

Charting The Course: The Silas Guide Book



The Path

STAGE ONE:

Believing the Fact, I surrender to God in simple faith, making no promises but merely asking for his aid.

STAGE TWO:

I start attending meetings of the Society, and from its members I select a Silas, a trustworthy traveling companion for this stretch of the road.

STAGE THREE:

In honest detail, I describe to God and to my Silas the course and consequences of my attempts to live apart from God.

STAGE FOUR:

Encouraged by my Silas and others, I develop the daily disciplines of prayer, study, and self-examination. I abandon self-help asking God instead to do for me what I cannot do for myself.

STAGE FIVE:

I learn to trust the body of Christ, weighing the wisdom of my friends when making decisions and seeking their strength when confronted by temptation.

STAGE SIX:

When I can do so without injuring anyone, I make amends for damage I have caused. When such amends are impossible or inadvisable, I demonstrate my repentance in other ways.

STAGE SEVEN:

I offer myself as a Silas to others. Each day, I ask God for the grace to seek his kingdom rather than my own, to serve those he places in my path rather than serving myself.



Leaving the Cave

During my adolescent years I sometimes dreamed of running away from home. I made a plan. I would slip out of my window one night, retrieve my backpack from the barn, and then hike cross-country, avoiding towns, until I reached the hills. I would search the hills until I found a cave that I could make my home.

The cave would be perfect. From its mouth I would be able to look out over the faraway farms and the road that wound through the valley. I would see anyone who approached me, but no one would be able to see me. **In my cave, I would be safe.**

I never did run away from home, but I managed to find the cave anyway. It was right inside my own head. I made that private place my fortress, my sanctuary. In my cave, I felt safe.

Here's the thing about caves: they feel much safer than they really are. Sure, you can hide in a cave, but if your enemy discovers where you are hiding, he can trap you there. And there's always the risk of a cave-in.

Also, a cave is not really very comfortable. You can cushion the floor with carpets and paint pictures on the walls, but it's still dark inside the cave, and the temperature is always about 55 degrees. If you want to get warm, you have to burn something.

And a cave dweller doesn't really go anywhere. He may watch the traffic passing on the road below. At night he may catch voices of travelers as they sit around their campfires discussing the world beyond the valley. But he won't join them, because that would mean leaving the safety of the cave.

I lived in my cave until I was 42-years-old. By that time, my sanctuary had become a prison. I felt trapped. I was hungry, I was cold, and I was almost out of fuel. Nearly everything I had ever owned had gone into the fire, and now it was dark again.

To follow the Path, you must first leave the cave.

Excerpt from *Samson & the Pirate Monks*



What is a Silas?

The Role of the Travel Companion

A Silas is a travel companion for this stretch of the journey.

No longer are we spending our days alone in the darkness of our caves, hiding our failures for fear of rejection and ridicule. Instead, we are walking together on a sunlit path that is taking us somewhere.

The Silas relationship is not assigned. The Silas must pick a guy he trusts.

A Silas is not perfect, all-knowing, all-caring, or all-wise. He has not attended Silas University, is not certified, and is certainly not infallible. A Silas is merely a friend and fellow traveler on the journey.

A Silas is a compassionate outsider that can look at your life objectively and help you understand exactly where you are.

A Silas is not bound to any relational time frames. The relationship may end after just a few weeks or it may last for many months or years.

A Silas does not do the hard work for you, but journeys with you so that you are not alone.

The Silas does not call you. The responsibility for initiating contact lies squarely on your shoulders, where it belongs. This is a step towards taking ownership of your own journey and learning how to ask for help. The Silas will listen and offer encouragement. He gives suggestions, not orders.



Setting Sail

Where are you?

The question “Where are you?” is the first question God asked man in Genesis 3. It is intended to encourage an inward journey to discover what we are feeling, thinking, and the story we are creating to make sense of it all.

It is a question that pursues our heart, asks us to discover our deepest desires and needs, and to name the ways we have chosen to remain in our caves rather than stepping into the light of day.

It is a question that is seeking to know whether we hope to be found, to be seen, to be soothed, and to be made safe and secure.

It is a question that most likely causes deflective and defensive behaviors to resist another’s curiosity and attunement due to our own shame and self-contempt.

If I am going to alter the direction of my life in any permanent way, I must first acknowledge that I did not arrive at my present position as a pawn of fate or the helpless victim of malevolent forces.

It is true, that great power are at work in the world, and I have certainly encountered many circumstances beyond my control.

My tiny ship has always struggled against tides, currents, winds, waves, and even occasional hurricanes. In all that time, however, *I have been at the helm of my ship*, anticipating and responding, acting or failing to act.

I have chartered and rechartered my own course, patching my vessel after every storm and setting my sails with little regard to ultimate reality.

Now, finally, the time has come for me to reconstruct that long voyage and calculate the cost of it.

It begins with the question, “where am I now?”

I am in a place. There are elements of this place that are good, and there are other elements that God has promised to use for good even though they are awful.

And I am not alone. Whether I have fled to the uttermost parts of the sea or made my bed in hell, God has followed me there.

Excerpt from *Samson & the Pirate Monks*

Silas Tool: Creating a Life Map

A Silas can help his Silee locate his current location by having him map out his journey thus far. One way to do so is by having him create a timeline broken down into five-year blocks, noting his key life events and his responses to those events.

Some questions to help the Silee complete this task include:

- What did you feel when this event occurred?
- Where did you feel it in your body?
- Where else in your story had you felt that before?
- What did you do about it? Why?

Once the map has been constructed, the next step is to encourage the Silee to name the costs of this journey.

What has this cost him: Relationally? Financially? Spiritually? Physical Health-wise? Mental Health-wise?

At this point, he will want to turn to self-contempt and shame at the losses resulting from his decisions and behaviors. It is important to remind him that the punishment for all of his sins are already paid. Christ does not condemn him, and he must not condemn himself. He will, in due time, make some amends to others for damage he has caused, but he cannot repay for his sins.

All that God requires him to do—all that he can do—is confess his sins to God in honest detail, accept the mercy he freely extends, and relinquish the rudder of my life to him.

Knowing his story will help you, his Silas, place his struggles in context, make connections he might not notice on his own, and remember things he would rather forget.

EMOTIONAL DEFENSES

We all have defenses. They are normal and even healthy, although very often as adults they become problematic. Defenses are anything we do to avoid feeling core or inhibitory emotions. They are a form of emotional protection. Even an emotion can be used to defend against another emotion, like when we get angry while underneath we are really scared or anxious. Not every defense is bad. In fact, we need defenses sometimes when emotions aren't practical.

Defenses are destructive when we are so out of touch with our feelings that our bodies and minds become adversely affected. Defenses prevent us from knowing and expressing what we want and truly feel and keep our true authentic selves hidden and tempered. Defenses also make us more rigid, causing us to lose flexibility in thoughts and actions. Too many defenses make it hard to wholeheartedly engage in life. They can also cause us to act out in self-destructive ways.

COMMON DEFENSES

Joking	Mumbling	Procrastination	Grandiosity	Being Secretive
Sarcasm	Constant Apologizing	Preoccupation	Misogyny	Cutting
Smiling	Not Talking	Irritability	Working Too Much	Obsessions
Laughing	Not Listening	Negative Thinking	Numbness	Addictions
Vagueness	Spacing Out	Judging Others	Helplessness	Suicidal Ideas
Changing the Subject	Tiredness	Judging Ourselves	Over-Exercising	Misguided Aggression (i.e. getting angry at your partner when you're really angry at your boss)
No Eye Contact	Criticizing	Prejudice	Over-Eating	
Eye Rolling	Perfectionism	Racism	Under-Eating	

EMOTIONS, EMBODIMENT, & EMPATHY

The triune God designed our triune brain to feel emotions in our bodies in response to the emotions of others. But when we cannot feel our feelings, or haven't been allowed to, we can be confused about how to respond to the emotional expression of others. We may try to make someone else's feelings go away or dismiss them to avoid having to feel the emotions that get stirred in us when they invite us to see the hurt they have experienced.

Emotional understanding of others is directly linked to our awareness and understanding of ourselves. Improving our ability to tolerate discomfort, take responsibility, and soothe ourselves in healthy ways when we experience big feelings helps us stay in uncomfortable, meaningful conversations without making them about us or making the other person's emotional expression go away.

Intimacy happens in the emotional interactions of a relationship. When we can't share our emotions, or respond to the emotions of others, we never experience the belonging we were built for.

Silas Tool: Facing the Kraken

Invite your Silee to imagine facing the emotion directly without turning to avoidance. What might it look like to sit with that emotion for just 30 seconds?

Anchoring Thoughts

What are you thinking?

"I'm a failure."

"I'm not good enough."

"I am weak."

"I'll never change."

"I don't deserve love or respect."

"I'm broken beyond repair."

"I'm disgusting/dirty."

"If people knew the real me,
they would reject me."

Our thoughts, emotions, and behaviors are deeply interconnected, each influencing the other in powerful ways. When we engage in addictive or maladaptive coping behaviors, such as compulsive scrolling, overeating, or viewing pornography, we often do so in an attempt to avoid or soothe uncomfortable emotions.

Beneath these actions are thoughts that, while perhaps unconscious, are driving the behavior. These thoughts frequently stem from deeper emotional wounds, often tied to past trauma. For instance, when we feel anxious or lonely, a thought might surface: "I can't handle this," or "I'm unworthy of connection." These shame-based messages become deeply embedded in our thinking and can fuel behaviors aimed at numbing or distracting from the pain.

The behavior serves as a temporary escape, but the thoughts of shame persist, creating a destructive loop. It is crucial to recognize that these thoughts and behaviors are survival strategies learned in response to past pain. To break free from this cycle, it's important to explore the messages of shame lying underneath these thoughts.

Ask yourself:

- What am I really telling myself when I feel the need to escape into this behavior?
- What do I believe about myself in these moments?

By bringing these shame-based thoughts into the light, you can begin to challenge them and choose healthier, more compassionate ways of responding to your emotions.

Silas Tool: Name to Tame

These prompts guide your Silas to identify the underlying shame-based messages driving his behaviors, helping him make the connection between these thoughts and his actions. By bringing these painful thoughts to light, he can begin to challenge and reframe his beliefs, leading to healthier responses.

- What thoughts or beliefs about yourself come up when you feel the urge to act out?
- Do you notice any recurring thoughts like 'I'm not good enough' or 'I'm too broken'? What are they?
- Are you trying to avoid a painful thought or belief about yourself? What is it?
- When you think about your behavior, does the thought 'I'll never change' or 'What's the point in trying?' come up?
- Do you notice any 'all-or-nothing' thinking like, 'I've already messed up, so why not keep going'?
- When you feel ashamed, do you think, 'I deserve this' or 'I'm unlovable'? How does this drive your actions?
- Are you using this behavior to quiet the thought, 'I don't belong' or 'I'm alone'?
- What would it feel like to face the thought 'I am not enough' without turning to this behavior? What are you afraid might happen?

Weathering the Waves

What are you doing?

Taking stock of your actions is the first step toward understanding the deeper motivations behind them. These behaviors may seem harmless or even comforting in the moment, but they are often linked to unprocessed emotions or unmet needs.

By recognizing the patterns and triggers that lead you to engage in these activities, you can begin to uncover the role they play in your life.

Are they providing you with a sense of control, relief, or distraction? Or are they keeping you disconnected from your feelings and deeper desires?

This reflection is not about judgment but about curiosity—what is happening within you when you find yourself reaching for an external escape? By understanding what you're doing and why, you open the door to making more intentional choices that align with the person you want to become.

COMMON AVOIDANT BEHAVIORS

These behaviors often feel like quick fixes to avoid discomfort, but over time, they can prevent healing and reinforce cycles of shame and disconnection:

- Procrastination
- Mindless scrolling (social media, internet)
- Binge-watching TV or streaming shows
- Overeating or comfort eating
- Substance use
- Pornography or sexual acting out
- Overworking or staying excessively busy
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Shopping or compulsive spending
- Gambling or risky behaviors
- Excessive exercise or fitness obsession
- Isolation or withdrawal from social interaction
- People-pleasing or avoidance of conflict

Silas Tool: Tracking Rogue Waves

Below are questions to help guide a deeper conversation with your Silee that explore his behaviors with greater awareness, understanding the nuances behind his actions. This will help him uncover patterns, triggers, and emotional drivers, empowering him to make conscious decisions that align with healing and healthier ways of coping.

These questions help him recognize his immediate action, grounding him in the present moment.

- What are you physically doing right now?
- Describe your environment. Where are you? What time is it? What else is happening around you?
- How long have you been doing this? Did you intend to start or continue?
- When you started, did you plan to do it for this long, or did you lose track of time?

By identifying patterns and triggers, he can start to notice when and why he tends to slip into these behaviors (such as particular emotions, times of day, or specific stressors).

- When do you find yourself most likely to engage in this activity?
- Does this behavior usually follow a specific feeling, situation, or thought?
- Are you doing this alone or with others? Does it feel different when you're alone?
- How does the presence of others (or lack thereof) affect your level of engagement or desire for the behavior?
- How do you feel physically as you engage in this behavior?

Often, avoidant behaviors are attempts to suppress or bypass these physical sensations, which are closely tied to emotional experiences.

- Does he feel tension in his shoulders, a tightness in his chest, or a sense of numbness?
- Can you notice any changes in your breathing or heart rate? Do you feel more alert, numb, or disconnected from your body?

Even maladaptive behaviors offer something—relief, distraction, or a temporary sense of control—and often feel good in the moment, but leave behind negative emotional residue.

Understanding the perceived benefit can uncover the emotional needs behind the action.

- Does this behavior feel like it's helping you in the moment? What does it offer you?
- What need or desire are you trying to fulfill with this behavior? Are you seeking comfort, escape, control, or numbing?
- How do you feel after you've been doing this for a while? Does the activity leave you feeling better or worse?
- Do you notice a sense of relief, shame, guilt, or disappointment when you finish this activity?

Invite your Silee to explore what the behavior is helping him avoid, whether it's uncomfortable emotions, difficult thoughts, or a sense of vulnerability. Recognizing this can help him understand why the behavior is so appealing and encourage him to confront the core issue he is avoiding, which is often more painful or challenging than the behavior itself.

- Is this behavior connected to avoiding something else? If so, what might that be?
- What do you suspect might happen if you didn't engage in this behavior? What thoughts or feelings would you have to face?
- Does this behavior align with the person you want to be? Why or why not?
- What is the gap between who you want to be and what you're doing right now? How can you begin to bridge that gap?

Charting the Course

What are you thinking of doing?

We tend to fall into our old patterns without thinking, often finding ourselves at familiar, unwanted destinations without even realizing how we got there. It's easy to get caught up in these cycles, repeating the same behaviors that lead to shame, isolation, or disappointment. In moments like these, having a trusted companion—a Silas—can make all the difference.

This section invites you to pause and consider your next step.

What would be the easiest thing to do? Often, the easiest choice is to continue on the familiar path, acting out in ways that bring temporary relief but long-term pain.

What would be the hardest thing to do? The harder choice

might involve choosing a healthy behavior, sitting with discomfort, or reaching out for support—actions that build lasting strength, even though they might feel unfamiliar or difficult in the moment.

If you continue on the same path, what do you anticipate happening? Is it a familiar outcome, one that leads to regret or emptiness? Or can you begin to imagine a different destination, where each choice you make creates a new pattern—a healthier, more life-giving way of being?

By reflecting on what you are thinking of doing, you can break free from automatic reactions and begin charting a course toward true change.

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a vintage-style compass. The compass face is visible, showing cardinal and intercardinal directions (N, NE, E, SE, S, SW, W, NW) and degree markings. The hand is positioned as if about to use the compass for navigation.

Silas Tool: Compass Calibration

The goal is to help your Silee recognize both destructive behaviors he may be considering and alternative healthy habits he could implement when the urge to act out occurs. These reflection questions guide him in exploring his impulses, evaluating the potential outcomes, and shifting toward more constructive coping strategies.

- When you feel the urge to act out, what is the first behavior that comes to mind? Is it something you know will harm or help you?
- Are you thinking of engaging in a familiar pattern like dissociating, using pornography, or overeating? How has this behavior affected you in the past?
- What need or emotion are you hoping to address through this behavior? Is there a healthier way to meet that need?
- Is this behavior going to offer you long-term relief or just temporary escape? What might the aftermath of choosing this behavior look like?
- Can you think of a healthy habit you've used before that has worked in similar situations? How did it help you in the past?
- When you feel ashamed, do you think, 'I deserve this' or 'I'm unlovable'? How does this drive your actions?
- If you weren't acting out, what could you do instead to address your emotions or calm yourself down?
- What would happen if you chose to sit with your uncomfortable emotions or thoughts for a few minutes instead of acting on the urge? How might that shift your perspective?
- If you choose a healthy behavior in this moment, how will you feel afterward? How might it change the way you see yourself?
- Are there small steps you can take right now to interrupt the urge to act out? What could you do in the next few minutes to shift your focus?
- What would it mean to choose a healthier path right now? How could that decision affect your relationship with yourself and others in the long run?

Tacking Towards Clarity

Tacking is a sailing term that refers to the maneuver of changing direction by turning the bow of the boat into the wind, allowing it to sail in a new direction. In much the same way, we can adjust the course of our behavior when we notice ourselves drifting toward avoidant patterns. Rather than continuing down a familiar path of avoidance, we have the power to steer ourselves toward healthier, more intentional actions.

What is one small, healthy action you could take when you notice an avoidant behavior or thought pattern emerging? It might be as simple as taking a deep breath, stepping outside for fresh air, or reaching out to someone you trust for support. These small actions may seem insignificant at first, but they can dramatically shift the course of your day—and over time, your life.

What would change for you if, instead of avoiding the emotion behind the behavior, you chose to address it directly? Facing uncomfortable feelings like fear, shame, or sadness can feel daunting, but doing so opens up the possibility for healing, growth, and lasting change.

As you reflect, write down one specific step you're willing to commit to the next time you feel the urge to engage in avoidant behavior. This small, intentional shift can help you take control of your journey, guiding you toward the person you want to become.

Silas Tool: A Personal Ship's Locker

In maritime contexts, a ship's locker is a storage space where essential tools, equipment, or supplies are kept. When the urge to engage in destructive behavior arises, it is important to have collection of healthy habits and coping strategies that someone can draw from when navigating emotional storms or difficult moments. Here are some examples to help you craft your own ship's locker:

- **Take a deep breath or practice breathing exercises.** Deep, mindful breathing can help calm the nervous system and ground you in the present moment, providing space to respond thoughtfully rather than react impulsively.
- **Step outside for fresh air or take a short walk.** Spending time outdoors or going for a walk can help clear your mind, shift your focus, and regulate your emotions through movement and nature.
- **Journal about your emotions or thoughts.** Writing down what you're feeling can provide a safe space to express your emotions, gain clarity, and process your thoughts without judgment.
- **Practice grounding techniques.** Engage in simple grounding exercises, such as naming five things you can see, hear, or feel, to help reconnect with the present moment and reduce anxiety.
- **Call or text a trusted friend, mentor, or Silas.** Reaching out to someone you trust can offer support, validation, and a reminder that you're not alone in your struggle.
- **Engage in a creative activity (drawing, painting, playing music, etc.).** Creative outlets allow you to express yourself in a nonverbal way, providing relief from emotional overwhelm and fostering a sense of accomplishment.
- **Read a book, article, or listen to a podcast.** Engaging your mind with uplifting or educational content can redirect your attention, offer new perspectives, and inspire healthier ways of thinking.
- **Do a physical activity (exercise, stretching, yoga).** Moving your body, whether through exercise, stretching, or yoga, can help release pent-up energy, reduce stress, and improve your mood by boosting endorphins.
- **Drink a glass of water or have a healthy snack.** Taking care of your physical needs can help curb emotional cravings, allowing you to respond to your body's true needs rather than acting out in unhealthy ways.
- **Practice mindfulness or meditation.** Taking a few minutes to meditate or practice mindfulness can help you observe your thoughts without reacting to them, creating space for conscious decision-making.
- **Do a small act of kindness for someone else.** Helping others, whether through a kind word or small gesture, can shift your focus outward and foster a sense of purpose and connection.
- **Tidy up or organize your space.** Cleaning or organizing your environment can provide a sense of control, calm, and accomplishment, while also distracting from destructive urges.
- **Engage in a gratitude practice.** Take a moment to write down or reflect on three things you're grateful for, which can shift your mindset away from negativity and toward a more positive, hopeful outlook.
- **Listen to calming or uplifting music.** Music has the power to affect your emotions; listening to something calming or uplifting can help soothe anxiety or elevate your mood.
- **Visualize a positive future outcome.** Spend time imagining how a healthier response in the present moment will lead to a more fulfilling future. This can help you reconnect with your goals and align your actions with your values.