

Balmer. You did a grand job and I am immensely grateful.
Thank you so much.

Chapter One

What Does it Mean to Follow the Road of Blessing?

First of all; it doesn't seem to matter at what point you join the road. If there are aspects of this Way that you struggle with – forgiveness, maybe; or trust, or letting go – there is no need to agonize over it. In time, it will come to you; the way will open.

If you read through chapters 9–11 of Luke's gospel, an amazing adventure of Spirit-filled ministry unfolds before you.

The Twelve are given authority by Jesus to heal the sick and cast out demons, to live by faith and preach the Kingdom. Wherever they go, people are healed – word even reaches Herod, people think maybe John the Baptist has been raised from the dead! Then comes the feeding of the five thousand (a disciples' miracle – Jesus blessed and broke the bread, but the disciples fed the people) and then the transfiguration (when the glory that was in Jesus blazed out visibly, and his disciples caught a glimpse of his wondrous light and power). After that, come arguments and failure and lots of teaching taken on board. They experience rejection and volunteer to call down fire from heaven in retribution, but Jesus says, 'Er – no!'

*Blessed is the man
who does not walk in the
counsel of the wicked
or stand in the way of
sinners
or sit in the seat of mockers.
But his delight is in the law
of the Lord,
and on his law he meditates
day and night.
He is like a tree planted by
streams of water,
which yields its fruit in
season
and whose leaf does not
wither.
Whatever he does prospers.
Not so the wicked!
They are like chaff
that the wind blows away.
Therefore the wicked will
not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the assembly
of the righteous.
For the Lord watches over
the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked
will perish.*

The maxim 'nothing avails but perfection' may be spelled *paralysis*.

Winston Churchill



Their ranks are swelled and seventy-two go out on the next signs-and-wonders tour. They return with joy, reporting that even demons submit to them. Jesus rejoices at the power of the Spirit filling them: 'I have given you authority to... overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you' (Luke 10:19). That's *amazing!*

They travel on, the crowd swells, Jesus teaches and tells stories.

And then – only *then* – one of his disciples turns to him and says, 'Lord – teach us to pray.'

What happened to the golden rule every church leader knows, that without prayer you can't even open the church council or eat your tea, never mind cast out a demon or heal an incurable disease?

This demonstrates that there is no right order to do things in. The road of blessing is holistic. You don't have to work your way up through the ranks. God meets you where you are and puts into your hands whatever you are ready for – generously, unstintingly, joyously.

A friend of mine graduated from university knowing he wanted to teach, but feeling ready for, and drawn to, teaching only older students: 16-to-18-year-olds. When he applied for

I will prepare and some day
my chance will come.

Abraham Lincoln



teaching jobs, they laughed at him. 'Oh, sure! We all want to teach the older students, it's more rewarding. But *we* had to work our way up, and start at the bottom with the little kids, and so will *you*!' Tough on my friend, tougher still on the little kids, and badly irrational. But God is not the County Council Education Department Board. He has no pecking orders; you start with what you are ready for, you begin where you are. Wherever and whoever you are, however much or little faith you have, you can start right in.

But though it doesn't matter where you join the road or how you make a start, it matters very much that you do actually begin. These are the strongest things in life:

- The Name of Jesus.
- The energy of the Holy Spirit.
- Truth spoken in the innocence of a child.
- Habit.

As following the road of blessing becomes a habit in your life, though it continues to be costly it begins to sit easy on you: 'For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light' (Matthew 11:30).

There is a sense in which force of habit carried Jesus through Gethsemane, his trial and the cross: by the time he had got that far, he would not have known how else to be but the way he was, what else to say but the truth, how else to respond but

Start by doing what's necessary; then do what's possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible.

Francis of Assisi



Habit is stronger than reason.

George Santayana





with faithfulness, authority and love. Jesus always walked in the will of God; his feet knew no other way to go.

When we begin following in the road of blessing, there are old habits and patterns of thought and speech to be broken; and new habits to form. They have to be laid down layer by layer, patiently; becoming second nature and then, over time, our actual nature – the people we have become. The way to form a habit is to begin.

So, on the understanding that we can join the road of blessing at whatever point we find ourselves, and that the important thing is to make a beginning, let's look now at the concepts and principles involved.

The first principle is that there is a pattern to life: it is orderly, not random. 'Chance', 'luck', 'happenstance', 'mere coincidence' are interpretations put upon events by people with an incomplete grasp of what is happening to them, and an unwillingness or inability to create a habit of seeing what we believe instead of believing what we see. Life is intentional, meaningful. The universe is flowing in a particular direction – the direction of God's will. 'We know that all things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to his purpose' (Romans 8:28, my paraphrase).

The letter to the Colossians speaks of the essential unity, or integrity, of all created things:

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly...

COLOSSIANS 3:12-16 NIV



[Christ] is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fulness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Colossians 1:17-20

This means that everything that is co-exists in a single organic unity orchestrated and nourished by Christ. His atoning death on the cross has resulted in absolutely everything now being at one (that's what atonement – at-one-ment – is). The cross of Christ is at the heart of creation, holding all things together: and the spiritual victory of his sacrifice has brought about an imperishable and eternal healing, not to humankind only but to the whole of creation – to the entirety of the way things are.

The road of blessing is created by this underlying framework of reality. It is there because God the creator is there. Like a spider spinning her web from the substance of her own body, God spins or breathes or sings out of his own *ruach* every created thing.

Ruach is a Hebrew word that crops up in the Old Testament. It can mean 'wind' or 'spirit' or 'breath'. This multi-meaning

To be really means to inter-be. Just as a flower relies on the sunshine, on the cloud, on the earth in order to be, so it is with all of us. None of us can be by ourselves alone.

Thich Nhat Hanh



So rather than assuming that we are stuck with levels of self-interested consumerism, individualism and materialism which must defeat any attempts to develop sustainable economic systems, we need to recognize that these are not fixed expressions of human nature.

Richard Wilkinson & Kate Pickett in *The Spirit Level*



allows us to access an understanding that the spiritual and physical are not really separate. They are at the same time one and not-one. So of course we see quickly that a soul is not the same as a body – and yet separating the two means death.

I am using this rather clumsy term ‘not-one’, instead of saying ‘two’, because ‘two’ implies the possibility of duality, of separating right out. We are never separated completely from God or each other. We are never ‘two’:

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:38–39

Duality does not apply. Even so, it is possible to see that there are times when we are in disharmony with ourselves, each other and God; there are times when we are attempting to travel against the flow of God’s blessing; there are times when we feel far away from God; and we do each have our own unique and individual being. So we are one, yet not-one.

The word *ruach* comes right at the beginning of the Bible:



Now the earth was formless [*tohu*, confused] and empty [*bohu*, desolate, waste], darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit [*ruach*] of God [*Elohim*, a plural form that takes a singular verb – the first implication, for Christians, of the Trinity] was hovering over the waters.

Genesis 1:2

However, when God creates Adam, the story (Genesis 2:7) says: ‘the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being’, and the Hebrew word used here for God breathing into Adam is not *ruach*.

This verse, so rich in understanding, says that God breathed (*napach*: a puff of breath, like the kiss of life) into Adam the breath (*njshamah*: a big word implying what is necessary for survival, and meaning the breath of God, humanity and every living thing) of life (*chay*: another huge word, incorporating the coming of life again in the springtime; community; the freshness of life in green and growing things and flowing water; family, liveliness; sustenance and maintenance).

The name ‘Adam’ is a play on the Hebrew word *adamah*, meaning ‘earthy’. So the name is like ‘Earthling’. Adam is made from the dust of the ground – *aphar* – debris, rubbish, dust; but when God breathes into him, he becomes a *nephesh* – a soul, a person, with desires and emotions and passions.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
Till I am wholly thine,
Till all this earthly part of
me
Glows with thy fire divine.

Edwin Hatch



Wherever Thou art, that is home.

Emily Dickinson



*There is no power but of
God.*

ROMANS 13:1 KJV



*There is only one thing I
ask:
Wherever you are
Whoever you are
If you would live my
Incarnation
Know
and be known.*

Timothy Biles



We don't get to know Eve's name until chapter 4, but her name means 'life'. Earthy and Life – what an amazing marriage!

So the understanding is that us being alive at all, everything about us that is anything more than the rubble and dust of the contents of a cremation urn, is because of the breath of God in us. We are all the sons and daughters of Earthy and Life, and we are animated (another interesting word, from the Latin *anima*, meaning 'soul') and sustained by the breath of God.

Then as we move through the Old Testament, we keep coming across the word *ruach*, which fills out for us our understanding of what the breath of God might be.

I think it's important to realize that there is more here than just metaphor. 'Metaphor' implies that something is like something else, as when the Psalmist says, 'O Lord my rock'. He doesn't mean God is a pebble; he means the qualities of strength, dependability and endurance that he experiences in God are reminiscent of rock. But when we talk about the breath of God in us giving us life, this is first cause, not secondary resemblance.

God is spirit, and breath is physical, so this could be puzzling for us. It helps to think of how light works: white light contains all the colours in itself, and it is when light is split through a prism that the colours become visible. So the white light, in which all colours are implicit but not manifest, is like spirit,



in which all the physical forms and energies of creation are implicit but not manifest. We can think of God in terms of radiance, pouring forth light ('In him was life, and that life was the light of men... the true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world', John 1:4, 9), and that the light becomes visible as it takes physical form in all its multiplicity.

For the sake of accuracy, we should pause to note that we cannot reduce the being of God simply to 'light', but light is a very primal manifestation of God: 'God is light; in him there is no darkness at all' (1 John 1:5); 'He wraps himself in light as with a garment' (Psalm 104:2); 'And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light' (Genesis 1:3; this is God's primary word).

The word *ruach* is used in Ezekiel's story of the Valley of the Dry Bones (Ezekiel 37). God shows Ezekiel the scattered bones of the dead in a dry valley, and calls him to prophesy to the bones, asking him, 'Can these bones live?' Ezekiel does as he has been told, and the bones eerily reassemble into corpses. Then God says:

'Prophesy to the breath [*ruach*]; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, "This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come from the four winds [*ruach*], O breath [*ruach*], and breathe [*napach* – like God breathing into Adam] into these slain, that they may live." So I prophesied as he commanded

God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.

1 JOHN 1:5 NIV

God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth.

JOHN 4:24 NIV



Chaque créature, même la plus petite, est dans les mains de Dieu comme si elle était son unique souci.

(Every creature, even the very littlest, is held in God's hands as if that were his only concern.)

French proverb

me, and breath [*ruach*] entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet – a vast army.

Ezekiel 37:9–10

We come across the *ruach* in Psalm 104, a wonderful song of amazing breadth and vision, that expounds and rejoices in the involvement of God in creation. The psalmist vividly describes the teeming world of living things in all its richness and variety – everything from mountain goats to whales to wind and fire. Then he says:

These all look to you to give them their food at the proper time... When you hide your face, they are terrified; when you take away their breath [*ruach*], they die and return to the dust. When you send your Spirit [*ruach*], they are created, and you renew the face of the earth.

Psalm 104:27, 29–30

This gives us an image of the living and dying of all creatures, the ebbing and flowing of all life, as being like God breathing in and out.

It accords well with what Isaiah says about the changing fortunes of our lives: 'I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the Lord, do all these things' (Isaiah 45:7). Once we understand this, we see that death as much as life, disaster as much as prosperity, are part of the road

of blessing, because they come from God and are consistent with his presence and the flow of his desire, his will.

Isaiah goes on to say, in the next chapter: 'Even to your old age and grey hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you' (Isaiah 46:4).

So the first principle implicit in the concept of the road of blessing is that there is a God, who created all things, and whose Spirit or breath holds all things in being. The created things are not God, yet are not separate from God – God and they are one but not-one – because without the breath or Spirit of God in them, they would be no more than dust.

This means that we can be confident that our lives are governed by loving intelligence, that they hold together with all created things, that they are in origin and nature spiritual; and that because of the *ruach* of God, and the cross of Christ at the heart of creation, though everything has its own separate form and being, they are all connected with each other and with God – not-one but one. So we do not worship Nature, but all of creation is holy.

This connection means that anything can be a doorway into God for us, a stepping stone onto the road of blessing: 'For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen,

Father,
I abandon myself into your
hands;
do with me what you will.
Whatever you may do,
thank you:
I am ready for all, I accept
all.
Let only your will be done
in me,
and in all your creatures.
I wish no more than this, O
Lord.
Into your hands I commend
my soul;
I offer it to you
with all the love of my
heart,
for I love you, Lord,
and so need to give
myself,
to surrender myself into
your hands,
without reserve,
and with boundless
confidence,
for you are my Father.

Charles de Foucauld



The important thing is this:
to be able at any moment to
sacrifice that which we are
for what we could become.

Charles DuBois



When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe.

John Muir



being understood from what has been made' (Romans 1:20). The stepping stone is not the whole journey: if we content ourselves with nature-worship or hedonism or politics or personal religion, even though we touch God in that aspect of his radiance, that colour in the spectrum of his greater light, we are limiting both our experience and our contribution – both what God has in store for us and what we are here to do. But any aspect of life can be our starting point, because God's *ruach* breathes in all of life, and his love is at work in all our circumstances.

Creation is alive, not fixed: it is dynamic, not static. It is not neutral, it is God-breathed and God-orientated (see Psalms 19:1–4; 104; 148 etc.). It is flowing, directional – there is a current to it. This is the heart of the road of blessing – realizing that there is a definite direction to move in, which makes a difference to our quality of life, because it is the flow of the Spirit.

Because we are made in the image of God, it is in our nature to return to God, to go God's way. This is what Jesus meant when he said: "Shew me a penny. Whose image and superscription hath it?" They answered and said, "Caesar's". And he said unto them, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's, and unto God the things which be God's" (Luke 20:24–25 KJV). What is made in God's image (*we are*) should always be returned again to him.



The *ruach* of God is what makes each of us a *nephesh*, a living being, not just a lump of matter: it is impossible for us to get away from God, because our very nature comes from God – and not only our nature, but *all* nature. For this reason, though it is sometimes costly and demanding to follow in the road of blessing, not to do so is to act against our own nature and all the rest of nature. When we do not travel in the road of blessing, it's like rubbing our fur the wrong way.

Just as 'all things work together for good for those who love God' (Romans 8:28, my paraphrase), so correspondingly all things continually act to trip you up and frustrate you when you travel outside the will of God. This is still true even if you are rich and successful: peace and contentment belong to the road of blessing.

This does not mean that peace and contentment are experienced only by religious people, or that all Christian people inevitably experience peace and contentment: it depends on following the road of blessing. Remember that you can join the road at any point. You might acquiesce to Christian creeds and doctrines, but if you are not following in the Way, you will not experience peace and contentment. Jesus put it like this:

Thus, by their fruit you will recognise them. Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will

Our greatest glory is not in never failing, but in rising up every time we fail.

Ralph Waldo Emerson



The most valuable lesson man has learned from his dog is to kick a few blades of grass over it and move on.

Robert Brault





say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’

Matthew 7:20–23

We are all passengers on this little mossy ship, this delicate dory sailing round the sun that humans call the earth. Joy, shipmates, joy.

Edward Abbey



It is only the people who are travelling the road of blessing who enter the state of bliss: not because of divine favouritism, but because only the road of blessing goes that way. Everyone else vanishes up their own backsides. That’s how it is.

Jesus says, ‘I am the Way, the Truth and the Life: no one comes to the Father but by me’ (John 14:6, my paraphrase). It is the cross of Jesus that holds all things together, that sits at the heart of creation.

The cross is a tree of death and a tree of life. Every tree puts forth roots into the dark earth and branches into the light air, and is an agent of transformation, balancing carbon dioxide with oxygen, and managing the passage of life-giving water through the earth and the air. This balancing and transformative role of trees is essential and life-giving. Without it, there is chaos – the earth begins to suffer conditions of extreme (drought and flood); and the layer in which new life can start is eroded and swept away by the wild elements of water and wind. Jesus, you remember, said to the wind and the water in their wildness, ‘Peace, be still’ (Mark 4:39 KJV): he is the creator of stability

It is difficult to realize how great a part of all that is cheerful and delightful in the recollections of our own life is associated with trees.

Wilson Flagg



(peace and contentment). Trees create stability too.

The cross of Jesus, tree of life and tree of death, is the place where endings are transformed into beginnings. Jesus passed through life into death, and through death into life. God created in him a touchstone of transformation. He became the Alpha and the Omega. In him we can find rest for our weariness – the end of striving; but also new energy, the beginning of life and hope.

The tree is a crossing place: both in nature, and in the tree of life and death that is the cross.

To know Jesus and walk in his way, to enter the crossing place at the heart of life and death, beginnings and endings, is to step into life, to realize peace and contentment, to travel the road of blessing.

Jesus is *someone*, not *something*. To know Jesus is to enter a relationship, not crack a code or create a formula. Therefore the Truth that Jesus is, is a truth that we get to know, become acquainted with personally: not a head-knowledge or a doctrine, but a friendship. We know Jesus only by travelling with him. And the Way that Jesus is, is a way of *being*, a journey – not ‘this is the way you do it’, a prescriptive set of rules and dogmas. The Life that Jesus is, is the life you live – habit, dailiness – not a prize.

It is not so much for its beauty that the forest makes a claim upon men's hearts, as for that subtle something, that quality of air that emanation from old trees, that so wonderfully changes and renews a weary spirit.

Robert Louis Stevenson



Jesus... whom we can approach without pride and before whom we can humble ourselves without despair.

Blaise Pascal



I believe in person to person. Every person is Christ for me, and since there is only one Jesus, that person is the one person in the world at that moment.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta



So, some people have started on the road of blessing who don't know they know Jesus – like the disciples enthusiastically casting out demons and healing the sick when they didn't even know how to pray. Everyone following the road of blessing will eventually know they know Jesus – enlightenment will come one day: 'Oh, *right!* It was *you!*' Of course they will: because Jesus *is* the Way. But they might not know at first – because you can join the road of blessing at any point, and only gradually does it unfold under your feet. You know what your feet are, don't you? They are your self-understanding.

There has been a lot to take in, in this chapter. Let me recap the basic points for you:

1. God exists.
2. God created everything.
3. The *ruach* (wind/spirit/breath) of God in creation is the life force that animates everything, giving it meaning and making it more than just stuff.
4. Human beings, the children of 'Earthy' and 'Life', bear the image of God, and are designed to follow in his way – to move with the flow of his Spirit.
5. The flow of the Spirit is the road of blessing.
6. To travel in the road of blessing brings you into relationship with Jesus, but you might not be conscious of that at first.
7. The road of blessing creates an experiential connection with the transformative power of the tree of life and death (the cross of Jesus) that sits at the heart of creation, facilitating



both transformation and stability in the changing fortunes of our lives, which are the gift of God (Isaiah 45:7).

8. You can join the road of blessing at any point, just as you are; there is no procedural order or prerequisite.
9. It is very important to make a start, because one of the strongest things in life is habit; and to form a habit, you do have to begin.
10. The seed of going badly pear-shaped is inherent in every life that is not following the road of blessing.

Most dreams of glory are safe because we never venture to put them into practice.

Charles Curothe

