

When pavement ends

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This sign sits in our front yard. Since it's covered from view by a line of trees, I rarely glimpse it from the house. But whenever the boys want to walk down to the creek, I notice it while we wander at the edge of the road.

The yellow steel diamond that screams this unmistakable truth in all caps:
"PAVEMENT ENDS."

And it reminds me again that everything certain ends. Everything that seems sure and steady, ends.

Everything that spread out before our eyes, smooth and rolling, stretching on beyond our view—it eventually ends. Sending our wheels spinning and skidding as we scramble to reorient and remember how to travel this part of the journey.

But so, too, the road that was twisting and turning, ends. Everything that was hard and unrelenting, packed down like pavement rolled by strong machines—it ends, too.

And there can be something comforting in the crunch of dirt and rumbling gravel we will meet ahead. A road that leads to an unknown adventure or draws us back to nature. Back to the ground of our being.

Sometimes I wonder what it meant when Jesus said, "I am the Way."

Did he mean he is *The Way*? The one and only road; the strong, solid, shining and certain street; the gleaming golden highway leading off into the sun?

Or did he mean that he is *the way*, the winding and wandering path, the trail that seems to shrink in the overgrown woods, the dusty trace of footsteps that trudged before our own?

Or did he simply mean that there *is* the way, that light falls on our feet when we follow, that there is always something next if we keep going?

Sometimes we fool ourselves that we know what path we are on. We've chosen this career, this spouse, this address. And so our days are going to unfold accordingly, neatly tipping in a row like dominos we lined up with a careful eye.

But if the only constant is change, as the wise try to tell us, then the fact that pavement ends is the only sure truth. Today is a blink; this season is a phase. Tomorrow may be rockier or smoother, but it will not be exactly like now.

Maybe Christ meant that all of this is the Way—that he is both the level ground and the rumbling gravel, the reliable street and the meandering road. Maybe he is there when we glide easily, assuming we're in control, and when we spin out helplessly, remembering we never were.

The kids slap the bottom of the sign, grinning at its metallic twang. They run to the brush to find sticks to see how wood will sound when it clangs against steel. When does the world stop seeming so simple and wonderful, like one great science experiment waiting for our discovery?

This is the Way, too. Wonder. Listening. Joy.

I take one small hand in each of my own and we start to walk back up the hill towards the house, our shadows lengthening like giants in late afternoon sun. Suddenly they do not look so small, to my right and my left; they seem to stand at my same height, all three of us together with the sun warm on our backs.

This pavement, too, will end. But around the corner where I still cannot see, there will be some unseen wonder ahead. That is the promise of way.

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