

# MAPPING *your* SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

A WORKBOOK TO HELP YOU  
PRAYERFULLY AND REFLECTIVELY  
LOOK BACK OVER YOUR LIFE  
AND NOTICE THE MOVEMENTS  
OF SPIRIT.

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*Ordinary Pilgrim*

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# WHY REMEMBERING IS MEANINGFUL

"IT'S THE PAST THAT TELLS US WHO WE ARE. WITHOUT IT WE LOSE OUR IDENTITY."

- STEPHEN HAWKING

"REMEMBER THE FORMER THINGS, THOSE OF LONG AGO... I MAKE KNOWN THE END FROM THE BEGINNING, FROM ANCIENT TIMES, WHAT IS STILL TO COME."

- ISAIAH 46:9-10

Remembering is one of the most crucial activities we do as humans. Remembering forms our stories about who we are, where we have come from and, crucially, where we are going.

But our memories are also not stable, not solid objects that we can take out and hold. They are as striking and as ungraspable as mist. They change as we change, because we are constantly reinterpreting our memories through the lens of our current experience and belief.

As unreliable as our memories may be, they are essential to us. Spanish-born film-maker, Luis Buñuel, wrote, "Our memory is our coherence, our reason, our feeling, even our action." Memory informs our sense of self and our sense of belonging (or not belonging) and from that identity we make decisions and take steps forward in a particular direction.

What we remember shapes who we become.

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# REMEMBERING WHEN YOUR FAITH IS SHIFTING

Memory can start to feel problematic when something deep is shifting within us. We wonder what we can trust about the past. We begin to reinterpret events that had always seemed so stable and significant. Or we discover new information that changes how we remember an event. Did that really happen the way I remember? What was really going on? Did I really encounter God at that moment?

Richard Rohr talks about the importance of “transcend and include” - the pattern of incorporating all we have experienced into our current outlook and identity. Rather than needing to deny or repress anything that came before, we recognise that it is part of how we have come to be the person we are today.

We might imagine it like the rings of a tree. As the tree grows up each year, it is also growing out, in ever-widening rings. Every new version of the tree contains all its past manifestations. So too, you contain every past you within you. They are part of who you are, even as you have moved beyond them.

There is something powerful, then, in choosing to befriend these past versions of ourselves, and of looking again with curiosity at how our understanding and experience of God has shifted just as we have shifted.

“The self is where we meet God”, wrote David Benner in his book *The Gift of Being Yourself*. “If we find our true self we find God, and if we find God, we find our most authentic self.”

To look back and re-examine our memories and our past selves takes great courage, but I trust that it can be a life-giving exercise, because in remembering with curiosity and with a tender love for the different past manifestations of ourselves, we come home again to ourselves and to the Divine in a deeper way.

# A WORD OF CARE

Our memories are not neutral and it is impossible to control them. As you do this exercise, memories may surface that are uncomfortable or even painful. It can be fruitful to sit with these difficult memories, but trust yourself to know when that is true, and when to move on.

It can be helpful to reflect on this exercise with a friend. Agree to do the mapping and then bring it to each other and take it in turns to practise deep listening to the other person as they share what arose for them. Ask open ended questions that invite curiosity and exploration, and affirm and reflect back what you hear them saying.

If you feel particularly triggered, pause the exercise and seek our support from a trusted friend, spiritual director or, if needed, a trauma-informed therapist.

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"Give me a candle of the  
Spirit, O God,  
as i go down into the deep of  
my own being.

Show me the hidden things.  
take me down to the spring  
of my life,  
and tell me my nature and  
my name.

Give me freedom to grow so  
that i may become my true  
self -  
the fulfilment of the seed  
which you planted in me at  
my making.

Out of the deep i cry unto  
thee, O God.

- George Appleton

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# MAPPING YOUR SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

This exercise is an invitation to reflect upon your spiritual journey until now. I encourage you to be creative in the way you depict it. I have given you a few options on the coming pages but if another idea comes to mind, go with that.

## Charting it systematically

If you find structure helpful, this might work really well for you, or it might be a great place to begin putting some memories before taking those details into one of the creative approaches. Use the chart below and the questions on the following page as a starting point but feel free to adapt it as you see fit.

AGE / STAGE OF LIFE	KEY EVENTS & PEOPLE	THOUGHTS & FEELINGS	SPIRITUAL MOVEMENTS

# REFLECTION QUESTIONS

## **Early Influences and Memories.**

- How did the important people in your early life shape your experience and understanding of God?
- What are your earliest memories of encountering God?
- What messages did you get from family, school, church, community?

## **Along the Way**

- Who were the important people along the way?
- How did your image and experience of God change over the years?
- Who have been your role models?
- What scripture passages have been most important?
- Have there been authors/poets/artists that have influenced you significantly? In what way?

## **Highs and Lows**

- What have been the major highs and lows?
- What are the issues and areas you most struggled with?
- What has been most life-giving for you over the years?
- How has your prayer life changed?
- What would you say were the most significant periods along the way and why?

## **Reflect and Consider**

- If you were to give each "chapter" of your life a title, what would it be?
- As you reflect upon your faith journey, what strikes you about the way God has spoken to you?
- How have you discerned the presence of God in your life over the years?
- Has there been a golden thread running through your encounters with God? Recurring patterns?
- What have you learned about God and the spiritual life in broad terms?

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# FOLLOWING YOUR LIFE RIVER

The metaphor of life as a river running through your life is a common one, from source to mouth, with depths and shallows, turmoil and calm.

Margaret Silf has developed this particular metaphor in her book *Landmarks*. She writes:

“The river makes a difference to the landscape through which it flows...And the relationship is mutual, because the landscape makes a difference to how the river flows and where its destination will be.”

Take a big piece of paper and draw your spiritual life as a river.

Adapting the questions below and from the chart, you might like to additionally reflect on:

- What is your source? In what space does my life’s flow begin?
- What are my tributaries - who or what has formed me into what I am?
- How has the flow of your river been impeded along the way? Has it been diverted for other people’s purposes? Has it struggled through obstructions?
- When has the flow of your river felt rich and life-giving? How has your life been a source of life to others? What speed have you moved at and how has that served you in different seasons?
- How and where do you feel your river is flowing now?

*Don’t feel limited to the river image if it doesn’t resonate. Perhaps there is another image or metaphor that describes your journey, inside which you can begin to think about it, e.g. a pilgrimage, or the rings of a tree trunk.*



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## RINGS OF YOUR TREE TRUNK

This exercise is an expansion of the idea that we contain within us all the past selves we have been. This might be a good approach to mapping your spiritual journey if you want to intentionally reclaim memories and previous aspects of yourself, and imagine how they remain a part of you even as you grow beyond them.

Start by drawing a small circle in the middle of your paper and recall your earliest spiritual memories or images of the Divine.

For each new phase or season of life, draw another larger circle around the previous. You can write, doodle or sketch within each ring the thoughts, feelings and memories that come to you. Finish with the season you are currently in.

## INTUITIVE COLLAGE

Consider using collage as an accessible and intuitive creative process.

Start by identifying key seasons of your spiritual life (you may use the chart). Choosing one of those seasons to focus on at a time, take a paper, some old magazines and a glue stick, and collage a page based on what arises as you remember that season.

Collaging exercises work best when you don't overthink it. Put down anything that intuitively seems to fit, and then reflect prayerfully afterwards on why that seemed meaningful.

# THANK YOU.

It is a gift and an honour to get to journey with you. I hope this guide to mapping your spiritual journey has helped you connect with your truest Self, and with the great mystery that we call God.

If you have found this practice life-giving, I would love to invite you to join my **Faith Shift Course**, beginning in September 2022. Together, we will create a brave and sacred space to bear witness to your faith shift and imagine a life-giving and authentic way forward. [Find out more on my website.](#)

If you would like to process what has arisen with you, I am offering [one-off individual spiritual direction sessions](#) and would be honoured to hold sacred space for you.

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It is my delight and privilege to get to accompany people as they explore their deepest connection with themselves and the Divine.

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