

## EXCERPT



### ***Spiritual Wayfinding***

#### ***33 Walking Meditations for Navigating Life with Embodied Wisdom***

April 14, 2026 | \$17.99, 168 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-1196-6

Spiritual director Deborah Gregory invites you on a pilgrimage through thirty-three unique walking meditations exploring the core questions *Where am I?* and *Where am I going?* Each experience in this easy-to-use guide offers a creative approach to walking, specific prompts for reflection and prayer, and Ignatian contemplation of Scripture.

## Horizon-Gazing Walk: *Sight*

Haunted by disturbing thoughts, Francine Shapiro decided to take a walk. She noticed that as her eyes moved back and forth, her body calmed and the troubling thoughts faded. Curious about the connection between lateral eye movements and stress reduction, Shapiro investigated this phenomenon for her PhD in psychology. In her book *Getting Past Your Past*, Shapiro credits that happenstance walk for spurring on the development of a clinical treatment for anxiety known as Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR). In 2018, Licia de Voogd and colleagues published a study in *The Journal of Neuroscience* confirming that lateral eye movements quiet the brain's fear signals, calm us down, and help regulate emotions as we reprocess memories.

Shapiro's lakeside walk demonstrates that our eyes do more than see the world; they also help us navigate it with embodied wisdom, emotional health, and spiritual vitality. "Eyes are responsible for mood and level of alertness" as we perceive our environment, explains neurobiologist Andrew Huberman on the *Huberman Lab Podcast*. As we admire the vivid colors of a sunset or track the swoops of chickadees, much more is happening than what meets the eye. Our eyes enhance our mood by gathering sunlight, engage balance through peripheral vision, and lower blood pressure by soaking in beautiful scenery. Optic flow—the sensation of the world passing by while walking—resets the nervous system and helps the mind let go of worries with each step. Nature-gazing walks can improve vision, promote mental health and emotional well-being, and illuminate a sense of God's presence.

I grew up believing my body's sensory experiences restricted my spiritual growth. Like Shapiro, I didn't know my eyes were connected to my physical, emotional, and spiritual health. Theologian and modern mystic Evelyn Underhill offered a different perspective in her book *Practical Mysticism*: "Our senses make us free." Our senses not only enable us to perceive the world, but they also catalyze and integrate our spiritual experiences. "The Beautiful is essentially the Spiritual making itself known sensuously, presenting itself in sensuous concrete existence," said Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. Physical senses awaken spiritual senses, allowing us to experience awe as we reverence and delight in God. The sensory system invigorates nerves, emotions, rationality, memory, desire, and spirit to infuse our experiences of both beauty and pain with meaning.

An amazing hack for physical and emotional well-being is horizon gazing. Whether it's a sweeping view of the ocean or the jagged outlines of a mountain range, gazing at the horizon calms the body and soothes the spirit. Walking toward the horizon signals to the body that there's no immediate danger, just boundless possibilities stretching out ahead.

Three times a year, the Israelites set out on a horizon-gazing walk as they ascended to Jerusalem for festivals of worship. In *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, Eugene Peterson called their liminal journey "a time of danger, of expectation, of uncertainty, of excitement, of extraordinary aliveness."

Walking is a practice of hope. When afraid, the body instinctively freezes or runs away. Hope, on the other hand, walks forward. The journey to Jerusalem was a pilgrimage of hope. Walking reminded them of God's protection and care year by year. The horizon ignited their imaginations with hopeful possibilities not yet reached. And when they grew weary, they lifted their gaze to the mountains and sang a pilgrimage song: "I raise my eyes toward the mountains. Where will my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. God won't let your foot slip" (Psalm 121:1-3 CEB).

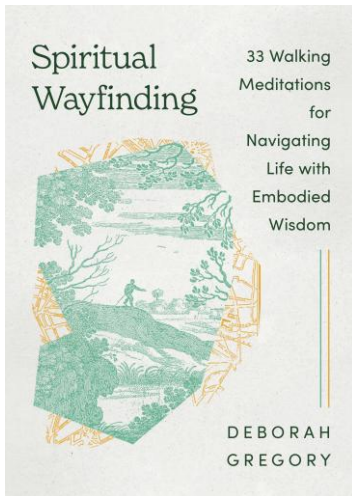


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Today, walk with a grateful awareness of your eyes in three movements. First, look around. Allow your gaze to wander, and notice any shifts in mood or physical sensation. Then, look back on your life and examine the habits of the eyes that you have cultivated. How do your eye movements or watching habits affect your life? Finally, look up at the horizon as you consider Psalm 121. Reflect on where you need God's help and hope.

## **WALK IT OUT**

### **Scripture Meditation**

Read Psalm 121. Focus phrase: *I lift my eyes.*

### **Walking Meditation**

Before you go:

- Choose a path in a natural setting.

As you walk:

- **Look around**, noticing your natural eye movements and what catches your eye as you walk.
- **Look back** on your life and examine the habits of your eyes. How do your eye movements and watching habits affect your life?
- **Look up** at the horizon and sky. What do you see? How does it feel to lift your head up?  
Recalling Psalm 121's promise that God is watching over you, what help and hope do you need?

### **Rest and Reflect**

After your walk, reflect on this question: *What healthy habits of looking up can I cultivate?*

—adapted from chapter 3, "Horizon-Gazing Walk"



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## Q & A



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*Deborah Gregory is a spiritual director with a specialization in Ignatian spirituality, an award-winning documentary filmmaker, and the host of The Betwixt Podcast. Her holistic approach to Christian formation bridges ancient wisdom and modern neuroscience. Drawing from her experience in a neurodiverse family, she champions inclusive spirituality and supports those navigating a neurotypical world. Deborah enjoys leading retreats, training spiritual directors, and exploring nature in Central Florida, where she lives with her husband and two daughters.*

## Harmonizing Contemplation and Action

### **What inspired you to write *Spiritual Wayfinding*?**

**Deborah Gregory:** This book emerges from the confluence of three experiences. 1.) The need to relearn how to walk after I broke my ankle and the embodied wisdom I gained through the experience. 2.) Discovering the need for (and wonders of) embodied spiritual perspectives through walking with my neurodivergent daughter. 3.) Finding my “directees” increasingly longing for movement and body awareness when they meet with me for spiritual direction.

### **What is the main theme of your book?**

**Deborah:** This book offers a multisensory journey that integrates mind, body, and spirit with an invitation to look around and find orientation in relation to something bigger than ourselves. It is a response to our technological dependence that draws our focus downward and inward. The book also moves away from trending contemplative practices that reinforce these postures through silence, stillness, and solitude by returning to the ancient practice of harmonizing contemplation and action. Each walking meditation invites readers to encounter God’s actions within the flow of their own actions

### **What are five main things you want readers to take away from your book?**

**Deborah:**

- Spirituality is holistic—my body offers wisdom to help me navigate life and faith.
- My body is designed to encounter God while in motion, and it’s amazing!
- Neurodivergent people have deeply embodied spiritual wisdom to offer neurotypical people.
- While walking, I connect to a bigger story and find my place within it.
- My sensory system, emotions, thoughts, and desires are deeply connected to my faith journey and discernment.

### **Is there anything else you want to tell us about your book?**

**Deborah:** A subthread of the book explores spirituality from a neurodivergent perspective. Many of the walking meditations emerged from walking with my daughter and contain nuggets of her wisdom. Many neurodivergent people rely on movement to process and regulate sensory and emotional stimuli. In truth, neurotypical individuals need this as well, but many of us have lost our connection with the wisdom of our bodies while navigating life’s complexities. I’m discovering that walking as a spiritual practice resonates not only with the neurodivergent community but with anyone seeking a more embodied approach to faith and discernment.



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