

My father's map

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My father once sat me down on the couch and placed a map of Central Europe in my lap. He pointed to two major cities and said, "We have five months to get from London to Copenhagen. You plan our route."

I was ten years old.

My parents had decided to take us to Europe on an educational adventure for my entire sixth grade school year. This was their way of involving me. So I traced a pencil line that ran from London across the English Channel to Paris, down through the Basque region of Spain to the Costa del Sol, northeast into Switzerland, south to Italy, and back north through Austria and Germany before ending up in Scandinavia. My parents respected my general itinerary and filled in the blanks with extended stays in suburban London, Marbella, Davos and Florence.

As the leaders of our family, my parents regularly led us on forays into unfamiliar territory and taught us to read maps and navigate the landscape. On the way, everyone had a job. (In Europe, I always carried the coats.) I like to think this kind of upbringing prepared me to approach life with a greater sense of curiosity, adventure, and confidence.

Somewhere in this story there is a lesson about leadership.

As leaders, we do not necessarily need to have all the answers. We need to be clear about where we are and convey some vision of where we are going, but maybe everything between those two points should be collaborative.

If you are a pastor, what would it be like to say, "Here's where I see us now. Here's where I dream we could be. Does anyone else share that dream? And if so, how would you like to get from here to there?" Then, let the congregation buy into the journey, not just the destination, and try to give everyone a role in determining the next steps.

One thing that may be different in your church than on our family's European voyage is that you can't always plan the itinerary in advance. Obstacles come along, some of them wonderful and some of them treacherous, and we have to keep regrouping and discerning to determine God's direction at every stage.

But if, as a leader, you feel the burden is on you to figure out how to "save" your church or that it's your job to get the congregation across some Jordan River, maybe you can instead turn to them, even to the youngest member or the newest member or a beloved spiritual leader of the laity, and listen in order to lead.

In October, my father passed away. And last week, I made the journey home to be with my siblings as we navigate the next stage of our family journey without him. I am so grateful for the map-reading skills he gave us. There is more road ahead, and we will find the way.

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