



The Heart of a Pathfinder

Charting Paths for
the Next Generation

MELISSA ALFARO

THE HEART OF A PATHFINDER

MELISSA ALFARO



Gospel Publishing House

KJV refers to the King James Version of the Bible

Scripture quotations marked (AMP) are taken from the *Amplified® Bible* (AMP), Copyright © 2015 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. lockman.org. Scripture quotations marked (CEB) are from the COMMON ENGLISH BIBLE. © Copyright 2011 COMMON ENGLISH BIBLE. All rights reserved. Used by permission. (www.CommonEnglishBible.com).

Scripture quotations marked (MSG) are taken from *The Message*, copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018 by Eugene H. Peterson. Used by permission of NavPress. All rights reserved. Represented by Tyndale House Publishers.

Scripture quotations marked (NLT) are taken from the Holy Bible, *New Living Translation*, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com.

The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.®

© 2026 by Gospel Publishing House, 1445 N. Boonville Ave., Springfield, Missouri 65802. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—without prior written permission of the copyright owner, except for brief quotations used in connection with reviews in magazines or newspapers.

978-1-60731-759-3

027076

28 27 26 · 1 2 3

Printed in United States of America

CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS A PATHFINDER?

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

From “The Road Not Taken” by Robert Frost¹

The words echoed in my mind. The tapping of my pencil on the wooden desk ceased as I was confronted by the words staring back at me from the transparency on the screen (Yes, I am dating myself here). As I committed Robert Frost’s poem “The Road Not Taken” to memory for an assignment, I found myself intrigued by the traveler’s journey.

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

THE HEART OF A PATHFINDER

Each time I recited the words, something grew inside my heart.
Was it curiosity? Intrigue?

Two roads. One path. Which way?

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

I remember reading the poem over and over. It was almost as if the cadence of the poem matched the footsteps of a person as they walked down unexplored terrain—the crunch of the foliage under their feet, branches breaking, twigs cracking, the sound of fresh grass being broken through as this traveler charted a new course.

It was in my seventh-grade English class, with this poem, that I was first introduced to the idea of a pathfinder. Though I wasn't familiar with the concept of a pathfinder at the time, God started cultivating the spirit of a pathfinder in me from a very young age.

I am a pastor's kid. I had the gift of growing up in ministry, in a loving home with parents who modeled Christlike faith. At the age of nine, I accepted the Lord as my Savior at a Missionettes event (now known as Girls Ministries). As

THE HEART OF A PATHFINDER

I look back at my adolescence, my seventh-grade year stands out as a defining moment. I was baptized in the Holy Spirit that year, at the age of twelve, in my parents' small rural church, Templo La Hermosa, in Breckenridge, Texas.

The Holy Spirit had been a topic of conversation for weeks prior to that Wednesday night. I remember asking my dad questions about the Holy Spirit and reading books that I thought would give me a simple formula on how to receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit. After weeks of seeking, praying, and even wondering if it would ever happen, on a Wednesday night, after my dad finished the sermon, I went to the altar and called out to God, asking Him to baptize me with fire. Shortly after, my parents joined me at the altar. They prayed for me. They tarried with me, and then my mouth began speaking words I had never previously heard or spoken before. I was filled with the Holy Spirit. My life was marked from that day on.

During that season of my life, God was definitely stirring my heart about a call to ministry, although I couldn't clearly articulate it at the time. Three years later, at a special service held for pastors' kids (PKs) and youth at the Gulf Latin American District Council in Corpus Christi, Texas, I accepted the call into ministry. As I walked to the altar at the front, I was trembling inside. I tried to negotiate with my fifteen-year-old self: *What are you doing? How could God call you into ministry? What will you do? Where will you go? Turn back and sit down.*

I didn't know what I would do, or even how I would begin to walk out my call. I only knew that I had heard the voice of God, deep in my spirit, calling me to surrender my life and future completely to Him.

That was the season I found myself staring down two roads:

Convenience or the call? Comfort or conviction? Success or sacrifice?

THE HEART OF A PATHFINDER

At fifteen, I couldn't possibly have known what my yes to God would require. But I didn't need to know. I just needed the certainty that the One who called me to chart a new path would be with me on this journey.

As I look back on the pivotal moments of my life, I see how the hand of God has always led me in forging new paths. I was the first in my family to graduate from high school. I was also the first to earn my bachelor's and master's degrees, and after much work, a PhD. Each educational path opened doors, allowed me to learn from mentors in the field, and provided new opportunities for me to sharpen the skills I now use regularly. My decision to pursue higher education also broke new ground for my family and influenced other relatives in my extended family. On two occasions while I was in graduate school, two of my cousins reached out to me for interviews for papers they were writing about people who had influenced them. Since then, a few of my younger cousins have gone to college and earned their bachelor's and master's degrees. Just this year, one of my younger cousins defended her dissertation and graduated with her PhD (the second person with a doctorate in our family). In 2017, I was the first female Hispanic elected to a non-ethnic- or gender-defined role of leadership on the Assemblies of God Executive Presbytery. I did not pursue this assignment. It was not in my ten-year plan. However, I have learned in my walk with the Lord that courageous obedience moves His heart and aligns our steps with His perfect will for our lives.

On my journey, I have learned that being a pathfinder isn't for the faint of heart. It isn't easy. It takes work, preparation, sacrifice, patience, and commitment. It requires stepping out into unexplored terrain after the initial excitement has worn off, putting one foot in front of the other, and remaining faithful to the call. Paths are only charted and cleared after we have walked through them consistently. The reward is great! When we break ground and find a path in

THE HEART OF A PATHFINDER

an uncharted area, we create something that will outlive and outgrow us. As pathfinders, we don't merely bestow our inheritance on another generation. We create new paths so our children and the next generation can build on our obedience and our inheritance.

What path has God called you to chart for the next generation? We only have two options—we will either maintain history or we will break new ground and make history. With God's help, you, my friend, can:

- Chart paths and make a way for younger ministers or pastors who continue to hit limitations in their leadership journey.
- Open paths for spiritual sons and daughters, who have the call of God on their lives, and speak to the God-given potential inside them.
- Change a community and shift cultural mindsets by showing what happens when multiple generations, men and women, and diverse cultures work together to build God's church.
- Take bold steps—even if you are starting out in ministry. You could plant a church, serve in a foreign country as a global worker, or anything that brings the gospel to the location God places you.
- Be ready for impact across the street or around the world, charting paths for others to join you in the adventure of obedience.
- Change the trajectory of your family. You are liberated from repeating what was said or done to you. You can be a healthier parent, spouse, sibling, or child to your family members as you show them a new pathway to a healthy family. You can be a pathfinder.

WHAT A PATHFINDER IS

- A pathfinder is an anointed leader committed to the next generation flourishing in the kingdom of God.
- A pathfinder goes ahead of others and discovers a way where there has never been a way.
- A pathfinder operates with the gifts of creativity and innovation.
- A pathfinder is resilient and navigates the arduous tasks of charting new paths.
- A pathfinder discovers new ways of doing things that bring a preferred future.

A pathfinder's greatest motivation is not the sustainability of their legacy but their ability to launch members of the next generation into their call. Obstacles don't discourage pathfinders. They see obstacles as opportunities to clear a path so the next generation can step into their purpose. Pathfinders take risks. They pay the price because they realize that their greatest legacy is not what they have built with their hands, but the paths that they have opened for others with their feet.

As mentioned, pathfinders do pass on the truth of the gospel and the wisdom of generations. Yet they do so much more. They help forge new ways forward that require courage and faith. For this, a fresh Pentecost is needed, as pathfinders and the ones they are helping experience afresh the power of the Lord for the mission. A key part of a pathfinder's impact is a focus on godly character, for who we are becoming in Christ is the foundation for what we are doing for Christ.

THE CALL OF THE PATHFINDER IN SCRIPTURE

We see the footprints of pathfinders throughout Scripture—Abraham, Moses, David, Esther, Jesus, Paul, and Timothy—each of whom is explored in the chapters that follow. In 2 Timothy, chapter 1, Paul wrote to his spiritual son, Timothy. Paul offered a glimpse into a faith that has been passed down through generations.

I remember your genuine faith, for you share the faith that first filled your grandmother Lois and your mother, Eunice. And I know that same faith continues strong in you. This is why I remind you to fan into flames the spiritual gift God gave you when I laid my hands on you. For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline. . . . Hold on to the pattern of wholesome teaching you learned from me—a pattern shaped by the faith and love that you have in Christ Jesus. Through the power of the Holy Spirit who lives within us, carefully guard the precious truth that has been entrusted to you. 2 Timothy 1:5–7, 13–14, NLT

Timothy's call was marked by the faith of his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice. His call was also marked and affirmed by the wholesome teaching from his mentor, the apostle Paul. Here, Paul admonished Timothy to fan the flames of the gift of God within him.

In Romans 12:11, the apostle Paul exhorted the believers: "Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord." The Common English Bible (CEB) renders the verse: "Don't hesitate to be enthusiastic—be on fire in the Spirit as you serve the Lord!" *The Message* (MSG) puts it this way: "Don't

THE HEART OF A PATHFINDER

burn out; keep yourselves fueled and aflame. Be alert servants of the Master, cheerfully expectant.”

Paul used an interesting term that the New International Version translates as *zeal*. The Greek term is literally described as “to boil, to be hot,” or metaphorically as “to be fervent, ardent, zealous.”² It is a word that clearly denotes intensity. As seen in the last paragraph, several Bible translations communicate this idea for English audiences through the idea of fire. Fire has great significance throughout the Bible and in its correlation to the life of the believer. In the Old Testament, fire was a symbol that represented God’s holiness, power, and protection. God used a burning bush to capture Moses’ attention and call him to be the deliverer of God’s people. Later, God used a pillar of fire by night to lead His people through the desert. In Leviticus, fire was an important element in the tent of meeting. God commanded Moses, “Meanwhile, the fire on the altar must be kept burning; it must never go out” (Leviticus 6:12, NLT). In the life of the prophet Elijah, we see how God used fire to demonstrate His power before the false prophets of Baal.

In the New Testament, we see on the Day of Pentecost that the fire that used to go before God’s people—in both great exploits and as a persistent presence—rested upon them as tongues of fire as they were baptized in the Holy Spirit and empowered to advance the gospel.

In the Old Testament, sacrificial fires required worshippers to offer a living animal as a sacrifice on the altar. But in the New Testament, the apostle Paul admonished the church in Romans 12:1 to “offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.” Just as we see a perpetual fire on the altar in Leviticus, we too are admonished to keep the fire burning on the altar of our hearts.

The same admonition that Paul gave Timothy still echoes in the heart of a pathfinder today as we look at our mandate for the next generation. It won’t be easy to keep a flame alive in the midst of a postmodern culture that seeks to snuff out or censor

our faith with humanistic philosophies. It won't be easy to keep a generational flame burning when worldly success or the American dream tempts us to walk the path of convenience rather than surrender to the call of God. Nevertheless, we have a mandate as pathfinders: to fan the flame in our Timothy, to fan the flame in the next generation. The flame speaks not only to our legacy, but to the need for present and future empowering by the Holy Spirit.

THE COMMITMENT OF THE PATHFINDER

The commitment of a pathfinder should be consistent and firm. Each step they take on their ministry journey should prioritize proximity, the elevation of perspective, and the passing on of faith through courageous obedience on behalf of the next generation.

PROXIMITY

In the same way that you can't fan the flames of a fire without being in close proximity to the fire, we can't engage with the next generation from a distance. It takes the right proximity to fan the flames in someone else. We see this illustrated throughout Scripture.

In Exodus 24, when Moses went up the mountain to talk to God, Joshua accompanied him further than anyone else. In Exodus 33:11, when Moses departed from the tent of meeting, Joshua remained behind in the tent. Joshua got to hear and see certain things firsthand because he stayed close to Moses. God revealed to Moses that Joshua would be his successor, and Joshua confirmed this call with his fidelity and proximity.

THE HEART OF A PATHFINDER

The prophets Elijah and Elisha illustrate the power of proximity. Elisha stayed close to his mentor, refusing to leave even under difficult circumstances. The reward was the fresh mantle of anointing as a prophet.

Mordecai's relational proximity to Esther granted him the opportunity to speak into a pivotal moment of decision (and he didn't mince his words or sugarcoat his advice; see Esther 4:12–14). Relational proximity affords us, as pathfinders, the opportunity to speak into the lives of the next generation with grace and truth.

Jesus prioritized proximity in His relationships. His simple command to the disciples as He called them emanates with the heart of a pathfinder: “Come, follow me” (Matthew 4:19, NLT). Jesus' invitation was an opportunity to do more than just fill their heads with knowledge. It was an invitation to come close, walk with Him, talk with Him, see what He saw, hear what He heard, and walk where He walked (Matthew 9:19, 35–38). It was an invitation to see firsthand how Jesus did life and ministry (Matthew 17:14–20). Jesus not only taught His disciples along with the crowds (Matthew 5, 13, 23; Luke 11), but He taught them across a dinner table (Matthew 9:10; 26:17–30; Mark 2:15; Luke 24:36–43), one-on-one or as a group (Matthew 18:21–35; 24–25; Mark 6:30–32; 9:2–13; 14:32–42; John 20:24–31; 21:15–19), as they walked along the road (Matthew 20:17–19; Mark 11:20–25; Luke 24:13–35), during fishing trips (Luke 5:1–11; John 21), and on boat rides (Matthew 8:23–27; Mark 4:35–41). He exposed them to His ministry (Matthew 14:13–21). Jesus pulled back the curtain on the meaning of parables that His audience was not always quick to perceive (Matthew 13:10–23, 34–43; 15:12–20; 19:23–30; Mark 4:10–34). Proximity to Jesus forged the ministry path for the disciples. When Jesus gave them the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18–20 before He ascended to heaven, the disciples were ready to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy

THE HEART OF A PATHFINDER

Spirit, teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.” Proximity with Jesus was their greatest training ground.

Pathfinders will prioritize proximity with the next generation. They will make time to meet with them, bring them into meetings, take them on hospital visits, and invite them to sit in on a board meeting. Pathfinders will make room on their schedule to take that call and process things with their spiritual son and daughter. They won’t spoon-feed solutions to their spiritual sons or daughters but will be good listeners and ask questions that lead those spiritual children to come to a point of clarity and direction on their own.

Pathfinders will pull back the curtain on the why of leadership decisions, rather than merely sharing the what and the how. Their approach will go beyond the didactic, as they relationally come alongside their spiritual children on their ministry journey—affirming them, supporting them, and charting paths that aid them in their future endeavors.

PERSPECTIVE

Pathfinders will also remove self-imposed limitations or institutional restrictions that may hinder the next generation from stepping into their call. They refuse to let human limitations hinder forward progress, for they rely on the power and wisdom of Christ, not merely on human ingenuity. Removing leadership lids has just as much to do with perspective as it does with accessibility. We chart paths so that others have the opportunity to look beyond the difficulty of the process and see the potential of God’s promise.

Imagine standing in the middle of a crowded room. Our vision is limited to what is closest—the people standing or sitting next to us and the objects a few feet away. Our perspective may be hindered by our position. However, if we stood

THE HEART OF A PATHFINDER

on an elevated platform or climbed up on a ladder or riser in the middle of the front of the room, we would gain a more panoramic view. The higher we climb, the more our perspective broadens.

If we, as pathfinders, want to help remove the leadership limitations of those next to us, we must help move them to higher ground, where they can acquire a new perspective.

This is a biblical concept. God often called His people to look up—to widen their vision. The Psalmist sang, “I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth” (Psalm 121:1–2). In biblical times, mountains were often used as pagan high places. However, the Psalmist looked upward to his true source of power and aid—the Lord. The Psalmist’s help didn’t come from the mountains but from the One who created mountains. A new perspective allows for reflection and redirects our focus back to our ultimate source of strength and power which is God Almighty.

“But you, Lord, are a shield around me, my glory, the One who lifts my head high” (Psalm 3:3). Only by changing the focal point of his vision would the Psalmist and, in turn, all of us, find newfound courage.

When John was shown what is to come in the Book of Revelation, he was told, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this” (Revelation 4:1). When we are willing to come up higher, we see beyond the here and now. Our perspective changes. We see what God is able to do!

A fresh Pentecost is needed for the next generation. To prepare for this, we must remove human limitations and expose them to new ways of dreaming and preparing themselves for the call. We must help them see it and visualize it!

THE HEART OF A PATHFINDER

I am a second-generation minister in my family. I was born and raised in a Pentecostal environment. I saw my parents minister as evangelists and local pastors. Beginning as a teen, I would serve alongside them by helping in children's church and in our youth group. From the age of nine, I remember how my parents normalized a future in ministry for me. They would talk to me about considering ministry. My mother would write down what I call prophetic notes in the back of my various Bibles, sharing how God had a plan for my life. My parents prayed over me and my future. They prophesied over me. They normalized access to ministry for me by keeping it a part of our conversations.

They normalized educational preparation for me. I am a first-generation college graduate. Perhaps my parents didn't have the opportunity to attend college due to poverty and limited opportunities. Even so, from a very young age, they normalized the importance of a college education in our family. College was not an option for my younger brother and me. My parents never asked my brother and me *if* we wanted to attend college. My parents had already decided that we *would* attend college and we *would* graduate from college.

With each conversation, each handwritten note, and each prayer uttered, my parents were removing the limitations to our future. They were taking us to higher ground and changing our perspective. They were broadening our vision! We had been exposed to financial hardships growing up, but my parents didn't want that experience to be our reference point. They wanted to give us a new perspective on what God could do in us if we surrendered our lives and futures completely to Him. Perhaps education wasn't in their past, but because they normalized it, talked about it, and gave us a new perspective, they ensured it would be a part of our future!

THE HEART OF A PATHFINDER

In our local church, we've had as many as three female staff pastors at one time. Forty percent of our church board is female. We regularly have both men and women preach and teach in our church. We are grateful that we have helped many look up and achieve their calling.

On one occasion, our NextGen pastor asked the students what they wanted to be when they grew up. A few of the elementary-age girls responded, "A pastor." Notice they didn't "a pastor's spouse." Why? Because seeing a female pastor or a woman in ministry is normal for them. A pathfinder paid the price to remove the barriers and helped give the next generation a new perspective of what God could do in their lives. Pathfinders create a new normal for coming generations.

Our imagination may be limited by our past experiences unless we filter it through God's perspective. If we want to remove the limits, we must begin by normalizing what others have seen as unconventional or inaccessible.

We normalize the call by talking about our own journey, preaching about it, and being intentional—inviting all generations of believers to pray about and respond to the call. We normalize what it means to prepare for ministry by seeking ordination, going back to school, and obtaining a degree. If we stop short in our formational journey, we can limit the potential of future generations. We don't want our excuses to limit what the next generation can do.

We normalize what generational, gender, and ethnic diversity looks like on the platform and around the decision-making table. We normalize men and women leading together in ministry, planting churches, and pastoring. We normalize it through our messaging, our sermon series, our conversations, our meetings, by the voices we invite to minister behind the pulpit, by the organizational bylaws we follow, and the mission and vision of the church we

THE HEART OF A PATHFINDER

lead. Words are important. If we cannot articulate it in our vital documents, we cannot expect it to become a part of our culture. As we normalize it, we begin to give the next generation a broader perspective on what God can do. Pathfinders don't leave glass ceilings for their sons and daughters to break. Pathfinders remove the ceilings!

PASSING ON

Growing up, I loved hearing the stories of what God did in the lives of family members. (I was an English major in college so I love stories.) I enjoyed hearing about the all-night revival services my parents experienced in their first church and how people were saved, healed, and delivered in their evangelistic revivals when they were on the road. However, as I grew, I realized that the purpose of their stories wasn't so much to chronicle the past as it was to encourage faith to believe for my future. Each story reminded me that God is the same yesterday, today and forever. The power to pass on was interwoven into the act of remembering and recounting. Pathfinders mine the rich lessons and testimonies of history so their sons and daughters extract the gold from those lessons and forge their own history.

In the Old Testament, there is a theme woven throughout God's big story—*remember*. One example is clear in the Exodus from Egypt. God delivered the Hebrew people from Egypt; He parted the Red Sea so they could walk on dry ground. He delivered them from Pharaoh. He provided for them miraculously during their forty-year journey through the desert. He gave them a leader, Moses, and provided the Law, including the Ten Commandments, to help them walk out their relationship with God. He was a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, guiding them on their journey. Time and time again, God would repeat a familiar command, almost as a warning, inviting His people to remember His mighty deeds and pass

THE HEART OF A PATHFINDER

on those deeds to the next generation. God told Moses in Deuteronomy 4:9 (NLT), “But watch out! Be careful never to forget what you yourself have seen. Do not let these memories escape from your mind as long as you live! And be sure to pass them on to your children and grandchildren.”

The Hebrew word translated as *pass* in Deuteronomy 4:9 can be understood as “inform, announce, teach, give signal.”³ The people were not to ignore what they had been taught. Their memories of these events would be their greatest defense against spiritual amnesia. God didn’t want His people to forget what He had done or become apathetic to His goodness in their lives. Along with the command to remember was also a generational admonition to recount the stories and teach them to their children, not just for information’s sake, but so that each story would become a part of the next generation’s experience. The recounting of the deliverance and deeds of God would serve to build the faith of the next generation.

On certain occasions in Scripture after God had performed a miracle, the people of God would set stones down as a memorial so they would remember His greatness and goodness. In Joshua 4, God told Joshua to command one man from every tribe to put down a stone to mark the place where He had opened the Jordan River, allowing His people to cross over on dry ground. God was giving them a visual representation that would trigger not only their memory, but also their faith! And this was something God wanted them to pass on to their children.

The purpose of creating a memorial was not merely to serve as a mile marker on their journey, as if to say, “The Israelites were here!” It served to remind them that, in the midst of their plight, God had been present.

THE HEART OF A PATHFINDER

But forget they did. The Book of Judges opens with a chilling reminder of what happens when we don't remember and pass on God's mighty deeds to the next generation:

When Joshua dismissed the people, the Israelites each went to settle on their own family property in order to take possession of the land. The people serve the Lord throughout the rest of Joshua's life and throughout the next generation of elders who outlived him, those who had seen all the great things that the Lord had done for Israel. Joshua, Nun's son and the Lord's servant, died when he was 110 years old. They buried him within the boundaries of his family property in Timnath-heres in the highlands of Ephraim north of Mount Gaash. When that whole generation had passed away, another generation came after them who didn't know the Lord or the things he had done for Israel. Judges 2:6–10 (CEB)

Despite God's provision and patience, generation after generation—from Joshua and Judges through the Prophets—we see how the spiritual amnesia of the Israelites negatively impacted future generations. As they fell into idolatry and sinned before God, they often found themselves in captivity or oppressed. Time after time, God sent prophets with words of judgment and restoration. God sent the prophet Jeremiah with the following message: “I will give them a heart to know me, for I am the LORD. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart” (Jeremiah 24:7, CEB).

He later sent the prophet Ezekiel with a similar message: “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to

THE HEART OF A PATHFINDER

keep my laws” (Ezekiel 36:26–27). Notice that this prophetic word came before Ezekiel 37—the valley of dry bones prophecy. In other words, before God would raise them up and build an army with His Spirit in them, He wanted to deal with the condition of their hearts.

Later, we have the prophet Joel, who again repeated the same message. We are familiar with Joel 2:28–29, “I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.” We love this passage! It speaks of revival and the promise of a spiritual awakening for every generation. But the precursor to these verses is Joel 2:12–13:

“Even now,” declares the LORD, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.”

Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love.

Do you see the pattern? Why would the people of God continually return to idolatry? Because they changed behaviors without allowing God to change their hearts. Countless Israelites observed the sacrifices, went to the temple, put on the right appearance, and disguised their faulty spiritual foundation. But God was not just after behavior modification. He didn’t want to disguise their cracks—He wanted to give them a new heart. Their failure to remember and pass on affected their children and their children’s children for generations to come.

In the New Testament, we see how the theme of remembering is echoed through the life and teaching of Jesus. He taught in John 14:26 (NLT) that one of the functions of the Holy Spirit is to aid our memory. Jesus said, “But when the Father sends the Advocate

THE HEART OF A PATHFINDER

as my representative—that is, the Holy Spirit—he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you.” Jesus even taught His disciples around the table. During the Last Supper, Jesus partook of the bread and the cup, reminding His disciples, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19, CEB).

We don’t remember only for our benefit. God calls us to remember the seasons we have gone through, the processes that broke us and that He rebuilt so we can chart out a path for those coming behind us. We remember so we can pass it on to the next generation.

When we get spiritual amnesia, the difficult seasons do more than discourage us; they can harden our hearts. Rather than remember what God has done, we become skeptical of His promises. Friends, this is an area we can’t miss with the next generation. We have to get it right. Every time we walk through a hard season, we can build altars so that we, and future generations, will have places for remembering what God has done.

This requires vulnerability with the next generation. If we only show them a veneered version of Christianity or a concept of ministry without suffering, pain, or offense, then we are setting them up for disappointment and failure. They will think they can’t live up to such a standard, and we may even lose them before they have started.

If we are going to be pathfinders who fan the flames of the next generation, we need to get close enough to allow them to see our wins and our wounds. The next generation is drawn to authenticity and integrity (actually, every godly generation is). They need to see and hear about the processes that made us laugh and even cry. We need to be vulnerable enough to show them our mountaintop

THE HEART OF A PATHFINDER

successes and the altars we built in the desert. Our God stories serve as a spiritual reservoir to encourage the faith of future generations. The Psalmist echoed this when he wrote, “Now that I am old and gray, do not abandon me, O God. Let me proclaim your power to this new generation, your mighty miracles to all who come after me” (Psalm 71:18, NLT).

Pathfinders lead by example because they are shepherds who have learned from the Good Shepherd himself. Jesus said the Good Shepherd goes on ahead of His sheep, and they follow Him (John 10:4). A great leader will mark the path for others to follow, not just with words or the power differential, but through his or her own example. Pathfinders don’t just tell—they show. During the Last Supper, Jesus modeled washing His disciples’ feet before commanding His disciples to do the same. Only after He modeled servant leadership did He invite His disciples to follow His example (John 13:1–17).

May we do the same.

If you find yourself staring at a situation that needs changing, it’s time to open a path where there has never been one. If you find yourself with a blank canvas, it’s time to create. If you find yourself in an unfamiliar season or territory, don’t deviate to the well-worn path. This could be an opportunity God is giving you to chart a new path for a new purpose. Take a deep breath. Put one foot in front of the other. Keep walking. Let’s chart new paths together.

A PATHFINDER PRAYER

Father, we position ourselves to hear from You. You are our Light and Compass on the journey. As we begin this journey, we invite You to speak to us, reveal to us, and stretch our hearts for the next generation. We believe our descendants—the next generation—will walk in Pentecostal power and prophetic authority. Help us to lean into the mighty deeds You have already done in our lives and ministry, that we might recount them to the next generation. May our stories build the faith of the next generation. We open wide our hearts and make ourselves available in any way You choose to use us to fulfill that promise.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Who has God placed next to you in this season?
2. How can you prioritize proximity with those God has placed next to you?
3. What habits or hindrances in your schedule need to change for you to become a more relational leader?
4. Identify the leadership limits prevalent in your local ministry or organization. What is one thing you can do to begin shifting the culture and changing the perspective in that area of ministry?
5. Is vulnerability hard or easy for you as a leader? What is one way you can begin to be vulnerable with the spiritual sons and daughters God has placed around you to build their faith for their call?

ENDNOTES

CHAPTER 1

¹ Robert Frost, “The Road Not Taken,” *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry*, ed. Richard Ellmann and Robert O’Clair, (W.W. Norton, 1988), 209.

² *Mounce Greek Dictionary*, s.v. “ζέω,” paragraph 6595.

³ Terence E. Fretheim, *NIDOTTE*, s.v. “,” 2:401.

You're not just leading for now — you're building for what's next. How big would you dream if you saw your ministry through a generational lens?

Melissa Alfaro challenges us to approach leadership through the lens of a pathfinder. She calls ministry leaders to do the hard work of clearing the path so future generations can step into their call. Drawing from her own experience, unique biblical stories, and the wisdom gleaned from pathfinders along her own ministry journey, Melissa brings a fresh perspective on the power and potential of generational influence. Encouraging leaders to find paths in uncommon seasons and spaces, she compels us to do the hard work of ministry leadership with integrity and heart so we can clear the path for those coming behind us.



About the Author

Melissa Alfaro and her husband are the senior pastors of The Tabernacle in Houston, Texas. She is an ordained minister with the Texas Louisiana Hispanic Network of the Assemblies of God. Alfaro is the executive presbyter representing ordained female ministers for the Assemblies of God and the national leader of the Assemblies of God Network of Women Ministers. She is a preacher, educator, writer, and blogger. It is her desire to help individuals become rooted in God's Word and enjoy their journey as they live out their God-given purpose.

