

Introduction

My high school geography class spent a lot of time making maps. Topographic maps, road maps, political maps. The capstone project was to invent an island and create a map for it, synthesizing various elements of mapmaking—scale, contour lines and corresponding topography, settlements, natural resources, and so on.

I made plenty of mistakes on my island map—drawing rivers where they couldn't possibly flow, positioning villages in unsustainable environments, and misjudging the likelihood of natural resources. My map even included extra “local color”—a grease stain from the butter dish on the kitchen table.

Turns out, inventing geography, even in two dimensions, is harder than it sounds. It's a lot easier to draw maps of places that already exist, places I've been or studied in books.

This book is a map of my life and one I couldn't see very clearly until I'd followed its meandering path to and, more importantly, *out of* a midlife abyss. Along the way, I thought I knew where the map would take me, but I had it all wrong. Well-meaning people often told me where it was going. But they were wrong, too.

We all have different maps—designed by Someone with a much better lay of the land than we have. Some maps have pristine beaches and crystal water. Some have steep hills and deep valleys, plunging cliffs and churning waves. Most include dense forests, expansive wilderness, and soaring peaks. The Mapmaker puts paths where we never would and erects mountains where we'd have put a highway.

This divine mapmaking is wrapped up with questions of calling and vocation, topics of perennial interest in the church: What is God calling me to do with my life? How can I find the

right, nay, the *perfect* fit for my passions and abilities? Where, in the words of Frederick Buechner, do my “deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet”? (*Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC*).

What sometimes gets lost in these questions is that most maps go places we didn’t expect—and not always good places, at least, as we’d define good. Some journeys are marked more by disappointment than accomplishment. We forget that the world is broken—that our individual worlds are broken, and following Jesus doesn’t change that.

Our maps may all look different, but despite these variations, all the roads we travel matter because God made the map, butter stains and all.