

# *Journeying Beyond Prejudice*

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“ 1 A great many people think they are thinking, when they are merely rearranging their prejudices ”.

Journey is a concept that pervades so much of what we do and who we are. We may have first discovered the idea as a young child travelling to destinations known and unknown mouthing the words “Are we there yet?” Journeys to unknown towns and cities, relatives, caravan parks, friends, more relatives, planes, trains, and yes automobiles. The value of the concept is etched on our psyche. We have been places. And we have returned. The journey is a powerful metaphor of life, with an abundance of parallels. It gives us a language to understand what it means to move from one stage to another and to understand the passage that takes us through that.

If journey, in our understanding, is the passage from one place to another, one stage to another, then prejudice is possibly the unspoken expectation of how that journey should look and the ultimate destination. For a journey to be well planned, it will usually involve a map (with its own set of folding instructions). What happens though, when all we have, is the directive to “go west”? Or when our role in the journey is one of passenger or collaborator? What meaning and value do our expectations have on a journey that has an unknown destination? There is no map. There can be no expectations. Our prejudices will possibly hinder us. Instead, what we can expect on our life journey, is to be surprised, possibly shocked, and maybe offended. Let’s take the powerful concept of the journey and apply it to the phenomenon of two or more people travelling together through life, through the seasons, and the changes. Are you willing to trust the process? Are you willing to see where the four points of the compass lead you? How grace, acceptance, rest and truth may guide you.

## **The Compass**

Within the professional realms of change management the role of change leader is to make the form, nature, content, future course of (something) different from what it is, or from what it would be, if left alone. Leading people through change by helping them to find meaning can be an effective way to lead them from restlessness to rest. Let us examine the parallels between the activities of a change manager and a counsellor. We are each attempting to navigate and collaborate with people through the changes in their life. Changes that may be stretching their paradigms, changes that may bring prejudices to the surface, changes that may cause restlessness, conflict and disappointment. Do we understand that a person’s perception is their truth, and in that, do we seek to accept, rather than condemn? Indeed, in travelling alongside another, are we able too, and willing too, ask ourselves what is my greatest fear in travelling with this person? Do we know our limitations? Can we, offer and receive, grace?

## **Grace**

Theological text defines grace as the freely given, unmerited favour and love of God. Let us endeavour, to link our counselling and change processes, to the example of Jesus Christ, as we reflect upon the following biblical text “ 2 Do not judge, so that you may not be judged ” (Matthew 7:1) and “ 3 I desire mercy and not sacrifice ” ( Matthew 12:7). These teachings on judgement, forgiveness and mercy involve a reciprocal relationship between how we act and how we are treated. The message, very simply is, do as you would be done by. It conveys the Father’s heart towards mankind, a heart of God that deeply desires mercy, over the offerings of form and function. Perhaps in that, we are to not obsess about whose fault it is, and lay blame. Perhaps we are to remember past events in a non judgemental way, not forgetting them or becoming emotionally detached or denying their impact, but rather, to “ 4 hear the sorrow and sighing of all sides ”. It is seeing events from everyone’s point of view and not just our own. It means feeling their impact with everyone’s feelings and not just our own. It is accepting the differences, by seeing the people living in them. It is both offering, and receiving grace.

## **Acceptance**

Acceptance is possibly the most liberating and disarming gift you can afford another, on this journey beyond prejudice. Acceptance can be a freefall. It can be frightening, and possibly takes more than we have. “ 5 Anyone who has entered the darkness of another’s pain, loss or bewilderment without the defenses of a detached professionalism, will know the feeling of wanting to escape, of wishing they had not become involved ”. What is acceptance to someone we are journeying with? Perhaps, for them, it is the time for their parachute to open. It is valuable time to be themselves, as they move towards peace. “ 6 I feel the obligation to take a moment to ask a favour of you all out

there. Thousands, no, MILLIONS of people are suffering untold mental agonies every day because of a secret need that they are afraid to express. And many live in that agony all their lives and die with, or even because of it, for fear of public ridicule and social exile. I have been lucky; I have not yet faced these things, although I suspect I will before the game is out. But the freedom of unleashing the hidden hurt is so cleansing, so joyous, that I urge each and every one of you to have tolerance toward others whose inner pains are no fault of their own. Give them hope, give them kindness, and even if you cannot bring yourself to support them, at least give them the space to grow, and treat them as equal members of humanity. For indeed they are.”

## Rest

To lead people from restlessness to *rest*, is to help them find meaning. The disciples of Jesus found themselves in an experience which was incredibly frightening. One night as they travelled across the waters from one shore to another, a storm threatened and ultimately unleashed its fury upon the boat they travelled in. Jesus slept. Jesus inactivity frustrated the disciples, of which some were fisherman and most likely familiar with storms. It is not a good sign, when the seasoned traveller is holding on, white-knuckled. Troubled and frightened, fearing for their very lives, they approached their sleeping master. Waking Jesus up, they explained a situation, which was most likely obvious. The boat, and indeed its passengers were not going to make it. Jesus response is intriguing. A miracle ensues. Jesus commands the winds to cease and the waves die down. He calms the storm. The crisis is averted and the journey can continue. It is not the miracle that is intriguing but what Jesus says to his disciples. “Why did you wake me up? How big is your faith?” Doesn’t that strike you as odd? Indeed, what were the disciples to do? Apparently waking him up wasn’t the right response to this situation. In the journey, peace is essential. The storms will rise. Peace can exist in the storm however. That is the power of peace. It doesn’t calm the storm, but finds strength and rest within it. Jesus disappointment was an encouragement and exhortation that it is not necessary for the storm to be subdued. Indeed, peace is attainable in the storm, when it is found beside Jesus. His peace surpasses understanding. It surpasses the fury of the storms of life. And when it is our desire to find a God who “does something”, we can remind ourselves, and those we travel with, to heed the master’s encouragement to lay down in the boat next to Him. ‘7 *And we relax. The pressure’s off. We confidently and humbly declare our availability to God. We move from brokenness to power, we feel ourselves becoming centred in Christ, no longer ourselves. We’re quiet. We’re not scrambling anymore. We’re not nervously compelled to speak....we have confidence in the Father’s availability, in the way to the Father opened up by the Son, and in the Spirit’s presence, becomes real, central and invigorating’*. Indeed, is there a safer place to be?

## Truth

The final point of the compass, we can journey beyond prejudice with, is *Truth*. Jesus exhorts us that we will know the truth and that it will set us free. Our compass needs to find that truth, not only for ourselves, but also for those we are travelling with. What is that truth that has the power to set us free?”. The truths that impact us the most, are those that are “internal”. An internal truth is a truth that is hidden somewhere deep within us. It needs to be discovered. It cannot be ignored. It is a part of us. It is how we were created. It will involve our humanity. It always points us, ultimately, towards God. We usually begin our journey running from those truths, but if we are to find any peace and rest along the way, we will have to stop running and accept them as part of who we are. They are our flesh. They are the flesh of those we are travelling with. Experience will teach us that we will never find them, while ever we travel with the clumsy and cumbersome baggage of prejudice. We must travel light. Prejudice will become the plank in our eye. We must remove it. The thief that was crucified along side of Jesus proclaimed the Gospel as his life drew to a close. He travelled from condemned sinner to victorious child of God, and gained the assurance that he would be with Jesus in heaven. What did he say in that moment? He simply acknowledged that he deserved a death on the cross, but that Jesus was an innocent man and did not deserve to die. He requested that Jesus remember him when he entered his kingdom and in doing so gave assent to his deity. In truth, there was nothing more he could do. His flesh was hanging on a cross, he was immobilized and dying. He recognized the truth about himself and the truth about God. His internal truth was that he was deserving of death, and in that, it caused him to see the truth of Jesus. ‘8 *When we perceive more and more clearly our true self in God, we are all but dazzled by the wonder of this image of God. But at the same time we are profoundly humbled. For we know that we are made in the image and likeness of God. ... And we know that, but for the grace of God, it could be wholly lost’*

Are you willing to journey beyond prejudice? Will you lay down your maps and your expectations? Will you surrender your ideals and your understanding? Are you willing to trust the process of revelation before you..... ‘9 *a revelation of the astoundingly accepting love of God which first reflects to us the image of the true self....the grace of God which keeps us in the place of ceasing to strive, and lets our hearts stay - simply open’.*

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