

Finding your Inner Treasure

A spiritual journey of
creative exploration

Helen Warwick

kevin
mayhew

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Introduction

The precious baby, on arrival into the world, carries inside a unique blueprint, a personality and set of gifts that make that child different from all other human beings. As that baby develops, outside influences affect how much of this blueprint is revealed. I picture a treasure chest within each one of us, full of the treasures that reveal who we truly are. I will be your tour guide through this book to take you on a very special, personal journey into your inner landscape to search for that treasure.

Your unique treasure chest is found buried deep inside at the very centre of your being. Carl Jung, psychiatrist and psychologist, said that people are seldom in sound physical and mental health unless they can find some way to relate to this centre of being, whom he calls God. The journey I will take you on will help you to find and relate to this core of yourself. I will be waving my flag to highlight certain tools and techniques to help you explore your inner landscape and uncover the treasure within. I will be encouraging you to dig for that wealth that will get you in touch with the true person that God has made you to be and the purpose he has made you for. Connecting to your treasure chest, this spiritual centre, will lead to revelations that will penetrate your body and your mind, leading to healing and wholeness.

The treasure chest will take on many descriptions throughout the book, as it has many aspects and

dimensions. If you are someone who enjoys a challenge you may like to note the different descriptions. Part of my role as a tour guide will be to encourage detective qualities to explore the many characteristics of your treasure chest. Qualities such as being able to see things from a different perspective, to think outside the box, to bring out the magnifying glass and examine, and to search and persevere, will all aid the exploration of your inner journey.

So what qualifies me as your tour guide? The main criterion that has led to me writing this book is the work that I have done on my own personal journey, one that has included much suffering as well as healing. I developed the creative techniques and exercises during a long period of suffering which started with a virus I caught in 1999 that led to myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME) for seven years. The healing journey that I had through this chronic illness – one to complete recovery – is written about in my first book, *Creating Gardens in the Desert*, also published by Kevin Mayhew Ltd.

The illness challenged all my ideals, throwing me into a completely different area – one of chaos, pain and confusion. I found it difficult to use the logical part of my brain, so I started using creative ways to explore what was going on for me, ways that did not depend upon intense concentration. I began writing a journal, using my imagination and just being creative with different materials. These tools started to open up areas within myself as I searched to understand

Journaling

A journal is a special place to help you uncover the journey you are on and to keep all the treasures that you find about yourself. You can adapt it to suit your needs. I have found keeping a journal really helpful. It is a place where I can write down whatever I want about myself, my life, my relationships and my view of the world and my journey through it. Seeing things written down and collated helps me to give an overview of my life and to work out the parts that I am finding difficult. It shows me the habits I need to change and helps me to search out where I am going. I often throw out a question into my journal and over the subsequent few weeks I am amazed by the answers I note through various sources – a conversation, a TV programme, a Bible reading, the newspaper.

In the book *The Cloud of Unknowing* written by an unknown author over 500 years ago, it is stressed that self-knowledge is needed for spiritual progress. A journal is a good way of getting to know yourself. It is good to have a central place to write, explore and collate information such as your reviews from the exercises in this book. Seeing parts of your journey all together helps to evaluate and examine.

A journal is personal to your own needs. You need to find a system and method of writing to your own liking. You could use your computer (there is a variety of programs to help you journal), a notebook or a file. I started writing and drawing in a small notebook and moved on to an A4 arch lever file so pages could

be added easily as well as cuttings and pictures. I have a favourite ink pen I use for most of my scribbling.

Starting a journal

A journal is somewhere you can be honest with yourself, work through feelings and thoughts and record your spiritual journey. It does not have to be a daily diary, but provides a place for reflection. Remember, it is only for your eyes so it does not have to be neat or without spelling mistakes. This is one of the greatest obstacles I find when introducing this to other people. It has been ingrained that all writing must be neat, in regular lines and legible. Try to ditch any obstacles that might stop you exploring your journey. Write in the best way for you to express yourself.

Reading back over your writings can help clarify how you work and can also highlight the process of how God is speaking to you. It can be an exciting method to enrich your life. My journal includes my explorations as well as notes on books I am reading, markers of celebration, ideas I have and snippets I collect. It is all dated and indexed so I can find entries again. I tend to underline important issues and use different colours for highlighting. I also review where I am and what is needed at regular intervals. The book you are reading has come about only because of all I have collected in my journal.

Your journal needs to be accessible and a place to write in regularly. See it as a tool to help you explore your life, not as a chore. Privacy is an issue to con-

sider. Many people I speak to do not want to start a journal, in case someone else gets hold of it. Personally I could not forfeit that place to explore what is going on for me with all that insight and treasure. I would feel very uncomfortable if I knew someone had read my journal, but I do find that chunks of it do get shared, as I know we all have common roots of the difficulties we are going through and it can be very reassuring and encouraging to hear about others' roots and the treasures they are finding. Carl Rogers, an American psychologist, wrote

I have found that the very feeling which has seemed to me the most private, most personal and hence most incomprehensible by others, has turned out to be an expression for which there is resonance in many other people. It has led me to believe that what is most personal and unique in each one of us is probably the very element which would, if it were shared or expressed, speak most deeply to others. This has helped me to understand poets and artists who have dared to express the unique in themselves.²³

My hope is that if anyone does read my journal they will see I have messy bits, unresolved issues and tussles with life, probably just as with themselves, but I also have blessings, enlightenment and wisdom which I hope would enrich them.

Some people use codes, symbols and art. This is a good way of exploring that will speak only to you.

One person I know collects pictures and photos that speak to her.

I have been sharing my journey with a special friend for many years. She finds a journal an invaluable tool to reveal her treasure and these are her reflections.

My journal is a most useful and unlikely tool for someone who hates writing! It gives me freedom as I don't have to be perfect. I have always been one to pour my heart out verbally but I tried writing the feelings down, so if a situation arose that I felt very emotional about I would let these feelings flood out on to paper, releasing the pain and tears. For me it is a good way to pray and it keeps me focused.

The following are the ways my journal is most helpful:

- I clarify things in the process of writing. I work out and identify feelings or issues that surface and begin to find the 'root'. Just by writing without restriction I find myself writing unexpected words or phrases that reveal the truth behind my reaction to a particular situation that has arisen. Something that seems insignificant on the surface often leads to something much more significant underneath. Once I

The Bible as a tool for uncovering treasure

The Bible is still the world's best-selling book, but you may have had a go at reading the Bible and found it really difficult, full of words you don't understand and very dry in parts. It might be relegated to the bookshelf gathering dust, as you are not sure where to start to read, or don't see its relevance to your life. Hopefully this section will give you a different perspective on the Bible, as it is the world's best seller for a reason. It is a book of revelation and contains the Word of God that is life-changing.

I use the Bible as an exciting tool in my explorations, God's Word being a source of my creative pursuits. It is a record of God revealing himself and his Word throughout the centuries and it carries the enduring messages God wants to bring to us now. Your Bible can be viewed as a personal book – it will take you on an adventure of getting to know yourself and your relationship with God. It needs to be read in a way that will reveal the personal messages and revelations that God has for you. Through this rich and complex collection of poems, stories, prophecies, adventures, dreams and personal letters, the Bible can be used in different ways to reveal the hidden wealth in your treasure chest.

There are many different translations and the one that I use most is the *New International Version* that is part of a Life Application Bible. This means that it contains explanations of the Bible passages, maps

and diagrams, as well as notes making it relevant to your life. I also have other translations and find *The Message*, which is a modern paraphrase of the Bible, very refreshing. If you are new to the Bible, you will need to shop around and find one that suits you best. There is a good website www.biblegateway.com which is an online Bible that has over 100 different versions and 50 different languages.

The Bible is split into the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament is the story of how God created the world and made an agreement (or testament) with the Israelite people. It shows how he cared for them, his rules for them, their history and how they turned from him. It is also written how they were to prepare for the coming of Jesus, God's Son. The New Testament sets out the new agreement offered to the world by the birth, death and rising again of Jesus Christ. It describes the effect that Jesus had on the people and chronicles how the early Christian Church was begun.

There are many parts of the Bible that have given me great comfort at times in my life. I found it very helpful being able to read about people going through similar emotions and thoughts to me. Psalms is a collection of poetry that often echoes my feelings and voices similar questions to those I have for God.

Isaiah is thought to be the greatest of the prophets (God's special representatives). He had the hard task of calling God's people to turn from their lives of sin and come back to God. The last part of this book

(from chapter 40) is filled with consolation and hope, which I have found truly inspiring.

I use the Bible as a book to read for its wisdom and insight, but also as a tool to connect me to God and my unique treasure chest. Using creative techniques with the Bible has allowed me to open up a direct route into my treasure chest to reveal insights from God. They allow God's Word to connect with our unconscious mind, linking into our personal journey. Hebrews 4:12 says:

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

The Bible is brought to life when you are thinking about the stories, putting yourself into these situations, linking into the emotions and using the words to question and challenge your life.

One helpful creative technique has been using my imagination to picture the stories written and let them speak to my situation. I found the parables in the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John a good place to begin. A parable is a story with a meaning. When the disciples asked Jesus why he spoke in parables he replied, 'The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you' (Matthew 13:11). The 'kingdom of heaven' refers to God and his timeless dimension. Using the imagination can help those secrets to be revealed directly into our

personal lives. I will take a short passage from the gospels (something that attracts and interests me) and imagine the scene that is set in the reading. I then observe myself in this scene, perhaps as one of the characters mentioned – or I could be an animal or object. I note where I am and watch the scene develop as I read through the passage. For example, at one time I read about the fig tree, in Luke 13:6–9, that had been planted and for three years had not produced any fruit. The gardener was ordered to cut it down but he wanted one last chance to nurture it. I felt helpless at the time, being very ill, and could associate with that fig tree. As I imagined the scene, thinking of myself as that fig tree, I explored my feelings of uselessness. Picturing the gardener wanting to give me another chance led me to have hope, as the gardener was so nurturing and believed in me. It also helped me to see that I actually was producing fruit when ill; patience, perseverance, as well as strength of character.

The practical exercise in the introduction to this book, where you imagined yourself in a field, was taken from the shortest parable in the Bible where Jesus tells of hidden treasure.

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

Matthew 13:44

The Bible contains a wealth of symbolism that can highlight our inner landscape. Sometimes I take a biblical symbol and find out what it meant to the people at the time and use that information to connect to my journey. For example, at one time I took the symbol of the shield and found some of the verses that mention shields in the Bible. I then looked up some study notes about the shield that highlight how it came to be a metaphor for protection. It also appears to be an expression of royalty, as kings were responsible for protecting their subjects. Thus the Lord is depicted as carrying a shield. I then used these thoughts to look at what type of shield I felt I needed for my protection and what image I had of God with his shield. The Bible is made to be used with the imagination and looking at the multi-layers that symbols create allows the Bible to connect deep within and feed us.

Passages in the Bible can be used as starting blocks to explore your own journey. As you read, challenge yourself over what the words remind you of in your life. Change the parts you read to make it your own story. I find rewriting parts of the Bible using my own words a useful tool and it helps me to explore what is going on for me. Don't worry about upsetting God! This is what he wants from his Word – a personal connection to his people. I find my journal a good place to explore the reflections I have had on a passage in the Bible.

Practical exercises

1. Get a feel of your Bible. Sit with it in your hands and see what thoughts come up for you. Is this a book that you think is the truth, or do you struggle with that concept? How does it feel holding the Word of God? What are your thoughts regarding being spoken to by God? Open it at a few places and read and explore. You might like to read a whole book through and note your thoughts. Having a study Bible that explains various passages can be helpful, but remember the Bible is a tool for revelation for you – you do not necessarily need to know what the writers meant. If you don't understand something then perhaps that is not right for you at the moment.
2. Let the word of God speak to you. This is a very different way of reading the Bible. It is taking only a very short passage or just one verse from the Bible and slowly reading it through. Try to let the words sink from your mind into your heart. You may need to read it through a few times. There might be a word or phrase that jumps out at you straight away. Stick with this and try to mull it over, maybe letting a picture develop in your mind. If the passage does not have anything immediate you have grasped on to, then try to develop a general sense or feeling of the passage, and you may find a picture develops of something you associate with the verse. Don't censor anything. Try to keep mulling it over and see what develops.

3. Take a passage from one of the gospels, or one with a setting and, having read it through a couple of times, place yourself in the scene. You may be looking on as an outsider, one of the characters, or an object in the passage. See what attracts your attention. Really get into the scene and note how you are feeling and ask yourself questions. What would you be saying and what would you be hearing? Is there anything you would like to happen or change?
4. Following on from exercise 2 and 3, read through a passage in the Bible focusing on your emotions. Notice any feelings that come up for you. How does your body react? Are there any gut reactions, for instance? What colours would the emotions be in the passage you are reading? You could take paper and colours and represent just the emotions going on in the passage and also within yourself.

The following are a few passages to start you off for exercises 2, 3 and 4:

Genesis 32:22–32 – Jacob wrestles with God and finds his true name.

Song of Songs 3:1–4 – A dream searching for love.

Isaiah 58:9–11 – God will answer the cries for help, will guide and transform.

Ezekiel 16:1–14 – This is God's allegory about Jerusalem. You could replace your own name and think about your own story of how you came to be and what happened at various stages of your life.