

Introduction

This is a mercifully short(ish) book about a long journey with God. So long that its length and scope is captured perfectly by that great theologian of our day, Buzz Lightyear, when he speaks of going ‘to infinity and beyond’.¹ It is a father/child epic adventure that starts at a specific point, continues on a specific route, and then culminates at a specific destination, a destination that will be more glorious than all the other places put together that we have journeyed to in this world.

Moreover, Jesus has pledged that we will make it to the end. He once said that ‘I give them (His sheep) eternal life and they shall *never* perish’ (John 10:28).² I can’t describe how comforting that is to me! Friends of ours have just popped by on their way to the Serengeti for their honeymoon. It will be truly spectacular – but not a patch on where Christians are going. An unspoiled and unending Heaven. And in the end it will be worth every step, every tear, and every ounce of perspiration that has dripped from our spiritual pores. We may doubt that at

1 Buzz Lightyear is one of the main characters in the Disney – Pixar Toy Story franchise.

2 As noted by J.C. Ryle there is a transition in John 10 from the character of Christ’s sheep to the privileges that they receive. “He gives to them eternal life; the precious gift of pardon and grace in this world, and a life of glory in the world to come.” J.C. Ryle, *John* Vol 2, Expository Thoughts on the Gospels (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2012), 128.

times in the hard seasons, but those questions will be forever silenced when our journey ends and faith gives way to sight. We will be there. Joy uncontained!

Undoubtedly, along the way there will be moments that we will wish to bottle and keep as our fuel for the road – times of immense elation, fulfilment and unfettered spiritual intimacy that we will love and cherish as a foretaste of Heaven itself. Then other days will arrive of toil and tedium, bruises and burdens that will seem too heavy for our laden backs and we will struggle to keep pushing on towards the long-anticipated end. Maybe that's why you're holding this book – because you are struggling now. Who would have thought that when you started with all that enthusiasm all those years ago? But here you are, hanging on and wondering how to take that next purposeful stride.

Often we feel that this earthly leg of the journey is incessant in nature and Heaven feels as far away as it can possibly be. Our days are long, and progress is painstakingly slow and in the meantime we have lost the imminence of the New World. Our technicolour future plays no part in our grey present. We know it's coming. It's just not coming anytime soon.

But what we miss in those moments of painstakingly slow progress is that life is passing fast, and much faster than maybe we have ever supposed to this point. In fact to God, as the Psalms reveal, 1000 years is less than a watch in the night (Ps. 90:4), which means that your life to Him is merely a blink. In real terms your Christian journey is a little like setting off on a long, winding and seemingly never-ending road trip and yet, much sooner than we thought, we are there. We have made it. We rise over the hill, round the last corner and there it is before

us...home! The place we have longed for, the destination we craved, and the life for which we were made.

Journeying to Heaven is the theme of this book. Indeed, journeying to Heaven needs to be the theme of your life. It is why you are here, and why you still have breath in your lungs. You were born into this world that you might spend your days travelling out of this world and to do anything else is to waste your one shot at getting it right. This is a voyage that leads you beyond time and all the pain that you can barely endure, and right into the home of God.

Let that sink in for a second so that the hope which is found in that truth can brighten the dreary vista that is currently before you. May it propel you onwards even today in the middle of whatever is unfolding, or call you to begin no matter what you are facing. We are talking about a journey that leads to paradise (Luke 23:43) where sorrows cease and tears dry (Rev. 21:4), a journey to an eternal dwelling that an eternal architect has put together for you. Moreover, it is nearer than we think and the journey to get there can be shared with Him. Every step, twist, and bump on the road can be a moment when God is right there with you. The God of the heavens can be our God in the mud. We can know Him, walk with Him through the mess and experience the joy which He alone provides. Wasn't that the experience of those who lived through the days of revival on the Island of Lewis, Scotland? They met with God in the ordinary. He was present at their kitchen tables. He was there as they worked in their fields. He was suddenly interrupting the monotonous and going with them into all the bits and pieces of life...and they loved it. God was really there. It therefore goes without saying that I hope this is your journey; that the pages of this book are a retelling of your

story and your own ascent as you head to the greatest destination of all.

Or perhaps it isn't yet, but it will be. Maybe you are about to begin!

Aimlessness

Every day finds us running in dozens of directions. Life is cluttered and frenetic, burgeoning with to-do's. It is untidy. It never fits neatly into a ribboned box. Often it is sad and sore but we smother those feelings by busying ourselves even more and occupying our minds. Distracted is sadly our new normal. There is always a smart phone to hold which, according to Apple, we unlock approximately eighty times every single day.³ The same research even suggested that when we don't unlock our phones we are still looking at them, touching them approximately 2600 times daily. Within three seconds of an app alerting us we are immersed, numbed and pulled away from our journeying status.

Alongside inane distractions are the serious ones. Projects at work that carry great importance, or family life in all of its seasons and shades. There are times when we feel we are being drawn down an endless stress-filled street, with a foreboding sense that we aren't getting anywhere. On one level we can be feverishly active and yet on another, we wonder if there is any direction to any of this. Where am I going? Who knows? What is my life for and why am I here?

Perhaps as Christians we used to know but that clarity has been stolen and now we feel like at any given moment we will step on the snake and slide back down the board

³ Knapp, J. and Zeratsky, J. *Make Time: How to Focus on What Matters Every Day* (Bantam Press, 2018), 16..

– right back to the start. Or like being on a treadmill and running hard but getting off covered in perspiration at the exact same spot you climbed on. Life can feel like that sometimes, even for followers of Jesus Christ!

I think I have just come through that kind of phase in my own life, which is probably one of the reasons I have found myself writing this book. I am thankful to God that it was only for a season but, although it was short-lived it was real: a time when any true sense of direction and purposeful journeying was strangely obscured to me. Please don't see a sloth in this confession for I have been busy during this season. But I guess that's the problem... busy but feeling aimless. Busy in ministry in our wonderful church and busy in family. I have functioned and faithfully fulfilled my duties in and out of our home. It's just that in the middle of it all a kind of haze came down and gradually I lost that definite purposeful walk that I once knew. When you have seen your destination and your whole life is propelling with passion towards it, and then suddenly that is no longer the case, you know something has altered! It is a felt experience. A loss. Like we are spiritually muddled and holding the map upside down. I'm sure as I write these words they will resonate with some readers. Is this where I am; somewhat lost and drifting?

If so, I am glad you are here. Glad you are holding this little volume in your hand. Many have been here before you and, I can promise you that includes some of the Christian giants you have revered. It is possible to journey with purpose for the first time and it is definitely possible to start journeying with purpose *again*. To know what your life is for and to know what today is for. To know what your story is, where it's all going, and how it all ends.

I can't promise you a flower-lined straight road, but I can promise you one where there is a Companion, Guide, and constant Faithful Traveller who will pull you on and light the way as the greatest Shepherd of all. And I can also promise that the destination will be worth it.

The Way

I first thought of writing this book when my eye caught sight of a nickname in the Bible. It immediately struck me as a perfect description of the life that I craved.

To be honest, I have had multiple nicknames and most of them are not repeatable here. Not by a long shot. I'm sure you have had a good few as well over the course of your life. Thankfully, virtually all of them were during my school years and have faded from memory with the passing of time.

In Bible times there were some original nicknames doing the rounds among the people of God. James and John, for instance, were dubbed 'the Sons of Thunder' in Mark 3:17, presumably because they were rather explosive in nature. Their fuse was short and on occasions the sparks would fly.

Moreover, in the early church days of Acts when new converts were facing the ire of society, there was a man named Joseph who always seemed to have the right word at the right time. He encouraged people. He put his arm around the shoulders of the weak and told them to 'keep going' when their every impulse was screaming out to chuck it in. He too got his nickname as he became known as 'Barnabas' which means 'son of encouragement.'

As I've said, this book revolves around a nickname of sorts. It's never been my nickname but I wish it had. If someone hung it over me as a banner, I am at a stage in

my journey when I would accept it as a badge of honour. It has nothing to do with my physical appearance or what my surname denotes and for once it's not derogatory at all. Nevertheless, I want it to describe me for the rest of my life and fit who it is that I have become in Jesus. It's found in the book of Acts where we read that the early Christians were nicknamed as:

... *followers of The Way*. (Acts 9:1, 2; 19:9; 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22).

A beautiful phrase that captures the true essence of Christian discipleship both then and now. A label that takes the hugeness of the Christian life and compresses it down to a bite-sized form that makes such sense to us all. Notice what they were known for:

- Where they were going, and not where they'd been.
- Who they were following, and not who they were.
- How they were living, and not how they looked.

How wonderful!

- Known for being on the way to Heaven, not known anymore for their sinful pasts.
- Known for following their wonderful leader Jesus who IS 'the way', not known anymore by their qualities or lack thereof.
- Known by their Godly lifestyles, not known anymore by passing trends.

They may have been called this by others but so taken were they with the expression that on occasion they gladly used