



Step by Step: Walking A Spiritual Red Carpet- An Ignatian Reflection

Several months ago, Phyllis and George decided to move to a home that better accommodated their growing family. She prayed that they would make the decision that would bring them closer to God and for the clarity to know what the outcome would look like.

Her prayer was not always about such big decisions. Usually, she prayed to balance the present season of life with her professional and parental responsibilities according to God's will. So that all the pieces that seem chaotic on good days and disparate and nonsensical on bad days somehow might come together in one beautiful vision.

When she sat in the Examen prayer of St. Ignatius, tired and looking for encouragement, she brought pieces of her day to God. She asked how they fit together and where they might take her. She searched for a view of her destination, complete with directional markers, so that she could be assured that the toil, uncertainty, and chaos along the way of her life was worth it.

She approached the discernment of her next home in a similar way. As the days and weeks went on, her frustration in prayer grew. She was waiting for a grand "aha" moment, some immediately clear signal of where God wanted her family next. She bargained with God promising that if she could see the big picture, she would happily follow where God led. The "aha" moment, however, never came. And her bargains soon turned to 'pleas.' One morning as she stepped outside for a walk, they grew particularly desperate. "What am I supposed to do in this uncertainty?" She asked. "Why won't you tell us where to go?"

In moments of unknowns, we often reflect on the imagery of a *red carpet*. There is something deeply alluring about it; we crave the certainty of that plush, scarlet pathway with such definition to it with a clear start, a tangible end and not too many surprises along the way in between!

We often find ourselves looking and asking God for our very own *red carpet*. Longing to understand God's big, grand vision for our life and seeing a clear, defined path to get there. This would give us the courage St. Ignatius so frequently taught on - the courage to act on God's will, to follow the path God had laid out. Because at the end, we would know that a fabulous destination awaits.

That morning was no different. She reports impatiently asking God for a full view of what lay ahead, and she reports she was only three doors down when God responded. "I have told you." His voice was the clearest she had ever heard in prayer. And it was tinged with the same frustration I was bringing to God. "Why aren't you listening?" God asked. *I have told you.*

She played those words over in her heart and head. Again, the image of that red carpet flashed before her eyes. Only this time, instead of it being fully stretched out in front of her as she had been hoping, God was just ahead of her, unrolling it inches before her feet. She understood in that moment that God was purposely not revealing where the pathway led. Instead, God was giving her just enough clarity, and just enough room, to take a *next step*. In this instance, the next step was to try to sell her current home and to trust that while doing so, clarity on where to go next would come.

This was a risk, an immensely privileged one but also an opportunity for blind trust, for St. Ignatius-type courage — something that comes along far too infrequently in our often-predictable stream of Outlook appointments, deadlines, and bedtime routines. She also realized the destination may never come fully into view. She rested in the thought that if she was “lucky,” she might discern another direction to go in her work or the right childcare arrangement for her son. But how it all would come together in one grand celebration — and the path to get there — remained hidden from sight.

I think that is how God wants it. I do not think we are meant to see where that “*red carpet*” is going. I suspect the path that we want to be fully laid out is one that we are only going to see in the rearview mirror, that only in hindsight will it all make sense. Where the accumulation of our next steps leads is provided on a need-to-know basis, and God has made the executive decision that we do not yet “*need to know.*”

By holding out for the big picture as we discerned a move, we can often ignore a keyway by which God was already telling us to act. And this is where I frequently stumble in discernment. Whether seeking clarity of vocation, accommodation, or something else entirely, do we forget that sometimes only pieces and fragments will be available to me at a time. In my stubbornness, weakness, and cowardice, I often refuse to walk unless that full, flawless red carpet is underfoot. But by doing so, I risk missing the next steps that God has already asked me to take. And this, I think, is not oversight, but God’s own ingenious design. Withholding the destination in God’s response to prayer may just be the only way God knows to get me to where God wants me. Step by step.

So, God invites me. Am I open to the walk by faith and trust?