

## Q & A



### ***The Way of Befriending*** *Transforming Relationships and Organizations for Belonging*

June 23, 2026 | \$21.99, 224 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-1558-2

*Parfait Bassalé is a belonging strategist, singer-songwriter, and author dedicated to fostering belonging and transforming systems through the power of friendship. Born in Benin and shaped by a global journey, he integrates leadership development, storytelling, and songs to bridge divides and invite courageous connection. Holding a master's in conflict resolution from Portland State University, Parfait has supported numerous state agencies, nonprofits, and private organizations in advancing belonging initiatives. Parfait and his wife have three children.*

## Transformation

### What inspired you to write this book?

**Parfait Bassalé:** My heartbreak over the state of our current divisions and a deep longing for a world where a commitment to mutual understanding would drive our actions. The fact is, tribalism is hurting all of us. 64 percent of Americans of all stripes report non-belonging in the workplace, 68 percent report non-belonging in the country, and 74 percent report non-belonging in their local communities. We keep pulling away from one another into smaller circles, leading us increasingly toward isolation. With other contributing factors such as technology, a third of adults and half of our youth are experiencing loneliness. A condition that increases risks for depression, dementia, cardiovascular diseases, and premature death. As the saying goes, insanity is to keep doing the same thing and expect a different result. What if movement toward the other is the key to healing our divisions and finding our own belonging?

### What is the main idea of *The Way of Befriending*, and what makes your approach distinct?

**Bassalé:** At its heart, *The Way of Befriending* is about liberation. The root word of *friend* shares the same origin as *to love* and *to set free*. To befriend, then, is to liberate—both ourselves and those we befriend—from the shackles of tribal identities, dehumanizing storylines, and learned helplessness that hold us hostage.

The book makes the case that the most transformative way to heal our divisions and address our deep loneliness is through unexpected acts of befriending—small, courageous movements of curiosity and compassion across differences. These acts don't just change relationships; they expand our own experience of belonging.

What makes this approach distinct is its form as much as its message. The book weaves together memoir-style storytelling, original songs, practical tools, and reflective questions, creating a multimedia experience that engages the head, the heart, and the imagination.

### What are five main things you would like readers to take away from your book?

**Bassalé:**

- “Our existing tribal systems are failing us.”
- “No one escapes the wreckage of othering. It strips us all of our humanity—both the otherer and the othered.”
- “Those who approach relationships primarily through a transactional lens—asking ‘What’s in it for me?’—report lower levels of happiness and fulfillment over time.”
- “The road to our own belonging and flourishing is through befriending the other.”
- “Systems change when hearts change. Hearts change when one dares to be a friend.”



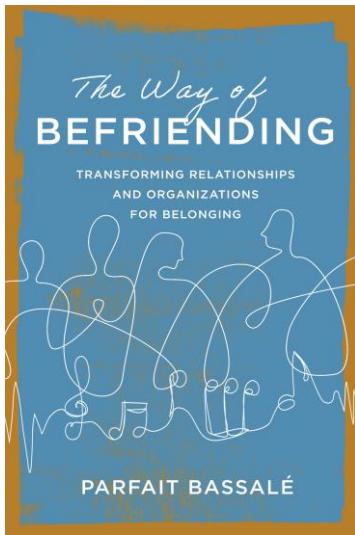
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#### **How did you first become interested in conflict resolution and bridge building?**

**Bassalé:** I often tell people that I was so conflict avoidant that I wanted to learn about conflict prevention so I would not have to deal with conflict. That was short-sighted. I have come to realize through my training and life experiences that conflict is a gift, an opportunity to know the other and to grow in love. Conflict reveals the fact that we are not identical individuals and there are gaps and blind spots in our lived experiences. When approached with courage, curiosity, and compassion, it can lead to connection and new insight.

#### **What holds most people back from taking steps toward befriending?**

**Bassalé:** Time. The effort it requires. The discomfort it brings at first. Past hurt. And a lack of confidence in our ability to navigate relational difficulty. All of these barriers are real—but they are not insurmountable. Like most things that matter, befriending begins with a realization: it is actually in our best interest to lean in rather than withdraw. From there comes a commitment to develop the skills required to stay present across discomfort. And over time, with practice, what once felt daunting becomes more natural—and even life-giving.

#### **In addition to being an author and consultant, you are also a singer-songwriter. What part has music played in your mission to bring people together?**

**Bassalé:** Music is a spiritual practice that keeps me grounded and helps me heal from my aches and longings. It has helped me transform lament into vision. Pain into beauty. Loss into hope and tears into melody. As such, it transcends my story and connects listeners to their own stories—allowing them to experience a similar journey of transformation. It has played the role of emotional amplifier and an alternative to direct instruction. Wherever words alone cannot enter, songs find a crack.

#### **What was the hardest part about writing this book?**

**Bassalé:** The hardest part was making the content both accessible and meaningful for a wide and deeply divided audience. In the book, I explain that if I could gather everyone I've met, worked with, or listened to over the years into one room and speak heart to heart, this book would be that room.

Engaging multiple entry points—especially spiritual ones—without alienating those who are wounded, wary of, or unfamiliar with them required courage and precision. I am sure despite all my efforts I will lose some. However, in the end, writing this book meant practicing the very vulnerability and risk I'm inviting others to take.

#### **Is there anything else you would like us to know about your book?**

**Bassalé:** The book is intended for both a Christian and non-Christian audience. It invites the reader to lean into befriending as a powerful force that can transform their relationships and organizations they are part of or lead.



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BIO



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*In The Way of Befriending, Parfait Bassalé combines stories, personal insights, practical tools, and original songs to guide readers in leaning into befriending as a path to healing and connection. In a world fractured by division and isolation, The Way of Befriending offers a transformative vision of connection and redefines friendship as a countercultural antidote to “othering” and a pathway to liberation. A multimedia experience including original music and lyrics by the author.*

## **Called to Bridge Divides**

Husband and father Parfait Bassalé is a consultant and singer-songwriter who helps people and organizations transform relationships and systems through the power of friendship. Born in Benin and shaped by a global journey, he integrates leadership development, storytelling, and songs to bridge divides and invite people to befriend the other. Whether he is consulting with public agencies, writing about systemic befriending, or performing a song that carries the ache of injustice and the hope of repair—it all flows from the same calling: to be a bridge.

Holding a master’s in conflict resolution from Portland State University, Bassalé has supported many state agencies, boards, faith groups, and private organizations in advancing belonging initiatives. During his five years as Executive Diversity Officer at South Puget Sound Community College—a 2024 and 2025 ASPEN Top 10 finalist—Bassalé led initiatives that fostered belonging and narrowed achievement gaps for historically excluded students. He also chaired Olympia, Washington’s first Social Justice and Equity Commission and serves on the board of Olympia Federal Savings, a financial institution dedicated to the advancement of all members of its community.

Parfait Bassalé is known for making a memorable impact. His unique approach combines storytelling, interpersonal neuroscience, songs, and reflexive inquiry to help individuals and organizations find solutions for greater belonging for everyone.

He lives in Olympia, Washington where he and his wife Karima are raising their three children.

Visit his website at [parfaitbassale.com](http://parfaitbassale.com).

*“Creating real belonging requires us to recognize the storylines of exclusion and dehumanization that hurt us all, and then interrupt them with unexpected acts of courage, curiosity, and compassion. I dream of a world where everyone is a friend. It starts with inspiring people to befriend ‘the other’ and helping them with the tools to make those connections genuine and lasting.” —Parfait Bassalé*



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