

It's rare that a third film in a series is great. *Return of the Jedi* managed to do it. I liked *Back to the Future III*, though it's my least favorite in the series. And then there's *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*. Maybe it's because they're trying to find the Holy Grail. Maybe it's because it's got Sean Connery. Or maybe it's just a great film. If you haven't seen it, Indy's father has been obsessed with finding the Holy Grail his entire life. Now he's gone missing, and all Indy has is his journal, his life's record of all the clues he's discovered to lead him to the secret resting place of the Grail.

[Movie Poster] Indiana Jones movies are so fun because it's a quest movie. At every step along the way, he's collecting clues that frankly don't make any sense. They're puzzles, riddles or objects that are out of context. It's not until Indy reaches his goal that all the clues make sense - and that's certainly true in *The Last Crusade*. The Nazis have captured Indy and his father, and if Indy doesn't get the grail quickly, his father will die.

Standing between him and the grail are three trials, the keys to which are buried in his father's notebook. These clues that have been plaguing Indy and his father the whole film finally make sense, as Indy navigates the three obstacles.

There's a reason films like these - Indiana Jones, National Treasure, even films like Ocean's 11 or shows like *Sherlock* - are so popular. We love a good mystery, a journey of discovery. We love stories where all these disparate clues come together. We enjoy that "aha" moment, where everything clicks and we see how all the clues that have been there all along make sense. It's like we finally see the whole puzzle and go ooooooh. I see why that was important now.

We love that "click", that "aha" moment.

At least, we love it in movies. In real life, that's not how we prefer to learn. We don't want learning to be a process, a journey. If you've ever been on the cusp of a big decision - leaving home for the first time, a new job, a new relationship, taking an old relationship to another level, a big move - when we come to these moments in our lives we *don't* want to be like Indiana Jones, fumbling along trying to discern the correct path.

We want the pertinent information delivered in a helpful email, or maybe a text or at *most* a book or sermon. We want someone to *just tell us* already.

Which makes where we are as a church right now particularly frustrating for many of us. We know that God is calling us forward. [Vision slide] We know that in the future, Catalyst will create spaces where everyone can embrace their God-given calling.

But what does that look like? Well, we're not exactly sure. We don't know precisely how God's call will unfold in our lives, in our building, in our community, our city, our world. We're in a position of anticipation. We know the "aha" moment is coming, but nothing has clicked yet.

Which is perfect for the season of Advent. Advent is a season of *waiting*. For the last month, we've been learning how to anticipate well. How to move forward when we don't know exactly where we're going. We've been listening to Israel's prophets as they guided God's people to anticipate the promised Messiah. By learning how they waited, we learn to wait well too.

[Map Graphics for Weeks 1-3] We began by exploring our *desire* to grow, to move forward, to follow God's call into the future. Then we acknowledged the reality of *change* - that we can't go without leaving. We confessed that change isn't easy, but when we're following God's call, it's worth it. Then last week, we saw that if we want to finish this race, if we want to make it where God is calling us, we must move forward in *gratitude*.

This week, I want to sketch out what our journey will look like - and specifically, what aspects of our journey will be most important. Because the bad news is: we're not going to get a custom, downloadable brochure from God letting us know where we're going. We can't put "10 Years from now" into our GoogleMaps and see the path. Because that's not how learning actually works.

I get that's how we *think* learning works - that knowledge basically means "facts" and learning basically means sitting and hearing (or reading) a bunch of facts strung together.

But knowing is way more than just having the right facts. Knowing is a journey, a process of discovery. It's what philosopher Esther Meeks calls "Subsidiary-Focal Integration". That's a \$20 phrase for something we all do probably thousands of times a day, so let me break it down for you. [Abstract Process] Anytime we learn something, there's what we are focused on, and there's everything else that supports the focal point. The supporting stuff is the subsidiary. And the main thing is the focal (obviously). The process of learning is what happens when we integrate the main thing and the supporting things into one cohesive experience.

I know... HUH?

So an example: how many of us know how to ride a bike? The *facts* about bike-riding are pretty straightforward. You have to balance on two wheels while you pedal forward. Not much more to know than that (especially if you're not shifting gears).

But learning to ride a bike takes way more than knowing some facts about bike riding in your brain. You have to learn how to mount the bike, and your body has to learn how to stay balanced and you have to learn that the bike goes where your eyes go so you *can't* look at the car parked over there because you're going to hit it.

[Bike Process 1] And even after you can stay on the bike, you're still not *really* riding yet because you're constantly thinking about all these subsidiary things (like balance and parked cars and the dismount). It's not until those become second-nature, until they're integrated, that you're *really* riding a bicycle. You're not *really* riding a bicycle until your focus, your attention is

on the wind blowing past your face, the road or trail zipping by beneath you, and you're just *riding*.

[Bike Process 2] Bike-riding is about integrating all the subsidiary stuff so you can focus on the real goal - the riding. That's the goal, the "aha" moment when everything clicks and you're just... doing.

Or take Indiana Jones. He wants the Grail, but to get it, he can't just learn some facts. He has to pay attention to all his clues. But the clues, the tests, none of it is the *grail*. It's not his "aha" moment until he finally gets to the grail.

SFI is about paying attention to the subsidiary stuff until you get to the "aha" moment. It's about practicing until it clicks. You can't learn to ride a bike if you never get off the couch. You can't find the Holy Grail until you go on a quest for it.

So what does that have to do with God's call on our future? It means right now we're in the *learning* stage. We haven't had the "aha" moment yet. The future hasn't clicked for us. But that doesn't mean God isn't giving us clues.

[Scripture Slide] That's how it worked for Israel as they anticipated the Messiah. If you have a Bible, turn with me to Micah 5. As you're turning to Micah 5, you probably know that the Old Testament is full of prophecies regarding the promised Messiah. Particularly in the prophetic books, we find God giving hints about who the Messiah will be.

That's in big part because the prophets were active mostly during times of political turmoil. People's lives had been turned upside down, there was a lot of anxiety and uncertainty. People wanted to know how God was going to intervene, and the prophets often offered words of promise and hope like Micah's in chapter 5:

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times. Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor bears a son, and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites. He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. And he will be our peace..." -- Micah 5:2-5a

Micah imagines a coming king who will rule like a good shepherd. This king will come from Bethlehem, a small hamlet a few miles from the capital city of Jerusalem. Nothing interesting or important ever happened in Bethlehem. Their one claim to fame was that they were the hometown of David, Israel's greatest king.

I'm sure you can appreciate how vague Micah's promise is. Israel will suffer tough times until a woman in Bethlehem bears a son and he'll be a shepherd.

Okay... anyone want to guess how many baby boys were born in Bethlehem from the time Micah lived until Jesus? I have no idea either, but I bet it was a *lot*. If you're trying to pinpoint the Messiah and this is your only clue, you're hosed.

[Magi Picture] But this particular promise plays an important role in the Christmas story. Jesus, the promised Messiah, was born in Bethlehem. About 1,000 miles away, a group of astrologers (called magicians or magi in their day) read in the stars that a new king of Israel had been born. So these magi embarked on a journey. They set out to Jerusalem, the capital of Israel, to pay their respects to this new king, no doubt dreaming of a political alliance.

They had no idea who this king was. They didn't know that he wasn't born in Jerusalem or that Herod, the reigning king, was clueless. They just showed up in Jerusalem because where else would you look for a new king? Matthew tells us the story in chapter 2 of his Gospel:

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born.

Herod has *no idea* where to look for this new king. It's clearly not *his* kids, so he's understandably disturbed. He asks his scholars where the promised king will be born and suddenly, all the pieces fit. They have that *aha* moment:

"In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.'" -- Matthew 2:1-6

[Magi Clues] In that moment, in Herod's palace, all the clues came together - I wonder if the "click" was audible. The long-awaited Messiah has been born! He's here... right now... just a couple of hours away, in Bethlehem!

[Magi Nativity] Once the magi have all the clues, they travel to Bethlehem and discover no less than Jesus himself. Their "aha" moment leads directly to a real, personal knowledge that goes far beyond having all the facts. They experience in a real, tangible way, God become human.

The magi's journey should be instructive for us: they could not come to know Jesus without undertaking the journey. No amount of facts they learned while they were in Persia would have led to the knowledge they had of Jesus himself. Only by setting out, following clues and putting all the pieces together could they discover the person they sought.

So too with us. If we want to learn what the future has for us, we cannot discover that future by staying where we are and waiting for that future to come to us. We only reach the future we're

being called into by journeying, moving forward, gathering the clues, hints and intimations that surround us and trust that our "aha" moment is coming, when everything will make sense and we'll understand how everything fits together.

We could ask, Why? Why is faith like this? Why is *life* like this?

Or, to be a bit more pointed... if God wants us to have a life of faith, if God wants a relationship with us, then why doesn't God just come right out and *tell* us? Wouldn't that be more reliable? More loving?

Well, if knowledge is just about information, then yes, of course. But knowing isn't just about facts. Knowing is about discovery, about holistic learning. And that can't happen unless we go on a journey.

You know this because this is how *any* relationship works. I'll tell you how I knew Amanda and I should get married.

My wife Amanda and I started dating in February of 2008. We'd been friends for several years, and decided to try a dating relationship. We worked together and had the same friend group, so we talked and saw each other pretty much every day for the first four months we dated. And then over the summer, Amanda went to El Salvador for a couple of weeks to work with a church she was connected to down there. And the day before she returned, I took my youth group to New Orleans to do Katrina relief.

So for three weeks, we essentially had no contact, especially compared to what we'd become accustomed to. We knew that would happen, so we decided to take a creative workaround. We each bought a journal for the other, and took them with us. Every day we were apart, we journaled to each other about our days. And then, when we got back, we dedicated an evening to reading our journals together.

There was this moment in the midst of that evening, when we both read more or less the same words in our respective journals. On the same day, thousands of miles apart we both wrote a version of, "Being apart this long sucks. We shouldn't do it anymore."

That was my "aha" moment, the moment I knew I wanted to marry Amanda. Suddenly all the time we'd spent together, sharing our lives, becoming closer, the ups and downs, it all clicked into place and I knew she was the person I wanted to be with for the rest of my life.

I know... super cute story. But don't miss the important part: imagine if we hadn't dated between February and July, if we'd just kept being friends, operating at the same relational level we'd been on for the years preceding.

I doubt we'd even have bought journals for each other. We certainly wouldn't have missed each other so deeply. And there would have been no "aha" moment.

Because without the journey of the dating relationship, we were not the persons each other wanted to marry. The journey of dating, the journey of coming to know each other transformed us into the persons who were fit to marry each other.

If you had simply told Amanda and me that we were supposed to marry each other before we even started dating, we might have been scared off dating each other at all. Because a fact by itself isn't enough, and in that case, it wasn't even a fact. We were not the persons we wanted to marry before we began the journey.

This is how every relationship works... the journey of friendship, of romance, of business, of parenting transforms us.

Why would we expect our relationship with God to be any different? We cannot step into the future God is preparing for us until we walk toward that future. Because we are not the persons who are fit to inhabit that future. We must set out on the journey, armed only with clues, trusting that the one who calls us is faithful.

What journey of discovery are you on? As you have looked to the future, what lies ahead for you? What is your heart calling out for? What changes are you willing to endure? If God is calling you forward, then what are the clues around you? A new spiritual practice? A friendship you need to invest more time in? Something you need to let go of? What's the next right thing you need to do?

And what about Catalyst in the next 10 years? We have some clues. **[Map of rowlett]** We know that the city of Rowlett is changing. We know we don't want to be limited to the city limits of Rowlett because the people of Catalyst are not limited to the city of Rowlett. We are Wylie and Sachse and Garland and Rockwall and Forney and Mesquite and Dallas - and that's not even counting those who worship with us online.

[SFI + vision] And we have a vision, a direction. Catalyst creates spaces where everyone can embrace their God-given calling. We know we're going to be intentional about creating spaces for new relationships, new persons - physical spaces (both here and, hopefully, elsewhere) and relational spaces. We know we're going to make a concerted effort to enter into relationships with people who are different from us - different races, classes, life stages, orientations, religions, political beliefs. And we're all going to work to discover how God is calling us to serve in the world, out of our loves.

That's more vague than some of us want. But it's not *nothing*. Our vision is much like the magi's star or Indy's journal. It's guiding us in the direction God is calling us. And as we take the next right step and the next right step after that and the next right step after that, we will be moving ever closer to that "aha" moment when everything clicks for us, when we encounter the God who is calling us forward, when we look up and see that along the way, God has transformed into the persons we needed to become to embrace this new future.

What is your next right step? What's stopping you from taking it?

Communion SetUp

[Communion Slide] Our journey brings us to the communion table first because at this table, we acknowledge our dependence on God for life. This table takes back to the meal Jesus shared with his followers the night he was betrayed. In that meal, he gave us bread as his body, broken for us. A cup of wine as his blood, spilled as a new covenant between God and humanity.

Approaching this table every week is like the practice of riding a bike. We consume God's grace, we eat and drink and participate in Jesus' life so that his life becomes our life, so that grace becomes second nature. We learn to trust God by practicing trust, by participating in Jesus' faithfulness.

You don't have to be a member of Catalyst to receive communion. If you're willing to trust God, to take the next right step forward, to practice a life of faith so that you can step into the future God is calling you toward, then you're welcome to come.

Examen

1. What do you want?
2. What "clues" has God put in your path? What do you *know* is important to your calling?
3. What scares you about following your calling?
4. What is your next right step this week?