

the organic process of taking step after step. Each step changes our perspective of the landscape; each step changes us. That is why the person who starts out to reach a goal is not the same person who reaches it. That person has been changed by the journey itself. Can we trust the change to which we're opening ourselves? Can we trust the unknown when we can't know what lies around the next bend? Two gifts for travelers can help us trust in what lies ahead of us.

TRAIL ANGELS

The longest hiking trail in the United States is the Pacific Crest Trail. Each summer dedicated hikers challenge themselves to hike its entire length. Last year my French friend Jean-Michel fulfilled a lifelong dream by hiking it. He prepared carefully, becoming an expert on the trail long before leaving France. He chose his equipment carefully, conditioned his body, and a friend agreed to send him supplies at post offices along the way.

But even though Jean-Michel prepared well, the most unexpected blessings he encountered were trail angels. Found along both the Appalachian and Pacific Crest trails, trail angels are people who drop off gifts at the sleeping huts: Hikers discover big barrels of fresh water or shopping bags filled with energy bars. Sometimes there is more. Trail angels invited Jean-Michel into their homes for meals and showers, and drove him to nearby towns to pick up mail and replace supplies.

Trail angels can be found on all our trails. Whether it is the fellow seekers at the Job Club or the unexpected phone call that comes when it is needed most, trail angels are everywhere. Sometimes it is hard for us to acknowledge our needs. We might reply, "Just fine," as I did when Beverly asked me how I was doing. It is even harder to reach out for help. When we do, however, we experience the miracle of a casual friend or a perhaps stranger transforming himself into a trail angel.

THE SPIRIT AS ADVOCATE

Trail angels are one gift to the traveler who is stepping out into the unknown. The second gift is the availability of the Spirit as a continual presence. "Lead me to the rock that is higher than I," requests the psalmist in Psalm 61. We all need a rock to depend on that is higher than ourselves. We need a wisdom greater than our own and a strength greater than our own.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus promises an "Advocate" who will be with us as a companion. *Advocate* is a good word in this context. It is a person who is on your side, who sticks with you, speaks up for you, and generally looks out for your welfare. John described this advocate as "the Spirit of truth" (John 15:26). The Spirit, the Advocate, does not perfectly smooth out the path as we step into the unknown. Hard times happen. But the Spirit is biased in our favor and lovingly accompanies us as we venture into the unknown.

This book is grounded in the image of weaving a braid whose three sections fit snugly together and create a long, strong strand. Each section of the braid—*willingness, attentiveness, and responsiveness*—is woven in turn into the center. Each strand is dependent on the others for its strength. Here, in the *responsiveness* section, we see how they turn and turn again to each other for strength. Paying attention leads to responding with a step. We step forth trusting and open to the Light to illuminate and show the way forward. And so it continues: Pay attention, trust, step forth.

Practices for Finding Your Way

These are practices to use while you step into a new facet of your life. However, you also need to pay attention to how things change for you as you take steps

forward, to notice the new landscape of your path as you move ahead. You may find it helpful to revisit attentiveness practices earlier in the book.

TWO STEPS A WEEK

The only step you need to take is the next one. This practice asks you to commit to two steps a week and to take those steps. It is important to write out this practice.

1. You have made a decision and are ready to move forward. Perhaps your decision is only provisional and uncertain, but you are going to act on it. Write down two things you will do to implement your decision this week. Whether small or large, you are willing to take these steps.
2. Under each step you plan to take, list the strengths and skills that will help you take that step. Acknowledge to yourself that you have these strengths and skills and that you will use them as you move forward.
3. Then list any obstacles that could interfere with your forward progress—perhaps blocks within yourself or external stumbling blocks. For each potential barrier, write out at least one way you can manage or overcome it so it will not hold you back.
4. Write down when you will take each step (or begin taking it).
5. After you have met your commitment for this week, take notes about what was helpful in this practice. Then prepare for the next week and the next steps you will commit to.

THE ACCOUNTABILITY FRIEND

We all need support and encouragement from others. This practice describes one way of arranging for that accountability and support.

1. Carefully think about who could be an “accountability friend” for you, someone you trust to support you and with whom you can be honest and open. The friend needs to be willing to ask you about the steps you have committed to take and must not be afraid to ask you how you plan to get moving again if you are stuck.
2. Before you ask someone to be an accountability friend, make sure you understand specifically what you are asking for. What kind of regular contact do you need? Perhaps you want a weekly e-mail exchange or perhaps you want to meet face-to-face. How long is this accountability relationship going to last? Are you asking for a commitment of six weeks or six months? You and your accountability friend will decide on the details together, but it is important to consider in advance the arrangement you’d like to have.
3. Having asked someone to be an accountability friend, you may discover that your friend would like to receive the same gift from you. An equal exchange can deepen your friendship. On the other hand, do not be discouraged if someone turns you down. Your friend may be uncomfortable with this role, but still be loving and supportive. Ask someone else.
4. As you begin, talk to your friend about the background of your decision. Be specific about your decision and what your next step is going to be.
5. Tell your friend when you have taken the next step. Share any problems you found along the way and what you plan to do next.

OPENING TO THE SPIRIT

When you open the decision you’ve made and the steps you are taking to the Spirit, you are offering your