rains," she thought to herself, and they can't figure out how to get out of here." Then she turned her head, looking up to the wider creek just beyond the small whirlpool. At that moment, she heard a voice within. "Like these minnows," it said, "if you just stop fighting and go with the current, there's calm water ahead. You can't see it, but I can."

Ultimately, she was fired by the malfasant board, despite the outcry of the community. But after that, through community petition, five board members were ousted from the school board. When community leaders asked her to return to the superintendency, Jane declined. The work she had come there to do was done. It was time to move on. Today, her husband deceased, she lives peacefully in that calmer water, in a different state, doing work that she loves with people she respects and who respect her. She is thriving.

The voice that Jane heard—the voice that I hear—is available to anyone who is willing to listen. Some people, like Annie Robinson, call it intuition. Annie Robinson came into my life late. In fact, I almost missed her. She taught the art and science of intuition to a devoted following. One of the stories told at her memorial service was this one, from her daughter. In her last days, Annie kept having dreams about digits that were all the same, like 111 and 555. These dreams kept recurring, night after night. It was only after her death that their meaning became clear. The time recorded on her death certificate was 5:55.

Right up to the end, her inner voice was telling her where she was on the journey. Eventually, she understood.

So it is with all of us. Our work is only to listen.

The *wayfinding* explorers memorized the star pattern of the night sky on the day of their departure. This memory gave them information about how far they had traveled. So it is with the wayfinder on this journey. But it

isn't the stars that we remember—it's the people in our lives when we began the journey and the degree of pain we were feeling.

Most often, journeys of self-discovery begin with pain. It seems that someone is there to inflict the pain, and others are present to comfort you—even, perhaps, to guide you. At some point, you'll realize that a similar situation is happening and those same people are present. You'll also know, from the difference in how you are thinking, feeling, and behaving, that *you* are different. Your pain has lessened or disappeared altogether. You have changed. Compassion has replaced repugnance. Self-confidence has banished victimization. Love has uprooted hatred. Beauty has made ugliness disappear. Faith has overcome fear. Your world is bigger; your God is larger.

The ancient Hawaiians relied on star patterns to guide their way. Our stars are the constellations of people who help us gauge our progress. Who are your “markers”? Where are you on the journey?

Possibilities

Possibilities swirl like whirlpools or supernova.
I watch, puzzled, to know which frame to freeze or seize.

Then realization comes.

Jump in and ride the watery, starry rings through the spiral,
To find the point.

Find Fellow Wayfinders

Genuine success is creating and living a life that aligns with who you truly are. The purpose of this book is to provide a little information, awareness, and many tools that make success possible. People who choose to live the life that is truly theirs make a commitment to speak from their hearts, work the process with rigorous honesty and purity of intent, and be authentic.

Palmer (2000) writes about the importance of “inner work,” noting,

“If people skimp on their inner work, their outer work will suffer as well... We could spread the word that inner work, though it is a deeply *personal* matter, is not necessarily a *private* matter: inner work can be helped along in community... Left to our own devices, we may delude ourselves in ways that others can help us correct” (pp. 91-92).

Therefore, I suggest you find fellow wayfinders, each on his or her own journey of self-discovery. Go at your own pace to deepen the learning and increase the likelihood that you will actually release the parts of your life that aren't working and replace them with the life you truly want to live. Stay in touch with your fellow wayfinders as you live life from the new patterns you have chosen and use the tools for staying on course. You will use each other as a "sounding board" to help you refocus as difficult situations arise.

Recently one of my wayfinding friends called following a telephone conversation with her father that activated old memory. I said, "It's just chemistry—liquid sloshing around in your brain. Here are a couple of things that might change the chemicals." I offered one tool from this book [see Chapter 12 - Toolbox] along with a story from my own life that taught me a lesson.

Similarly, two clients who are partners in a small business have to deal with a third important person who frequently pulls one of them aside for his latest get-rich scheme that inevitably sidetracks them. I suggested, when this happens, that the person who has been pulled aside go immediately to the other partner and say, "I've been hijacked." Don't repeat what he said; that would only reinforce it. The other partner, upon hearing the word "hijacked," will refocus the partner on the mission and goals of the organization, the progress that has been made, and the next positive step they have agreed to. They will continue to talk until centered, with all vestiges of the hijacking having disappeared from mind.

These are examples of how we can help each other. Using this book as your guide, you will awaken your truthful *realization* of how your brain and memory system have developed, over time, and that, along the way, working with an underdeveloped brain, you might have stored memories that do not serve you well and that are actually blocking you from living the life you want. You will complete a process for *releasing* the patterns that don't work for you and *creating* new ones. You will establish a firm foundation for living your new life. Then you will use the tools for staying on course to sustain the changes you have made. You will have become a *Wayfinder*.

Chapter 1 Exercises

1-1. Have you had any experiences similar to those described in Chapter 1? What are they? How did they change you?

1-2. What spiritual work have you already done? How did it change you?

1-3. What's the next major learning in your journey that you want to acquire?

1-4(a). What feelings come up for you as you reflect on Chapter 1?

1-4(b). If your answer is fear, what is the source of that fear? How old is it? What do you want to do with it?