

GUIDEPOSTS on the SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

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Markers for Hidden Treasure

Winter in Colorado is a Texan's delight. We descend upon the slopes, fill up the hotels, and relish the mountain scenery. The year I set up practice, Gwen and I chose to make our Texas citizenship official by engaging in the wintery rite of passage called skiing. After spending a week enjoying clear days and daily sprinkles of fresh powder, two feet of snow fell the evening prior to our departure. It covered an area from southern Colorado to mid-New Mexico. Our drive south that morning inched through canyons with extreme care, but I felt certain that once we reached the plains, we could pick up speed and make our destination before nightfall.

As we crested the last hill, however, my certainty crumbled. Snow blanketed the plains to the tops of fence posts. The sky was overcast with white featureless clouds. Horizon met sky imperceptibly, and the only color on the landscape was an occasional farm house or leafless tree. Road was indistinguishable from snowy field. We halted while visions of vacation days wasted played through our heads.

Then I *saw* them. At first they were inconspicuous, and though I had driven this road before, I never recalled noticing them. But there they were---small circular reflectors peeping out of the snow on either side of the highway, outlining the way. The wisdom of the highway department had foreseen this day. They installed light reflecting *guideposts* which now rose just above the snow. Our path was now visible. With careful discernment, we could now proceed, the guideposts outlining our way to home.

Our Instinctual Program

Those of us who have heard the call of the Spirit to know God in His inner Kingdom are aware that the pathway we trod is obscure. If we are to ever find our way Home through that land of indistinct landmarks and hidden obstacles, we need guideposts to mark the way. We long to find His hidden treasure, but without a map of God's *individual* plan for our lives, we often frustrate, longing for God's direction to be more clear.

Since the Bible did not set down a psychology in modern terms, discerning inner guideposts has been a great challenge for Christians. Through our intuition, we at times have a *sense* of God's leading, but defining this is difficult. And what about those day to day needs to be sure we are walking in the Spirit? What if we are off course without knowing it? How can we discover this before it is too late?

One treasure I found buried in the Bible opened my eyes to a gift of guidance found deep within our souls. Buried within the image of God given us at creation are the *instincts* of development which can lead us to God. "Instincts!" you say. "I thought instincts were those things that made us want air, food, and sex. How can something as animal as instincts lead us to God?"

But it is true. Let us look at Romans 1 and see what God says.

¹⁹since what may be known about God is plain to them (ie. wicked men who suppress the truth), because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities---His eternal power and divine nature---have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so they are without excuse.

At first it may not be obvious how this reference indicates that our instincts can lead us to God. But notice, it was *since the creation of the world* that man could perceive God through what He made. This means that before the fall, mankind was *preprogrammed* to perceive from created things the reality of God. The material world by itself does not give this knowledge. There is something in the soul that is designed to *react* to the created realm with a movement of consciousness toward God.

Preprogramming in the psyche can be called “instinctual”. We can therefore conclude that within all of our instinctual natures, there resides a pathway to God. It is in a certain state of disrepair due to the fall, but it must be there or Paul could not have said with such confidence that people who do not know God are “without excuse”.

Discovering the Path

Now if such a pathway exists, one would think that scientists studying the nature of man would some day stumble on to it. Indeed, several schools of psychological theory have noted that a person’s development is heading toward an end. Development seems to be more than taking us to “illusion” as Freud suggested¹. There seems to be some kind of innate call leading us higher. Maslow² called this process, “self actualization”; Carl Jung³ termed it “individuation”; and most of us have perhaps pictured a vaguely defined “maturation” somewhere out there in our own theorizing. As Christians we can gain much by appreciating these concepts.

But for us the “chief end of man” always remains that described in the Westminster catechism⁴, “to know God and enjoy Him forever.” Could it be that transcending the psychological stages of “self-actualization” or “individuation” waits a loving, personal God guiding us Home? I believed there was, but I had not yet seen Him through the close up lens of psychotherapy. I needed to meet Duane.

Duane’s Story

Duane was thirty eight years old when he entered treatment. He was a successful computer programmer, and by most social measures, Duane would have been considered “normal”. He was seeking treatment because of a worry problem. His particular troublesome worry was that he had left bugs in his computer programs.

In most areas of his life, Duane was not a worrier. He had a good marriage and family, he enjoyed his job, and his family of origin was loving and stable. Religiously, though respectful toward Christianity, he did not regard himself as a Christian and denied a personal experience of God. The one item that seemed suspicious in his history was his father’s sudden death when Duane was three. He had no conscious recollection of the father, remembering only his uncles who provided him with substantial, consistent masculine support.

We searched a long time to find the root of Duane’s anxiety and taught him helpful techniques for controlling about seventy five percent of it. However, the source for the remaining twenty five percent was never found until Duane had the following dream.

I was in a co-ed prison. We were served beans and weenies all the time. I was on a work detail. I see my three year old self guiding us to see my uncle. This is the uncle who is the retired minister. He had come to visit me in prison. The three year old says, “Pay attention to your uncle. He has something important to say.” The dream then ended.

Imagine how you would feel if you saw your younger self vividly telling you to pay attention to something important. Like you, Duane felt very intrigued by the urging of his dream, so we used imagination to recreate the dream in the session and let it continue.

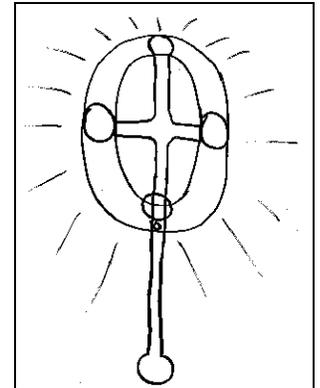
My uncle has a Bible in his hand. He starts off at a younger age then rapidly changes to his present age. He opens his Bible, and I go through various age changes as he reads the Bible. As I get to age forty (Duane’s then current age), I start listening to what he has to say. He points out something interesting. The three year old is outside the bars of my cell looking in. He slips between the bars and pushes my uncle and I apart. He says, “No! I don’t want you to learn that. You’ll be hurt. Can’t you remember how you were hurt the last time? You

believed, and your father left. Don't give anything to God. He took something away." The three year old is angry and violent.

Duane then elaborated saying, "I lost something I loved very much. I don't know who to hold responsible except for God. It's like the three year old is saying, 'I'll never forgive.'"

Following this revelation, Duane and I worked to alleviate the longstanding hurt and anger which had remained dormant since his father's death. Thereafter, Duane had several dreams about beautiful but expensive antique telegraph keys. Collecting such keys was a hobby at which he was quite accomplished. The dream sequence was climaxed in the following:

I was in antique row. In one *familiar* store there were no telegraph keys. I went to a *new* antique shop. They had lots of pieces. I was looking at one miniature which was highly collectable when a friend from college walked up and handed me two miniature keys---one a hundred years old and highly desirable worth \$1000. I put it down.



As he pondered the dream, the high cost of the keys reminded Duane of the adage "if you want to dance you have to pay the piper". He saw that the dream related to a struggle between his old familiar world view and something new that was trying to emerge. He could sense there would be a cost whether he decided for the old or the new, but he felt he was in the "dance" and had to decide something. I had him draw the most impressive of the telegraph keys, and this is reproduced here.

Symbols which we find fascinating and radiate light like this key were called by Jung "symbols of transcendence". These symbols arise to indicate the activity of the highest, most whole and mature part of the psyche. Jung called this part the archetypal "Self". In German, the term "Self" translates better "the Its Self" suggesting a clear distinction from the personal conscious ego, sometimes referred to as "myself". Jungians see the Self as a master program of the soul which organizes the activity of all the smaller instinctual subprograms of development into a movement toward wholeness. Christian theology describes a part with similar functioning as the "human spirit". We assert that the Holy Spirit works through our spirit to connect us to God.

Symbols of transcendence serve to focus the attention of conflicting parts of the psyche on the possibility of a more unified state of mind at a higher level of maturity. Subjectively, it feels like a higher calling. By helping to unify warring parts of ourselves, inner harmony is promoted along with, for those who will receive it, a movement toward God. I hope no one misses the fact that the overall shape of Duane's telegraph key is that of a cross. Duane noticed it too and called it a Celtic cross.

Duane's associations to the long arm of the cross were that it represented "the long path from here to there in life". We noticed that place he referred to as "there" was enclosed by an oval and recognized as a figure called a "mandala". The mandala is a symmetrical geometrical figure, sometimes elaborate, sometimes simple, which represents psychological wholeness, the highest spirit of man, or the transcendent God Himself. The circle is the simplest of these figures---the "Rose Window" of Notre Dame cathedral perhaps the most famous.

Duane was impressed by this symbol and began spontaneously asking for readings in Christianity. He found C.S. Lewis much to his liking. A month and a half later, his final intellectual hurdle to faith was overcome after exploring the following dream.

I was visiting a ham radio operator friend. He wanted me to climb his tower to work on his antenna. I replied, "I don't climb towers, Phil. I have acrophobia.:" He encouraged me to try, so I did with apprehension. At the top of the tower, I stepped off of the ladder and hovered above the ground.

This hovering lead him to discuss the possibility of supernatural intrusions into the natural world. He realized that his current belief in a cosmos working strictly according to natural law was merely his unexamined assumption. By the next session, after accepting the possibility of a reality above natural law, his remaining anxiety had dropped from 25% to 15%.

Duane's making peace with God was climaxed quietly in the following dream.

My Grandad had a terminal illness. The doctors rolled him in on a table. They said, "We can keep him alive for another few hours if you want. "I didn't want him hooked up to the tubes. I wanted the death to be natural.

Duane then talked of having to die before we are reborn and saw the dream as representing his letting go and turning his life over to God. In his words, he had "received the gift". Thereafter, his lingering anxiety diminished to 5% or less. Five sessions later he was ready to end treatment. Follow up for the next several years showed continued freedom from anxiety and growth in his new faith.

The Bugs in Duane's Program

So, you see, Duane *did* have a bug in his program. The bug was not external; it was internal. Notice that whatever or *Whoever* spoke to Duane through his dream seemed pretty intent on his moving toward God---intent enough to make him anxious until he took care of the issue.

I need to emphasize that no suggestion of movement in a spiritual direction occurred by me through this time. Spiritual issues were forthrightly discussed when he brought them up, but all movement toward this conclusion was initiated from within his own psyche primarily through the medium of dreams.

With Duane, I had finally seen something I could conclude was not the psyche only, but God at work in a soul. By confessing the bitterness held frozen in his three year old heart and experiencing the relieving sorrow, this man's heart became open. Then by following the gentle prod of spontaneous symbol production, he discovered a relationship with God. I knew that I had never cajoled him. I only responded to the realities that arose inside. Someone other than me was the evangelist here.

The Continuing Search

I wanted to learn to cooperate with that Someone, letting the written and living Word of God inform my understanding. So I continued to ask, seek, and knock (Matt. 7:7). I increased my efforts to find Christian and psychological wisdom that would teach me to recognize and cooperate with the force that converted and healed Duane. It seemed reasonable that the symbolic experiences which guided Duane might be a common method the Holy Spirit uses to call people to Christ. However if I, as an evangelical, was going to have confidence in this method of cooperating with God, I needed to see it affirmed in scripture. I did not have to look far.

Jesus and Symbols

As I searched the scriptures to discover how God relates to the symbolic realm of life, I have come to believe, not only does Jesus *allow* our interest in the symbolic, he *expects* his disciples to be tuned in to this realm of reality--- so tuned in that they see symbolic meanings in everyday life. Indeed, when Peter did not understand a symbolic statement Jesus made, the Master became harsh and somewhat irritated. Watch as Peter and Christ interact.

Matthew 15

¹² Then the disciples came to him and asked, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?"

¹³ He replied, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. ¹⁴ Leave them; they are blind guides. If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit."

¹⁵ Peter said, “Explain the parable to us.”

¹⁶ “Are you still so dull?” Jesus asked them.

It has taken me many years of being a Christian and thirteen years of psychiatric study and practice to understand this reaction in my Lord. Why the frustration? What was wrong with Peter’s asking for an explanation?

To answer this requires discerning what Jesus had been up to in Peter’s life during the previous chapters. We must realize that the disciples were the men who Jesus must prepare to receive baptism in the same Spirit with which he was filled. He had only three years to shift their focus away from over-reliance on the visible world and learn to trust in the invisible. God was doing unheard of things among His people. The collective mentality of the disciples’ generation had only dim awareness of what messiah was to be. In three years, these twelve would see him no more. If they were going to rise above their society’s limited vision, he would have to teach the men entirely new ways of seeing.

Learning by Immersion

Jesus’ method of shifting their focus to the unseen kingdom was like learning a foreign language by immersion. You are placed in a classroom and nothing is spoken except the language to be learned. Jesus placed his disciples in an environment filled with the symbolic, and he was fully expectant that they would learn “symbolese”. Immediately after his commissioning of the disciples in Matthew 10, Jesus presents them with the following set of parables and symbol-rich experiences:

1) 11:1-6 Jesus answers the inquiry from John the Baptist’s men by pointing to the symbolic message in his actions.

2) 11:7-15 He uses word pictures to praise John referring to him as “Elijah”. He ends with the prophetic refrain warning hearers to put on their symbolic “ears”-- “He who has ears let him hear.”

3) 11:16-19 He compares the skeptical generation with whining children in a marketplace.

4) 11:25-26 He gives thanks to God that the “children” understand him but not the “wise”.

5) 11:28-30 He offers them the rest of his “yoke”.

6) 12:33-37 He compares the people to trees and the pharisees to a brood of vipers.

7) 12:38-41 He offers the listeners only the sign (symbol) of Jonah.

8) 12:48-50 He refers to his disciples as his mother and brothers.

9) 13:1-23 He tells the parable of the sower explaining that the reason he speaks in parables is so that only the people with uncalloused hearts can understand. He then explains the parable to his closer followers.

10) 13:24-30 He tells the parable of the weeds and wheat.

11) 13:31-32 He tells the parable of the mustard seed.

12) 13:33 He tells the parable of the yeast.

13) 13:37-43 He explains the above three parables and admonishes once again, “He who has ears let him hear.”

14) 13:44 He tells the parable of the treasure hidden in a field.

15) 13:45 He tells the parable of the pearl of great price.

16) 13:47-51 He tells the parable of the drag net.

17) 13:52 He likens those who understand the parables to a house owner with both new and old treasures.

18) 14:13-21 Jesus feeds the five thousand and then later (16:9) expects the disciples to have understood its symbolic meaning.

19) 14:22-34 Jesus walks on the water. When Peter fails to stay atop the water for long, Jesus admonishes, “You of *little faith*, why did you doubt?”

20) 15:1-20 Jesus uses word pictures to confront the Pharisees.

This brings us to Jesus' rebuke of Peter for his "dullness" when he asked about the meanings of his metaphors. Jesus had just spent months giving Peter lessons on symbolic style of thought. This immersion in symbols was obviously important to Jesus--so important that he became frustrated when Peter failed to catch on.

In the next event, it becomes doubly clear what Jesus is doing. We now see the faith of a Canaanite woman praised by Christ. Look closely at what it is that Jesus is calling "great faith".

The Great Faith of a "Hound"

Matthew 15

22 A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession."

23 Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us."

24 He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel"

Notice! This again is a word picture.

25 The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said.

26 He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs."

Jesus really seems to be stuck in this symbolic mode, doesn't he?

27 "Yes, Lord," she said, "but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."

Well, look here! The woman is responding with a metaphor herself. What will Jesus do now?

*28 Then Jesus answered, "Woman, you have great **faith!** Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.*

Notice the contrast between the "little faith" comment to Peter and the "great faith" comment to the woman. If I was Peter, I would be feeling really humbled right now. I'd be wondering, too, what the Canaanite woman did that I did not do when I tried to walk on the water. "Three feet on top of the water isn't bad for a beginner, is it?" What was Jesus seeing in her that he was commending as faith?

An Action Parable

Now we see Jesus do what might be called an action parable. He feeds the four thousand. We can see he intended it to be symbolic because later he expects his disciples to have interpreted it. (16:10) Imagine being Peter as he picked up the seven baskets full of broken pieces. He feels the tension of his perplexity at what the Master is trying to teach him. He knows Jesus has commended a pagan Canaanite woman for her faith. And here he was, a son of Abraham, and still apparently missing the essence of Christ's teaching. What was it he was still missing? What gives?

The Midterm Exam

Jesus next refuses to give a sign to the Pharisees and Saducees referring once again to the sign of Jonah. Following this, the disciples and Jesus went across the lake, forgetting to take bread.

Matthew 16

6 "Be careful," Jesus said to them. "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees."

⁷ They discussed this among themselves and said, “It is because we didn’t bring any bread.”

⁸ Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked, “You of little **faith**,...

“Oh, drat!” thinks Peter. “There are those words again! What does a man have to do to please this guy?”

“...why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread? ⁹ Do you still not understand? Don’t you remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? ¹⁰ Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? ¹¹ How is it you don’t understand that I was not talking to you about bread? But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” ¹² Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Peter did it again. He interpreted the Master’s saying as about the *outside* world when it was about something *inside*. He missed the metaphor. He forgot to turn on his symbolic thinking. This is the same as before. He was rebuked for “dullness” after the symbolic remarks on the Pharisees, rebuked for “little faith” after the lake incident, and rebuked for “little faith” again when he muffed the metaphor this time. I can imagine Peter thinking, “The Canaanite woman did not seem to do that much, but she was commended for “great faith”. I wonder how come...? Wait! Maybe this is it! She answered Jesus in a word picture like he has been using to teach us. Maybe there is something important about thinking symbolically that has to do with “great faith”. Could it be that opening the imagination to imagery, word pictures, and symbols is important for growing a faith like Jesus wants us to?”

I think Peter is finally starting to catch on.

The Semester Final

We now reach the climax of this entire phase of Christ’s training his men. He wants them to get the full vision of the “good news” before he starts giving them the “bad news”. He wants to connect them to the functions of mind that will leave them open to the Spirit, his future presence with them, before he lays on them the news of his passion and death. Immediately after Peter passes this “final exam” we read...

Matthew 16

²¹ *From that time on, Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.*

This pivotal event once again revolved around Peter, the one who would ultimately lead the group of men who would change the world. It is the famous scene at Caesarea Philippi where Jesus seems to be testing his men to see if they have yet caught the vision.

Matthew 16

¹³ *...he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”*

¹⁴ *They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”*

¹⁵ *“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”*

Now you must remember, Jesus is a pretty controversial figure at this time. He is not conforming to many of the popular notions of what the messiah would be. Peter has hoped for the messiah, but has been frustrated for many months trying to please this man he has followed, has gotten a number of rebukes, has faced social ostracism from the rulers of the temple, etc. Much within him would likely want

to rebel at the hope that this was the long awaited King. Yet something had broken through in Peter--- something that went beyond his discouragement at Jesus' displeasure, something that transcended the social norms, and something that would make Peter risk everything he was for the sake of this man.

16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

And notice Christ's reply.

17 "Blessed art you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.

18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

"I Passed!"

This is quite a soliloquy in praise of one who has failed so repeatedly to get the picture. What has happened to Peter that allowed for this transformation? Revelation has broken through. Light has dawned. And Jesus refers to this inner revelation of himself in Peter as the foundation stone of the church.

Now I ask you, did any of the training that Jesus did before this moment contribute to the insight that had dawned in Peter? Of course it did. And on what aspect of psychological development was that training focused? It was focused on opening Peter's mind to symbols. So hopefully you can now see how important developing our symbolic mind is if we are to receive the revelation of Christ in our souls. As Jesus said, "A time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth. ... God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." (John 4:23-24). Doctrinal truth is important, and our reasoning evangelical minds love it. We pride ourselves at discerning truth from error and being believers in the Word. But Jesus answered with the statement above in order to circumvent a doctrinal question posed by the Samaritan woman at the well. Jesus moved her focus from doctrine to spirit without ignoring the former. For the "spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him" (Eph. 1:17) to happen, I am convinced from scripture, convinced from empirical observation of patients, and convinced from personal experience that the opening to this spirit involves activating the symbolic mind.

Symbols as Guideposts

Symbols, you see, are our *guideposts* in the unseen world of soul and spirit. Whether we are in darkness of night or blinding whiteness of snow, we need the symbolic mind to enable our seeing the unseen and hearing the unheard. Feelings are vague, and reason and doctrine are overly limiting. But symbols arising from our deep inner soul can provide a richness of meaning that can lift our soul's experience to God. They are the messages from our instinctual programming (Romans 1: 19-20), and sometimes from God himself (see Acts 10:1-48), designed, like in Duane, to lead us further on the road to Him.

We live in a time in which New Age religion abounds. We need the historic "truth" side of our faith to provide mooring and discernment. New Age religion is heavily into symbolic thought, and without links to the God of history and the Bible, they flounder and think themselves "gods". Satan sometimes attacks us through our imagination and people, even believers, apply symbols in ways that show lack of understanding and discernment. But let us not relegate the realm of imagination and symbol totally to the category of false religion as some evangelical authors have done.¹ Let us sanctify our imagination and discover how to cooperate with the God who is creator of imagination and symbol. Let us learn from the Master, like Peter, that consciousness of the symbolic is necessary for "great faith". Let us open to the reality that the Holy Spirit and human spirit speak to us regularly through image and metaphor in the world and in our soul. Let us attune ourselves to notice. May we heed what Jesus (Matt. 11:15) and the Spirit (Rev. 3:22) are saying to the churches, "*He who has ears let him hear.*"