

Spiritual Practice 6.28.20 "Trail Marker"

I have a spiritual practice this morning for those of us that might be feeling disoriented, unmoored, overwhelmed, paralyzed or lost.... these days. Lydia will walk us through this powerful Psalm 13 in just a few minutes - that starts with David, expressing his own frustration of feeling deeply lost from God. Isolated from God. He says, "HOW LONG GOD?" "How long will you keep your back turned away from me?" "How long will you not look at me?"

Maybe you too, this morning are eager for God's face to turn to you. Some sign, a trail marker - anywhere in this vast landscape that God is with you on the journey - as uncut and as wild as the path may seem.

A friend of mine, recently reminded me of the Appalachian Mountain Club's (the AMC) advice * when you go off trail, when you are hiking, and lose your bearings.

So this morning - I thought I'd take the AMC's advice and offer it to you, as it sits in a deep spiritual place for me... so here's the first of the steps if you are feeling lost....

1. The first is to extend grace to yourself. (as GOd does).

There's no need to beat yourself up or inflict shame on yourself --for the ways you feel alone, unknowing, afraid or overwhelmed.

The AMC says no matter how experienced a hiker you might consider yourself to be, no matter how many times you've been out on the trails, how many 4,000 footers you've bagged, how much great gear you have... **"You are not an experienced hiker when you are not on a familiar trail." David felt lost even though he knew and loved God... We can feel lost even if we are trying our best - because these days are unfamiliar.**

So a great spot to start is to extend grace to yourself. Release undo responsibility.

2. Stop. The AMC says, "Moving isn't helpful until you know which way to go, and if you're thrashing around in the forest, you can't follow the next three steps they recommend."

So I invite you right now to stop. To truly be still. In your body, spirit and heart....

To really stop can feel discomforting, humbling.

But to charge, react, thrash our way through - without at least a brief pause - has the potential to make ourselves even more lost and disoriented.

So right now to the best you can.. Stop.

Quiet your heart.

Quiet your mind - Stop overthinking. Over analyzing.

Stop your body from moving.. Your leg from bouncing... Your eyes from scanning.. Your finger from tapping.

Just stop.

It is the most powerful action that allows us to orient ourselves to God.

2. Breathe. *“Anxiety can lead to panic, but breathing can help cool your nerves. If you don’t know where you are, staying calm will help you think clearly and figure out your next move.”*

Breathing helps let all the feelings tumble through us. Let’s the ones that we don’t need to hang on to - fall to the ground... and the feelings we do need to feel - to inform us - to help us clarify our next steps. Because they often are the ones that show where our deep passion lies.

.. which might be to keep staying still or take a nap.

.. or to eat a snack.

.. or look at our map again - with fresh eyes.

3 deep breaths. IN & OUT, IN & OUT, IN & OUT. FULL STRETCH OUT of arms..body.. So that breath reaches through ALL OF US...

3. Look for landmarks. *“This might be big, like a mountain, but it could be closer and more modest, like an unusual mushroom or a hollow log. The denser the undergrowth, the more observant you need to be.”*

- What are the landmarks of God in your day?
- Where have you noticed God today already?
 - Maybe something big - something really noticeable already has occurred - like you woke up today! PRAISE GOD! Or your new dog, you just adopted is sitting in your kitchen greeting you eagerly this morning... :)

- Likely there are some small - more intertwined markers of God too - in the undergrowth, the ordinary moments of your day?
- Take a moment to think - where you have already seen the markers of God TODAY.

The more we take note, as a practice, to recognize these markers of God in our days - the more we can identify God in the brush, on the unmarked trails.... That we will surely journey on.

Lastly,

4. Listen. *“Most people who wander off-trail are within 300 yards of it—close enough to hear the voices of other hikers, which tells you which way to walk.”*
So when you feel lost - listen.

Don't just hear.. But listen for God's voice.

Right now - take a moment... listen for the voice of God. It's there.

- **“Hi, God.”**

- **What kind of day is God inviting you into?**
- **What kind of trail does God want to take with you? Listen.**

It is important when we are lost to stop & breathe.... Look for God's landmarks & Listen. This is the work important not just for our journey - but for the next generation, and the generation after that, and the generation after that... what trail markers will we leave? What new trails will we cut?

Prayer: “Dear Spirit of God, our TRUE NORTH - thank you for being our guide. Help us to listen to your invitation to us now - maybe it's that we don't get back on the same trails we've been on so many times before... Maybe you want us to be bumped off trail right now.. But God could you promise to find us there... Could you promise to guide us still - through the darkest and thickest of forest - over mountains - and through valleys - could you dear God, dwell in our spirit - BE OUR COMPASS - no matter how turned around we get?”

***Source:**

<https://www.outdoors.org/articles/amc-outdoors/alone-lost-heres-get-found>