

**Life Needs More Yellow Arrows**  
**Jeremiah 29:11-14**  
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**Jeremiah 29:11-14 – The Message**

*11 I know what I'm doing. I have it all planned out - plans to take care of you, not abandon you, plans to give you the future you hope for. 12 "When you call on me, when you come and pray to me, I'll listen. 13 "When you come looking for me, you'll find me. 14 I'll make sure you won't be disappointed." God's Decree. "I'll turn things around for you. I'll bring you back from all the countries into which I drove you...[I will] bring you home to the place from which I sent you off into exile. You can count on it.*

I am seriously directionally impaired. I can get lost anywhere, including my own neighborhood. Even GPS doesn't help, because I get left and right mixed up, and will turn right when I should have turned left. Then I get that GPS lady saying, "Re-calibrating route" though I swear sometimes I hear her add under her breath, "You idiot."

So one of the things I worried a lot about before I left for El Camino was getting lost. If I can get lost in my own neighborhood, what would I do in a foreign country?

But luckily, walking El Camino was like "Path finding for dummies." The way was usually carefully and thoroughly marked with yellow arrows. There were other way markers—often markers bearing the scallop shell logo of El Camino or the figure of a pilgrim, and some cities even had street signs, but it was the yellow arrows that were the most ubiquitous. I and every other pilgrim looked for them first and we learned to rely them to guide our journey.

As I walked, I started to ponder how much easier my life would be if everywhere I went there were yellow arrows marking the way. No more confusion about east or

west, right or left. Just yellow arrows pointing the way to my destination. Then it occurred to me that even more than needing yellow arrows to point me on my geographical journeys, I need yellow arrows to point me on my life journey.

The prophet Jeremiah promises that God has a plan for our lives, a life plan that while it may not always be easy, is always full of hope and goodness and joy. We are free to say yes or no to that plan, of course, free to follow God's leading or to go another direction than God has planned. But what if we don't know what direction God wants us to go? What if we are clueless about what is the faithful choice when we come to decision making points in our lives?

So I as I walked El Camino, blessing the unknown but faithful volunteers who had painted yellow arrows on rocks and tree trunks, scrawled them on the sides of buildings and on street curbs all along the 500 miles of El Camino, I started to think that what we really need is spiritual yellow arrows to show us the way to go.

While there have been times when I have had a very clear sense about where God wants me to go, I usually flounder. I have to confess I am often as spiritually dyslexic as I am geographically dyslexic. So as I walked along, I began to ponder, "What are the signs God provides for us as we make our life journeys?" They may not be yellow arrows, but they are still there. We want a voice booming down from heaven, but God's guidance is usually a lot more subtle. We have to be open to guidance that comes in other, gentler, sometimes less obvious ways.

I became aware of this the first time the yellow arrows failed me. It was less than a week into my pilgrimage. I was walking on my own for the first time that day,

heading toward the lovely village of Puente la Reina which has hosted pilgrims for more than a thousand years. But after I crossed the medieval Bridge of the Pilgrims, the yellow arrows seemed to disappear. I couldn't see a single one. I got out my trusty guide book, which usually included some directions to the pilgrim albergues (albergues are the places where pilgrims sleep), but because of my directional dyslexia, I couldn't make heads or tails out of the directions.

I went back across the bridge and into the center of town, and looked for the missing yellow arrows. I had walked 15 miles that day, my longest day yet, and wasn't up for a lot of meandering around. I was tired and hot and sweaty and getting more and more upset when I spied two pilgrims ahead of me. They seemed to know where they were going. I fell into step behind them. They turned left. I turned left. They turned right. I turned right. I followed them down a busy road and up a long steep hill to the front door of the albergue.

This was just the first of many times that I followed other pilgrims when I was uncertain about the way. Even if all I ever saw of these folks was their backpacks adorned with the scallop shell that is the sign of an El Camino pilgrim, these unknowing strangers showed me which way to go. They were my community, my guides. God may not provide yellow arrows on our life journeys, but God does give us the community of the church to be our guides and mentors and companions on the way.

Community was incredibly important in keeping me on the right path during my pilgrimage, including the community of the host country Spain. I became adept at asking directions in Spanish. I didn't always understand the answer, but I could figure

out “izquierdo” (left) and “deracha” (right) and “deracho” (straight ahead). And it is amazing how much you can communicate with hand signals, facial expressions, and a good heart. There were many kind strangers who listened to my halting Spanish and patiently directed me back on the right path. Though language separated us, these folks, too, felt like my community. But even more amazing to me were the persons who helped without being asked. Apparently I was not the first clueless pilgrim, because people who live along El Camino seem to be used to lost peregrinos. More times than I can count, especially in larger towns, I would be standing on the street with my backpack on, clutching my trekking poles, and peering at my guidebook or looking around for a yellow arrow, trying to figure out where to go, and someone would stop and point out the way (usually a yellow arrow or sign that I had overlooked) without even being asked. More than one person walked several blocks with me to make sure I got back on track. Sometimes God sends unexpected teachers to help us along our life journey but we must be open to their wisdom and their guidance.

When I was walking by myself, I would often get into a kind of meditative trance. Thinking or praying deeply about something, I would become much more in tune with my inner journey than with my outer trek and I would forget to look for those yellow arrows. Several times when this happened, I was saved by my El Camino community. In French or Spanish or Italian, someone would call out to me (sometimes they had to do it several times before I snapped out of my reverie) and point out the arrow that I had just walked by. This reminded me how easy it is to get distracted and lose our way on life’s

journey, and how much we need our faith community to call us back when we get off the path.

Though I sometimes had trouble understanding it, my El Camino guidebook was incredibly helpful most of the time. In our life journey, our guidebook is the scriptures, our first and most important “yellow arrow.” God’s word is indeed a light that guides our path. But just as my El Caminio guidebook was sometimes confusing to me, so the Bible can leave us bewildered and lost. We don’t understand it. It seems contradictory or irrelevant. For instance, the Bible says divorce is wrong. But we all know—maybe have been in—marriages that are irretrievably broken, marriages where divorce is the lesser of two evils. What about those relationships? Our life experience teaches us that it isn’t as simple as “divorce is bad and staying married is good.” How do we find our way when our primary way marker confuses us and maybe even points us in the wrong direction?

Here again, El Camino taught me the value of community. While my guidebook was usually reliable, one day toward the end of my trek it was just wrong. My friend Anna from South Africa and I were walking from the village of Triacastela to the famous monastery at Samos. The guidebook told us we would walk only one kilometer on a busy highway, and the rest of the time on a quiet road and wooded paths. We started down the busy highway, buffeted by semi-trucks passing only a few feet away. Though we looked diligently, we saw no turn-offs for a less busy road—and no yellow arrows. We kept stopping and consulting the guidebook. Unlike me, Anna was great at reading maps, and said it looked like we were following the river as the map in the guidebook

said we should, but where was the quiet road that it promised? The highway we were on felt increasingly dangerous. And where were our trusty yellow arrows? When we had walked several kilometers, we decided we must have missed a turn off, so we turned around and started back. Behind us were two other women pilgrims, one from Korea and one from Spain. "Is this the way to Samos?" we asked. "We don't know," the women said. "We were following you!" The Spanish woman got out her map, the Korean pulled out her guidebook, and we consulted. Pooling our information and our collective best judgment, as well as guides in three different languages, we decided we were indeed on the right path.

The collective wisdom of community can help us sort through difficult questions and hard choices, help us to figure out the right way when we can't figure it out on our own. Scripture is a great resource for life's journey, but it often becomes clearer and more accessible when we turn to it with the help and guidance of others.

No, life doesn't come with yellow arrows. But it does come with friends and community and the Body of Christ. It comes with the saints who have gone before us and who light our way; it comes with teachers and mentors and spiritual guides and unexpected angels who keep us on the path; it comes with the community of faith here in this place and around the world. In all of these God sends us all that we need to find our way.