

The Journey of a Lifetime

By Heather Locy

It had always been a dream of mine to visit the American West, particularly some of the National Parks. Having lived my life in various cities on the East Coast, even traveling a bit overseas, I had never seen the things I associated with the West: rugged wide-open spaces, towering, purple-white mountains, gurgling geysers rhythmically spewing steaming water, or the way the moon and stars light up the sky in the desert when the sun goes down. When my husband came home one day sharing how some friends had taken a months-long cross-country road trip, digitally documenting their adventures, I could feel my heart skip a beat at the thought of such a trip together with our three (at the time) young children. I expressed my excitement to someday do the same. Hearing the desire in my voice, and perhaps experiencing his own 'call of the wild', he looked at me and said, 'Book it'.

I quickly realized that knowing where you want to go and how to get there are two entirely different things. I didn't even really know where to start to plan a proper trip. I needed to sit with our friends and learn from their experiences. I needed to read guidebooks. And I needed to know how to get where we wanted to go and what we might see along the way. All of these preparations informed what was a wonderful and truly epic adventure for our family.

As I've reflected on my process of spiritual formation, I thought back to that summer and couldn't help but notice the similarities.

Several years after that trip, as I entered mid-life, I noticed a shift in myself and my desire for God. I was long steeped in church and its culture, having walked with God for many years, but I noticed things were starting to break down a bit. I had a disorienting sense of being increasingly unable to apply and align my head knowledge of God to my heart. There was a disconnect between what I knew to be true about God (what it meant to be a Christ-follower) and my internal and external responses to what I was experiencing in my life.

Over time, I recognized a deep need to know God and myself in a new way. I just wasn't sure where to go or even how to get there, but I knew I had a choice to make. I also sensed it was a crucial 'life or death' type of choice. Was I willing to surrender to a process of learning, growth and healing? Did I want to seek Him above all else? Allow Him to lead me out of the wilderness I found myself in? Learn to listen for His still small voice? After seeking counsel and much discerning prayer, God brought an opportunity to join the Christian Spiritual Formation program that brought clarity to my questions and taught me how to walk more fully into those desires.

I found that any journey, whether it's an American West adventure or an internal soul journey, must have a destination. Without a destination, it's just wandering. Our destination as followers of Christ is greater maturity, Christlikeness, and capacity to love God with all our heart, mind, and soul.

And like any path, there are signposts along the way. A formation journey deeper into Christ is no different.

One of the first and most important signposts is before we embark we must count the cost and then risk following the path to our destination. As believers we must too ask ourselves what we really long for and be oriented correctly, with our eyes fixed on Jesus and our hearts pointed to Him as our True North.

But we do not walk alone nor are we left to our own devices. God is our Guide; an ever present companion, shepherding us, and loving us along the way. We have the resources of the Word of God, the wisdom of saints that have gone before us, and our fellow travelers to help encourage and sharpen us.

And He provides tools along the way - the spiritual disciplines that we practice, such as prayer, silence, solitude, and sabbath. These things are helpful as we navigate, surrender, and pay attention to the deeper invitations of God and the Spirit's movement in our souls. They help us know God and ourselves better.

I was recently struck by the words of John in John 4:42, "Now we believe, not because of what you said, but **because we ourselves have heard Him and we know this is indeed the Christ.** The Savior of the world." We serve a God who walks with us; One who is compassionate and loving, whose mercies never cease; Who reveals Himself to us in ways both intimate and unexpected.

I am profoundly grateful I said 'yes' at a crucial moment. May God grant us all the strength and desire to continue to respond to His invitations to greater Love.