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PATH

A JOURNEY THROUGH THE BIBLE

PASSAGES FROM THE
NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION
OF THE BIBLE



THE PATH

A JOURNEY THROUGH THE BIBLE

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Praise for *The Path: A Journey through the Bible*

This accessible journey through the Good Book reclaims the Bible as a grand story, from God's creation to Christ's return, and returns us again and again to its central questions of love, sin, and redemption. *The Path* is a perfect entry point for people who want to know more about the Bible but don't know where to start.

—JANA RIESS

Author of *Flunking Sainthood* and
*The Twible: All the Chapters of the Bible
in 140 Characters or Less,
Now with 68% More Humor!*

For those of us who are hungry for the Bible, editors Melody Wilson Shobe and David Creech not only give us meat, but they also cut it up for us. Simplified, yes. Dumbed down, not at all. *The Path* is practical and accessible—a terrific resource in an attention-challenged world.

—CHRIS YAW

Founder, ChurchNext

Taking its cue from the world of hiking, *The Path* is a wonderful resource for those who want to explore—or re-explore—the overarching story of the Bible. The selected passages offer a perfect overview of the Bible's contents, without becoming overwhelming. The notes provide helpful information, without taking away from the story.

The book is perfect for a lone traveler into the text of the Bible or for a small-group expedition. *The Path* is one of the best ways to familiarize yourself with the rich and life-changing message of the Bible that I've ever seen.

—ROY L. HELLER

Perkins School of Theology,
Southern Methodist University



THE PATH

A JOURNEY THROUGH THE BIBLE

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Forward Movement
Cincinnati, Ohio

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About this Book

The Bible is everywhere.

Many of us learned about it first as children, hunched over desks, decorating coloring pages in our Sunday School classrooms. The stories we heard were mostly the ones with animals—Noah and the ark; Daniel in the lions’ den; Mary, pregnant with Jesus, making the journey to Bethlehem on a donkey. We colored the pages and soaked in the stories, and they settled somewhere deep inside us.

But, of course, the Bible isn’t only for children. In churches of every stripe, people gather each Sunday to hear sections of scripture read aloud. We welcome the verses with singing or silence or incense. We bow our heads or raise our hands. We proclaim after hearing the passages that they are “The Word of the Lord.” These bits of the Bible, read and sung and preached, also find their way into our hearts and minds.

And we don’t only have exposure to Bibles in church. The Bible is the greatest-selling book of all time. In fact, the American Bible Society reports that 88 percent of households in the United States own at least one Bible—and the average household has not one, not two, but four Bibles.

Even if you have never set foot in a church, and even if you don’t have a Bible in your house, you still know about the Bible.

The Bible is the subject of much of the greatest art of all time: The stories of the Bible are painted in glory and splendor across

the vast expanse of the Sistine Chapel, captured in light and shadow by the deft hand of Rembrandt, told by bits of jewel-colored glass in synagogue and church windows constructed across hundreds of years and around the world.

We find the Bible nestled in the pages of literature. It is explicit in the works of the great masters: Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Steinbeck's *East of Eden*, Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, and many more. But the Bible's themes and references run much deeper than that. You can find them in Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*, L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time*, in Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, in the works of Stephen King and in dozens upon dozens of other books, from high literature to bestselling page-turners.

The Bible also finds its way onto the silver screen. You can see it in biblical epics like *The Ten Commandments*, *The Passion of the Christ*, or *Noah*. And you can hear its words in much more unlikely places: *Pulp Fiction*, *Saving Private Ryan*, *The Shawshank Redemption*, *Wedding Crashers*, *Life of Brian*, and hundreds of other famous movies all reference and explore parts of the Bible.

Yes, the Bible is everywhere.

Yet in spite of (or maybe because of) its prevalence, most of us don't really know the Bible. Although we have a lot of Bibles in our houses, and we've read and watched and heard a lot of things *about* the Bible, most of us have never read the Bible.

The truth is, we are intimidated. Opening the Bible and trying to read it feels like being dropped off without a map in the middle of a remote wilderness. We know certain major landmarks: Moses and the Ten Commandments, Jonah and the whale, Jesus walking on water, but when we are down in the weeds, we can't see how the stories connect to one another. We want to read the Bible, but we aren't quite sure how to navigate its pages. We search for God in the midst of the Bible, but we

aren't sure which direction to turn. We yearn to follow Jesus more closely, but we don't know where to start that journey or how to get to the trailhead.

The Path: A Journey through the Bible is an opportunity to walk through the Bible in an easy and accessible format. *The Path* is the story of the Bible, excerpted and condensed so that it is easier to read. In the pages of this book, we have laid out a clear trail, an easy-to-follow pathway, so that you can journey from one Bible story to the next and see how they connect to each other. As you read through *The Path*, you will see all of the major landmarks of the Bible's story—and you will walk in the footsteps of faithful men and women who have done their best to follow God's call. By reading *The Path*, you will journey through the Bible step-by-step, experiencing an amazing 360-degree overview of the vast, sweeping story of God's extraordinary love for ordinary people.

Inside the gilded-edge pages of the Bible, underneath that intimidating cover, between and through those lists of hard-to-pronounce names, in the midst of that wilderness of words is an incredible, epic story. It is the story of God's extraordinary love that overflowed into the creation of the world, the earth, and all that is in it, including humanity. It is the story of God's relentless, unwavering, unstoppable love for his people, people who are flawed and funny and ordinary, just like you and me. It is the story of the journey of all-too-ordinary people who have tried, sometimes with glorious success and sometimes with abject failure, to respond to God's love. It's the story of how God keeps trying to call us back to him, even when we have wandered and strayed from the path. It's the story of how, in the fullness of time, God came among us, love incarnate, in the person of Jesus Christ, to show us how to walk through this world with love and compassion. It's the story of Jesus' life, of his death, and of his resurrection. The Bible is the story of the founding of the Church, the followers of Jesus in the world, the people of the Way, proclaiming Christ's word and continuing

his work. It's the story of you and me, the descendants of these flawed, broken, and beautiful characters, the inheritors of the promise of God.

The Path is an invitation to journey through the Bible, to walk through this wilderness of words and see God revealed in them and hear God speaking through them. So let's get started on this epic adventure: a journey through the Bible to grow closer to God!

FORMAT OF THE BOOK

Although it looks like a regular book, *The Path* is the Bible. All of the regular text in this book is directly from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible. It is not a summary of the Bible, our interpretation of the Bible, or a story about the Bible. It is the Bible. On very rare occasions, we substituted a noun for a pronoun for the sake of clarity; these are noted in brackets. Other than that, the biblical text has not been edited or amended in any way, so that most of what you are reading in *The Path* is the Bible itself.

But, of course, *The Path* is not the entire Bible. Instead, it is *excerpts* from the Bible, selected texts that cover most of the "great landmarks" from the Bible's story. This is intended to give you an idea of the overarching narrative, the sweeping story of God's great love for us. As you read this book, you will be walking, in roughly chronological order, through most of the major moments of the biblical narrative. This journey gives you a sense of how the smaller stories of the Bible, some that are familiar and some that might be surprising, fit together to tell a bigger story. You might notice another difference between *The Path* and the Bible: There are no verse numbers. We wanted you to read the *The Path* excerpts in a narrative form, as stories without interruption. At the end of each chapter, there is a list of citations, so that you will know exactly which parts of the Bible you have been reading.

In between the long selections of the Bible, you will see small paragraphs that are written in italics. The italicized text in this book is summary, written by the editors. We use these paragraphs to give you an overview of what is happening in the biblical text that was omitted. Think of these paragraphs as a kind of “shortcut;” they enable us to bypass some of the more lengthy sections of the Bible, so we can keep walking to the important landmarks. These brief paragraphs of explanation help connect the individual components of the narrative. In writing these summaries, we have tried to stick as closely as possible to the words of the Bible itself, without adding a lot of interpretation or our own ideas. Of course, any excerpt or summary is an interpretation, but we have tried to be as unbiased as possible.

In addition to the summaries, text boxes with notes offer additional information. “Point of Interest” boxes explain a word or a term that might be confusing or highlight an important element that might be easy to miss. “Scenic View” boxes give a bit of history or background, so that you can better see the big picture of the Bible’s story. “You Are Here” boxes invite readers to find themselves in the story, to connect the ancient scripture to modern life. “Trail Crossing” boxes point out connections to other parts of the biblical story. These notes are not meant to be exhaustive but are simply a chance to learn more as you read along. These text boxes function like a trail map, giving you a bit more information about the things that you are passing as you journey through the Bible.

At the end of each chapter, a list of questions presents an opportunity to wrestle with the biblical text and see what it is saying to you. If you are reading this book as part of a class or small group, you can use the questions for group discussion. If you are reading this book on your own, you can use them as a starting point for prayer, reflection, or journaling. Each chapter also includes suggestions for next steps. These prompts provide even more ways for you to engage the story from the chapter. Some involve reading parts of the Bible that were skipped;

others give ideas for prayer or action. The questions and next steps are an important part of continuing your journey of faith beyond the pages of the Bible, so that you can follow Jesus more closely in your daily life.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The Path is yours, to read, to study, and (hopefully) to enjoy. This is a chance to walk with and through the scriptures on your journey of faith. It is an opportunity to explore the path that leads us into deeper relationship with Jesus Christ. There is no wrong way to read this book. However, we do have some ideas for how you might get the most out of reading this incredible story.

If you are reading *The Path* on your own, you might choose to sit down and read it straight through, as you would any regular book. The Bible is just as exciting as any soap opera or bestselling novel; it's full of suspense, drama, love, and even humor! Reading *The Path* as you would any ordinary book can give you an opportunity to be swept up in the story and to hear how all the pieces of the story fit together like a puzzle to give us an even bigger picture of God's love.

Alternatively, you might want to take time to savor and study this story, to take a stroll, rather than hike all day. If so, you might decide to read *The Path* one chapter a day or one chapter a week until you have finished. If you choose this approach, utilize the reflection questions at the end of each chapter, taking time to think, pray, or write about them.

The Path is also designed for group use. Companions make every journey more fun, and this journey is no exception. *The Path* would make an ideal small-group study. Your group could read a chapter at a time and gather weekly to talk about the questions for the journey together. A group study is a wonderful way to explore this story in companionship with others and

learn together what God might be saying to you, both as individuals and as a community, through this epic adventure.

Finally, *The Path* can be used as a companion to a curriculum offered by Forward Movement called *Living Discipleship: Exploring the Bible*. This course is a year-long exploration of the Bible, with twenty-six sessions that tell the overarching biblical narrative, from Genesis to Revelation. Designed for use in weekly formation time, each session is approximately an hour long. With twenty-six sessions, this means that *Exploring the Bible* is intended to function as the formation curriculum in a church for an entire program year—either on Sundays or another day of the week. There is a companion book for children, *The Path: Family Storybook*, so that children, youth, and adults can hear the same stories and walk together through the narrative of God’s great love. And *Pathways of Faith* is an all-ages coloring book with original illustrations for each of the chapters, creating an opportunity to engage scripture with your creative mind.

However you choose to use *The Path*, we pray that you hear God speaking to you through this story—and as you journey, discover that it is God’s story of love for you.

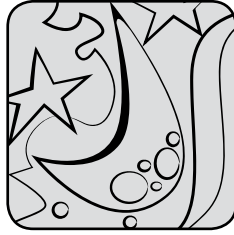
WHAT WAS INCLUDED IN THIS BOOK (AND WHAT WAS LEFT OUT!)

Excerpting the Bible is no easy task, and it was incredibly difficult to decide which parts of the Bible would be included in *The Path* and what would be left out. As you read through this book, you will likely notice some familiar (and important) stories that are missing. We had to leave many of our favorite stories and verses on the cutting room floor! That does not mean those stories aren’t important, but simply that we did not have space for them in this book. Here are the guidelines we used in deciding what to keep in and what to cut out.

- Our most important goal in this book was to tell the overarching story of the Bible: from God’s creation of the world, to God’s relationship with Abraham and his descendants, through God’s incarnation in Jesus Christ, and in God’s presence in the spread of the Church. In order to make that story comprehensible, we had to emphasize parts of the Bible that are narrative, or story based, and sometimes leave out parts of the Bible that are more teaching or instruction based. Those teachings are still important, but if we had included all of the laws of Leviticus or all of the minute instructions of Paul, we wouldn’t have been able to keep *The Path* short and readable!
- We felt it was important to include most of the highlights and best-known Bible stories. We asked a wide variety of people for input on what they thought were the “landmark” stories of salvation history. Those lists typically included things like: Creation, Noah, the Exodus, David and Goliath, prophecies from Isaiah, Jesus’ birth, death, and resurrection, and Paul’s conversion. We also looked at the Revised Common Lectionary, the assigned readings for the year read aloud in many churches, and especially at the stories that are included as part of the Easter Vigil’s stories of salvation. We used those texts as a starting point for the key stories that needed to be included in this book so that readers would get a sense of the main parts of the Bible and how they fit together.
- We wanted to capture the Bible in all of its beauty, complexity, and difficulty. We did *not* want to omit things simply because they are hard to read or challenge us. For example, the stories of Joshua, with violence that can be difficult to read and understand, is an important part of the story of God and God’s people.

The notes and questions aim to help you engage those difficult texts.


Our hope is that *The Path* is just a starting point: this is an introductory foray into the story of God's great love for you. And after you have walked this path and learned the terrain, we hope that you will want to return to this beautiful landscape again and again. We hope that this guided hike along *The Path* will ignite your passion and give you the confidence to journey on new and different trails, through the entire Bible, so that you will explore and discover anew the extraordinary story of God's love for you.



1

God Saw That It Was Good

CREATION

 In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light;” and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

And God said, “Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

And God said, “Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was

POINT OF INTEREST

In Genesis 1, there is a poetry and a pattern to the days of creation. With a few variations, each day unfolds like this:

- And God said, “Let. . .”
 - And it was so.
- And God saw that it was good.
- And there was evening and there was morning, the *n*th day.

so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, “Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.” And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

And God said, “Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

And God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.” So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.” And it was so. God made the wild animals

of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” God said, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

POINT OF INTEREST

On the sixth day of creation, things are described as “very good.” What makes this day different?

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

THE GARDEN OF EDEN



In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was

SCENIC VIEW

Genesis 2 offers a slightly different version of the story of creation. Read carefully and try to notice the differences in emphasis and order.

no one to till the ground; but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground— then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. And the Lord God planted


a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.” Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.” So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said,

“This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
this one shall be called Woman,
for out of Man this one was taken.”

Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.

THE PEOPLE’S DISOBEDIENCE

 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?’” The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.’” But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

YOU ARE HERE

The serpent changes the words of God just a bit. Look back at the previous page to see exactly what God says about the tree. How do the serpent’s words compare with what God says to the man? What might this say to us about listening carefully to God?

They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?” He said, “I heard the sound of you

POINT OF INTEREST

The story doesn't tell us what kind of fruit the woman eats. Although most artistic representations of this story show an apple, the fruit of the tree could have been a fig, a pomegranate, or some other fruit!

in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate." Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent tricked me, and I ate."

The Lord God said to the serpent,
 "Because you have done this,
 cursed are you among all animals
 and among all wild creatures;
 upon your belly you shall go,
 and dust you shall eat
 all the days of your life.

I will put enmity between you and the woman,
 and between your offspring and hers;
 he will strike your head,
 and you will strike his heel."

To the woman [God] said,
 "I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing;
 in pain you shall bring forth children,
 yet your desire shall be for your husband,
 and he shall rule over you."

And to the man [God] said,
 "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife,
 and have eaten of the tree
 about which I commanded you,
 'You shall not eat of it,'
 cursed is the ground because of you;
 in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life;

thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;
and you shall eat the plants of the field.
By the sweat of your face
you shall eat bread
until you return to the ground,
for out of it you were taken;
you are dust,
and to dust you shall return.”

The man named his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all living. And the Lord God made garments of skins for the man and for his wife, and clothed them.

Then the Lord God said, “See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever”—therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life.

YOU ARE HERE

When God asks the man and the woman about their behavior, the first thing they do is try to shift responsibility by blaming others. Does this resonate with your life?

SCRIPTURE CITATIONS

GENESIS 1:1-2:9 | 2:15—3:24

QUESTIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

1. The Bible tells the story of creation in two different ways. What might this tell us about the nature of creation? What might it tell us about the Bible?

2. According to Genesis 2, the human is put in the garden with a purpose: to till it and keep it. What does this suggest about the relationship between humans and the earth? What does this passage suggest about the relationship between humans and animals?
3. Before God sends the people out of the garden, he makes clothes for them. How does this act of tenderness relate to the punishment immediately preceding? What might we learn about God from this action?
4. Sin is often defined as “separation from God.” Although the word sin doesn’t appear in the Bible until later, Adam and Eve’s actions in this story are traditionally seen as the entrance of sin into the world. What does this story reveal about the nature and impact of sin?
5. In this chapter, we hear the Bible’s story of how the world began. How might this story complement and enhance scientific explanations for the origin of the universe?

NEXT STEPS

- We have another account of creation in the Bible: It’s in the Gospel of John. Read John 1 in the Bible. What connections do you see between John 1 and Genesis 1?
- Look at the two stories in this chapter about the creation of humans, and pay careful attention to the words used. What does each story tell us about what humans are like? What is their relationship to God? What is their relationship to one another?



About the Editors

Melody Wilson Shobe is an Episcopal priest who has served churches in Rhode Island and Texas. A passionate lover of the Bible, she hears God speaking in a new way every time she reads this extraordinary story. A graduate of Tufts University and Virginia Theological Seminary, Melody is currently working on curriculum development for Forward Movement. Melody, her husband, and their two daughters live in Dallas, Texas, where she spends her spare time reading stories, building forts, conquering playgrounds, baking cookies, and exploring nature.



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About the Illustrator

Roger Speer is a lifelong servant of The Episcopal Church. He has served with mission, congregational, diocesan, national, and international formation initiatives during an exciting tenure as a youth minister. At heart, Roger is an artist and craftsman. He holds degrees in art education and graphic design, as well as various training certifications that he uses to produce new ways to express the gospel with as much innovation as possible. He is husband to Fran and father to Fynn.



The icons featured at the beginning of each chapter are part of larger illustrations created by Speer for each story of *The Path*. They are available in color in *The Path: Family Storybook* or as coloring pages in *Pathways of Faith*, an all-ages coloring book. Both are available at www.ForwardMovement.org.

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