

No Shortcuts under God's Leadership

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Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 0 0] joining us online. It's understandable that there are fewer in the church today with the weather being so inclement and the roads being a bit dodgy. So please take your time as you leave and a safe journey home as well, we pray. The evening service tonight will be taken by Reverend Donald A. Macdonald, retired. It's just simply to give me a little break, so he's agreed to take the service this evening. We pray for God's blessing for that and for him. Most of the intimations are fairly self-explanatory. 8pm tonight, the YF meets on Zoom and do remember the monthly prayer meeting on Zoom tomorrow evening, that's at 7pm, 7.30pm, sorry, that's the monthly prayer meeting and on Tuesday at 6pm, Youth Club meets in the MA Hall before the trip to Scalladale. Their bus leaves at 6.30pm. The other meetings through the week, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday and next Lord's Day, you can see them there. Now communion, you can see there's an intimation today regarding the communion. As you know, we're hoping to have and praying for a communion on the 20th of February. There are some details there, there'll be more specific details given out,

God willing, next week in the bulletin. But just please notice the services are Saturday and Sunday and the service on Saturday the 19th at 7pm. That's just to give the Kirk session time to meet afterwards and also to prepare the table for the Lord's Day. The session will be opened on Wednesday evening and it will remain open from Wednesday evening onwards. So we'll also meet on the Thursday evening after the meeting in the seminary. So Wednesday evening, Thursday evening, the session will meet in the seminary after the services. There's no service on Friday, but the session have decided that they will still meet at 7.30pm. That'll be here at Kenneth Street to meet with anyone who wishes to come to the Lord's Table for the first time. We wanted to give everyone the opportunity, as much opportunity as possible, to come and take communion for the first time after such a long time, two years without one.

So please take advantage of that. If you're thinking at all of coming to the Lord's Table for the first time, we'll be delighted to meet with you. And if you want to phone me or phone any of the elders beforehand, get in touch, please do that. But we'll be delighted to meet with you at any of the session meetings. And details for the Lord's Day itself and the communion, as I say, will be available next Lord's Day in the bulletin. And with the easing of COVID restrictions, as you can see, we've now decided that we can use both doors for exit instead of going the one way. But to avoid any bottlenecks, please just leave pew by pew, whether you're coming to the front or using the main door, just do please just be a bit patient and wear your masks as well on the way out. So these are all the intimations then for today. Let's begin our worship. And we're singing firstly today from Psalm number 30.

Psalm 30. That's in the Scottish Psalter on page 239, the tune is Bethesda. We're singing verses 1 to 5. Lord, I will thee extol, for thou hast lifted me on high, and over me thou to rejoice, may it's not mine enemy. O thou who art the Lord my God, I in distress to thee with loud cries lifted up my voice, and thou hast healed me. Psalm 30 verses 1 to 5. To God's praise we stand to sing.

Lord, I will thee extol, for thou hast lifted me on high, and over me thou to rejoice, may it's not mine.

[4 : 1 2] O thou who art the Lord my God, I in distress to thee.

With loud cry, I have lifted up my voice, and thou hast healed me.

I am rescued from the grave, and thou hast healed me. I am rescued from the grave, and thou hast healed me. That thou hast healed me, and thou hast healed me. That thou hast healed me.

The Lord has made me save. For he that hath his holy want, sing praise unto the Lord, I'm given to him that's when he His holiness recourse.

For but the Lord let bless his rock, I've been his favor light.

[6 : 36] We may play for a night in June, And for the joy arise.

Let's unite our hearts and minds now in prayer. Let's call upon the Lord. Almighty and blessed God, We come into your presence to give you thanks.

We have sung words in your praise that call upon us to give thanks to the Lord. Lord, we have so much today to give thanks for, And we would scarcely have time, Even if we spent the whole of this time in prayer and thanksgiving, To give you thanks for all that you deserve by way of thanksgiving.

We thank you, O Lord, for the many advantages we have today. And we thank you for the gospel that brings us together. We thank you for the way that you reveal yourself to your people, Through your word, through the blessing of your spirit, Taking your word and opening up our minds, And our hearts and our affections to receive it.

We give thanks, O Lord, today that you deal with us so patiently, And in such a way as to reveal yourself to us as a God who is committed to the well-being of your people, In such a way as to bring them on the path that you have opened up and led them on.

[8 : 16] We pray for your guidance today, Lord, as we come once again to worship you together. We thank you, Lord, for all that it means to us to be part of a congregation of your people, To have that fellowship with one another and to have especially that fellowship with you, By which we are enabled to enjoy your presence, To know, Lord, in such an awesome way of your holy presence with your people.

We pray that that will come today to pervade our thoughts, And that our experience might be, Lord, that we have indeed met with the living God, So that we leave this place once again, Not only impressed but humbled, That we have such a privilege of coming before the Lord, Of coming to hold fellowship with you, To speak directly with you, And to give you praise and thanks.

We thank you, Lord, for everything that makes you so special to your people, For the great attributes that belong to you, that are revealed to you, Revealed to us from you in dealing with us mercifully, In your love and in your affection and in your regard for your people.

You have shown your mercy, you have shown your loving kindness, your steadfast love. We bless you, Lord, for the fact that there is forgiveness with you, In order that you may be feared and revered and served.

We pray today for your forgiveness, Because we come, Lord, to not only give you thanks, But to express our sorrow over our own sins. We thank you that we can tell you of our sins, That you enable us by your spirit to come in repentance, To repent of our sins and to confess them in your holy presence.

[10 : 03] We know, Lord, how much you are against our sin, And against sin itself and every aspect of it. We thank you that there is a provision made for us, So that your wrath does not reach us, Having reached already your son on the cross, Who bore the penalty of our sin, And who came himself to be the saviour of sinners such as we are.

We thank you, Lord, especially for him today, And we thank you for the perfection of his being and of his work, The perfection of his person, And the wonder that we have such a glorious saviour, Who came to be part of our human experience, Who gave himself to the death of the cross, To the contradiction of sinners against himself, During his journey in this world.

We thank you today, Lord, That you are exalted to the right hand of the majesty on high, Which itself bears testimony to your accomplishment of victory over sin, Over the devil, over death.

We pray today that the power of your resurrection might be operative in our lives. Help us to depend, O Lord, on nothing less. For we need that power in our lives day by day.

We need that power to overcome temptation, And to improve upon what we are as human beings, And in order to deal with the temptations and the sin, That we confront each day of our lives.

[11 : 35] Lord, we ask your blessing to be with us as a congregation. We ask that you would continue to let your favour rest upon us. We pray that your gospel will be blessed to us today and in these days to come.

And that all that has been done already in your name over past years, Even reaching back into the history of the congregation, Will continue to be blessed to us by way of memory, By way of anticipation that you will still bless us.

That you will continue, Lord, to own and acknowledge your great name amongst us. And Lord, to that end we pray that the gospel may flourish in our midst. We pray for those today, O Lord, who have joined us in recent times.

We ask that your blessing will be with them as individuals, or as couples, or as families. We pray that you bless all today who are seeking earnestly to know peace of soul, Peace of heart and of conscience.

Who know that it is right for them to draw near to God. Who know that it is right for them to be part of the fellowship of this congregation. And so we pray that you would bless any today, Lord, Who are searching for assurance.

[12 : 45] Who are needing further strengthening to walk in the ways of the Lord. We pray today that you would bless them. We pray for those who have been on the journey for a long time.

Who may have fears at this time that they didn't have previously. Lord, we pray for them and for any anxiety that we may come to have as the years go by. Remember us, Lord, we pray as we find so often that in the advancement of age and of aging and of old age.

That we find aspects of living that we have not fully anticipated in the difficulties of them. Bless all today, Lord, who face whether they are problems of mind or of body.

We pray for them and ask that you draw near to them. We pray too for our children. Bless them today as they meet in Sunday school, in Cresce and in Twinnies. We pray for the youth fellowship as they anticipate again meeting this coming week.

We pray, Lord, for all who give of their time so willingly and so lovingly to the teaching of our young people and our children. Oh, Lord, bless them, we pray.

[13 : 56] And at this time we pray for all those who are ill and all those anticipating surgery. We ask especially that you would draw near to Marianne as she anticipates surgery in the week to come.

Bless her, bless her, Lord, we pray in her mind, give her peace in her soul. We pray that the procedure might be successful. Oh, Lord, we pray that she will know of your continued presence with her.

We pray for our elders. We pray for Duncan McLean as he continues to bear his illness. We ask for him and we pray for Annabelle, for his family. We pray that you would continue, Lord, to remember them.

Grant them your peace in their hearts. We pray for Duny as well and for Liz as he recovers from his recent bout. We pray, gracious one, that you draw near to him. We pray that you would continue to uphold him and strengthen him.

We ask for healing for him. We pray that you would uphold him in his mind as well when temptations, as they usually do, come flooding in at such times. Lord, oh, Lord, we pray that you would bless him and bless them all as a family.

[15 : 06] We pray for all others, Lord, who are ill at this time, whether at home or elsewhere in hospital or in care homes. We pray especially for those who have some of their faculties come to fail, whether it's in memory or physically.

We pray that you would bless them who belong to us as families and as a congregation. Draw near to them, Lord, we pray. And bless their families and be near to them, to strengthen them and to give them the further resolve to continue to trust in you.

We ask, too, that you bless those who mourn in our midst. Oh, Lord, we know from week to week of families that experience death, bereavement and sorrow over the passing of loved ones.

Lord, we commend them to you today and pray that you bless all those who have lost loved ones in recent times in our congregation. We have had, Lord, a funeral most of the weeks that have gone by for four or five weeks successively.

We pray that you bless these families, that you bless those previously who lost loved ones, who still grieve and who still seek your comfort, who still may be asking many questions and who are seeking to come to terms and to adjust to life without the loved ones gone by.

[16 : 26] Lord, we pray that you bless them, whether their loved ones were in infancy or in youth or in old age. We pray for them all and ask that you would minister to them with the grace that you speak of in your word, that your people experience the grace that is suited to all our need.

And that you yourself minister to us, Lord, in our times of need. Supply them, we pray, with that grace. And now continue, we ask to bless us during these days.

Bless us as we anticipate a communion in the weeks to come. Lord, bless any who may at this time be thinking of coming to join your professing church, who come to think of taking this step.

We pray that you would encourage them. We pray that we may rejoice, Lord, once again in being able to observe the Lord's death and to come round the table of the Lord, around these elements that represent his death.

Oh, Lord, bless this to us and bless us toward it. And make it a time, oh Lord, which will be the highlight in our experience, having had such a long time without a remembrance of the Lord's death in the Lord's Supper.

[17 : 40] And so hear us now, we pray. Continue to bless us and watch over us. And pardon our many transgressions for Jesus' sake. Amen. Let's read God's word now as we find it in the book of Exodus.

Exodus chapter 13. I will read through the whole of the chapter from the beginning. Exodus chapter 13. The Lord said to Moses, consecrate to me all the firstborn, whatever is the first to open the womb amongst the people of Israel, both of man and of beast is mine.

Then Moses said to the people, remember this day in which you came out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. For by a strong hand, the Lord brought you out from this place. No leavened bread shall be eaten.

Today in the month of Abib, you are going out. And when the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Hivites, the Jebusites, which he swore to your fathers to give you a land flowing with milk and honey, you shall keep this service in this month.

For seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. And on the seventh day there shall be a feast to the Lord. Unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days. No leavened bread shall be seen with you.

[19 : 16] And no leaven shall be seen with you in all your territory. You shall tell your son on that day, it is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt. And it shall be to you as a sign on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes that the law of the Lord may be in your mouth.

For with a strong hand, the Lord has brought you out of Egypt. You shall therefore keep this statute at its appointed time from year to year. When the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites, as he swore to you and to your fathers, and shall give it to you, you shall set apart to the Lord all that first opens the womb.

All the firstborn of the animals that are males shall be the Lord's. Every firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, or if you will not redeem it, you shall break its neck.

Every firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem. And when in time to come your son asks you, what does this mean? You shall say to him, by a strong hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt from the house of slavery.

For when Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the Lord killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of animals.

[20 : 32] Therefore I sacrifice to the Lord all the males that first opened the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem. It shall be as a mark on your hand, or frontlets between your eyes.

For by a strong hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt. When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near.

For God said, lest the people change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt. But God led the people round by the way of the wilderness towards the Red Sea.

And the people of Israel went up out of the land of Egypt equipped for battle. Moses took the bones of Joseph with him. For Joseph had made the sons of Israel solemnly swear, saying, God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones with you from here.

And they moved on from Succoth and encamped at Atham on the edge of the wilderness. And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night.

[21 : 43] The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people. Amen. May once again God bless to us our reading of his holy word.

Let's sing now in Psalm number 25 in this, sing Psalms. Psalm 25 on page 29. We're singing verses 8 to 15.

June is rocking him. Because the Lord is just and good, he shows his paths to all who stray. He guides the meek in what is right and teaches them his holy way.

To those who keep his covenant laws, he shows his love consistently. For your name's sake, O Lord my God, forgive my great iniquity. And so on down to verse 15 from verse 8.

Because the Lord is just and good, he shows his paths to all who stray. Because the Lord is just and good, he shows his paths to all who stray.

- [23 : 05] He guides the me in what is right, and teaches them His holy grace.
To those who keep His covenant lost, He chose His love from distant peace.
For pure in sin, O Lord my God, forgive my great iniquity.
Good day are those who fear the Lord.
He'll teach to them the chosen way. And they may prosper all their life, Their children in the land will stay.
- [24 : 46] Lord spends our most to fear His pain, With them His covenant he will share.
My eyes are always so, the Lord. He'll bring my peace from every sin.
If you turn with me now, please, to the passage we read. That's in Exodus chapter 13.
And for a short time this morning, we're going to look at verses 17 to 19.
So Exodus 13, and we begin reading at verse 17. When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near.
For God said, lest the people change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt. But God led the people round by the way of the wilderness towards the Red Sea.
- [26 : 08] And the people of Israel went up out of the land of Egypt equipped for battle. Especially the reference there that God led the people not by the most direct route through the land of the Philistines, but by way of the wilderness.
It's always tempting to take shortcuts in life, isn't it? Whatever it is we're doing, it's always tempting to try and cut corners, get to our intended destination, or the object that we have in mind if we're doing something, by way of doing it more quickly than perhaps we ought to do.
But there are no shortcuts in the journey that we take under God's leadership. God does not do shortcuts in leading his people on to the promised land, on to heaven.
And that's reflected, really, you could say, in the best craftsmanship that you can see in this world. Craftsmen, those who are really skilled at their work as craftsmen, craftswomen, they don't take shortcuts.
They know that shortcuts are not going to be helpful in achieving the objective of whatever it is they're fashioning or crafting to make it the best they possibly can. When you look at a program such as the repair shop, for example, all of those broken and smashed up things that are brought in to these experts to repair and to bring back to a state of working order as near best as could be.
- [27 : 43] For example, if you find somebody coming in with a plastic bag full of smashed porcelain, a wonderful vase that once stood on a mantelpiece or on a shelf, that has been broken, it's fallen to the ground, it's got smashed up, and, you know, Kirsten, as her name is, usually takes that.
And as you look at her and the others that are doing various other types of repairing, as you look at her taking all of these smashed up pieces, she, first of all, tries to just put them together and match them up.
But especially if an attempt has been made to repair it with glue or whatever by somebody who wasn't an expert, first thing she does is take away all of that glue. It takes ages. She makes sure that all the edges are perfectly clean.
She makes sure that all the tiniest bits are clean to fit into, as far as she can tell the bits where they ought to go. And it takes such a long time. The temptation would be just to leave it as it is and try and put some more glue, some proper glue on it, and then fix it up and then put it in such a way as would actually be in its final order and polish it up, and that would do.

Well, that would not do. It would be nothing like the finished object that she would actually want to present back to the owners. If she doesn't do shortcuts, they wouldn't help.

[29 : 00] They would just lead to a spoiled or marred product at the end of the process. And you notice verse 17 here, when Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near.

That was the most direct route onto the promised land. But God didn't lead them that way. Instead, he led them through the wilderness, the way of the wilderness. And it gives us the reason for that, in case the people change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt.

God took them the longer way. God knew that the people were not equipped for war. It says there they took equipment for battle. Maybe it wasn't just exactly swords and so on that they took, but they took some means of defending themselves.

As they would travel on, you would understand that that would be, of course, perfectly proper. But they weren't a people who were used to war. They weren't at that stage ready to meet any of the enemies, such as the Philistines, or these groups that lay along the direct route.

That would take time. It would take time to shape them into a cohesive, disciplined unit. And under Moses, that is really what they set about doing. But it wasn't going to happen in a short journey by the most direct route into the land of Canaan.

[30 : 27] God chose another way for them. And that also is true of our lives in following the Lord as Christians. It's always going to be tempting for us to cut corners.

Always going to be tempting for us to try and get a more direct route. Always going to be tempting, and the way of the devil is to present us with this temptation. And indeed, our own hearts sometimes might think that the shorter way might be best.

Why should it be such a long way? Why should there be so much difficulty, so much challenge, so much suffering in the way? Why wouldn't it be more direct? Why wouldn't there be less of that sort of way that challenges us, that requires us to place our trust and confidence in the Lord, that requires us to develop as human beings, as Christians, as believers, in order then to more successfully engage with the powers that we're going to meet on the way?

So there are no shortcuts for the Israelites as they left Egypt, and that really, in principle, is what applies to the Christian life. There are no shortcuts, though sometimes we might actually prefer that to be the case.

We might prefer that the suffering would not be as long or as acute or all the things that have happened in our life thus far. What if God had taken them out?

[31 : 49] What would not be better to have loved ones left with us, to have not had the trauma that we've had to go through? Well, here is God telling us that His way is best.

God's wise leadership, first of all. Let's just look at that for a moment. God's wise leadership. You can see here in verses 17 and 18 the emphasis in these verses. When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, for God said, lest the people change their mind.

But God led the people round by the way of the wilderness towards the Red Sea. Now you could very easily skip over that as you're looking at these verses in the context of the wider context of this chapter and the next chapter crossing the Red Sea.

But do notice that emphasis. God was the leader. It was under God's leadership that this happened. The emphasis is on God leading them. He did not let the people choose the way that they thought best.

He did not let them actually say to Moses, look, this is the way we would prefer to go. Whatever you think, this is what we want. This is the way that is more direct.

[33 : 02] This is the way that's going to get us there more quickly than any other way. God did not let that happen. It's God's leadership that you have emphasized.

Yes, Moses taught the people. You can see all the way through these books of the Old Testament where the journey from Egypt through to Canaan is described. Of course Moses was leading them.

Afterwards Joshua to take them into the final stage of entering the promised land. These great leaders, of course they taught the people. They led the people. They guided the people. They directed the people.

They gave counsel to the people. They taught them the things of God. But ultimately, as this passage says, it is God who is directing them. It is God who is leading them.

It is God that they must wait upon. And how many times you find through these books of the Old Testament, Moses wrestling with the people to actually look to God, to wait for God's word, to act by God's word, to put themselves willingly under God's leadership.

[34 : 11] And of course, that's the way it is right through the Bible. That's the way it is right through our Christian experience, our human experience. We must have the leadership of God directing our lives or it will largely be to no avail.

Our own wisdom will not do. Our own ingenuity will not do. Our own reliance upon other people, even if they've gone before us, will not do. That will not carry us safely through the perils of the wilderness, the temptations that we're going to meet with.

We need to remain under and be confident under the leadership of God through his word, through his spirit, through the teaching of the Holy Spirit. And that's why you find in the Bible, of course, so often you find an emphasis on the leading of God and nowhere more so than in that book that we use so often, in the book of Psalms, whether reading it or singing it.

This is one of the great things you find in the book of Psalms. The leadership of God is so often emphasized there. Just let me pick up one or two verses out of so many that you could remember yourselves and look at and recall from the book of Psalms.

Psalms 5, you find it there. Of course, we should say that the very beginning of the book of Psalms, it talks about a way, the ways of the Lord, delighting in the law of the Lord, following the way of the Lord, prospering by these streams of water and so on.

[35 : 39] The very threshold of the book of Psalms really takes us to the leadership of God, to the guidance of God, to the word of God. But go ahead to Psalm 5 and verse 8.

What do you find? There's the psalmist prayer. This is David coming. Lead me, O Lord, in your righteousness because of my enemies. Make your way straight before me.

There is David facing enemies, facing temptation. What is he praying for? He's praying for the Lord's guidance, for the Lord's leadership, for the Lord to take him on. Go to Psalm 23, the well-known words.

The Lord is my shepherd. He leads me, makes me to lie down beside still waters. He leads me in the paths of righteousness. There's the Lord's leadership as the shepherd of his people.

Not the way that they choose and would want to have for themselves that they might think is best, but the Lord's ways of righteousness, the way of righteousness. And then all the way through the book of Psalms.

[36 : 39] Psalm 73, for example. You shall guide me with your counsel and afterward receive me to glory. You shall guide me with your counsel.

You will lead me. You will guide me. You will give me your counsel. Now, it doesn't say in that verse how long that would have to be the case for. It doesn't say you will guide me with your counsel for a short distance and then I'll be in the land of glory.

No, it says you will guide me with your counsel however long the journey is. It's your counsel that I rely on. It's your counsel that's made clear to me. And afterwards, you will receive me into your glory.

the Lord's leadership of our lives. And here's the question for me today and for you as well. Am I willing to let the Lord lead my life?

Am I willing today to place my hands, to place my life in the hands of the God who leads his people? Am I going to take up the privilege of being guided by God on the way through life?

[37 : 47] Rather than try and take the shortcuts myself, rather than try and guide myself through the difficulties, rather than use my own thinking or the thinking of someone else or the philosophies that you find out in the world.

Now here is God saying, let me guide your life. Let me actually take you on the journey and what a journey it is. And what an exciting journey it is.

Yes, it's testing and yes, it's challenging and there are so many things in it that will actually be difficult for us and the Bible doesn't hide that from us. But what an exciting journey it is. What excitement to be led by God?

To actually have your life governed by this great God that created and redeemer of his people? Who would want to travel through life without the leadership of God?

Who would want to travel through life looking to any other philosophy than that which is found in the scriptures in the counsel of God? It's God's leadership, God's wise leadership.

[38 : 49] And what are the benefits? Secondly, I was just looking at it very briefly as a point of principle. What are the benefits of accepting God's leading?

Well, two things and we'll try and fill them out a little bit. First of all, God's leading is a better way. He takes us on a better way, a way that's superior to any other.

And secondly, it's a way by which we are enabled to benefit others or be of benefit to them. It's not just something personal or merely personal.

It's something, as you find in the Bible, so often emphasized. We're not isolated as Christians, as believers, so that we just live our lives privately.

We're part of a group. We're part of a fellowship. We're part of his church. And being part of his church, as we'll see, means that we help each other along this way that God guides us.

[39 : 50] Well, of course, it's a better way. Now, taking a shortcut, as we've said before, is sometimes very much more attractive. And maybe we think that taking the shortcut will actually be beneficial because we'll arrive at journey's end more quickly.

Well, I remember in primary school in Tung, having to walk in those days about a mile and a half back and forth from school. And I don't know if you know your way through the village of Tung and then into Aird Tung, you actually come to a bit where there's a sharp right and left angle, but there's also a sharp left angle 90 degree turn in the road.

And the road comes and you go sharply to your left if you follow the main road. And this is the way that we would walk home from primary school in those days. But there was a shortcut.

You could try and cut out that bit with the angle and just try and cut across up through some of the crofts and come out on the road that you would actually have followed if you'd gone the longer way.

But of course, as always, there was a catch. And I remember trying that and finding, ooh, there's a boggy bit here and I didn't anticipate the boggy bit. And of course, I had to wade through that right up to my ankles and then all the way up through the croft and finally meet the road and on home.

[41 : 11] And you can just imagine what my mother said because it wasn't the done thing in those days to just have two or three pairs of shoes. It was just the one pair of shoes for school and if you'd have made a mess of them or you'd tore them up playing football, you were in trouble because they weren't easily come by.

And so when I got home, she said, stay on the road. Don't take that shortcut. Don't try and actually cut that corner. Stay on the road is what she said.

Now this is what God is saying to us all the time through life. Stay on the road. Stay on the path that God leads us on in Christ and through Christ.

Yes, you might think it's quicker or better to do it your own way but if you do that, there's a lot more than that you have to undo. If you read The Pilgrim's Progress, you'll find that for Christian at one point.

He fell asleep. He had to catch up and catching up is really, in a way, it's something you never do in the Christian life because what you've left behind, you're not really able to fully catch up on afterwards and you have to redo and retrace your steps and it's a lot more difficult.

[42 : 23] Just like the messy shoes with which I came home on the way from school. There's so much more to do then than I would have had to do had I gone the proper and long way around and the safe way around. Well, God is saying to the Israelites here, I'm not going to lead you through the most direct route.

You may think that's the best way but you're going to go round by way of the wilderness and that's really what makes us stronger at the end of the day, friends.

That's what the Lord had in mind for these people. They were coming out of Egypt having been there as slaves. They were not yet ready for meeting with conflict of the kind they'd meet with the Philistines.

People were used to war. People would soon annihilate them if they got engaged in a skirmish. And the Lord was saying, you're going to go round by way of the wilderness.

It'll take a longer time but you will learn. You will learn things that you now don't presently know. You will see the advantage of it laterally as you come out through at the other end of the journey and you will see that that is the case.

[43 : 34] We'll refer to that in a minute near the end of our study in Deuteronomy chapter 8. So here is something that was going to make them stronger and that's how it is for us as Christians as well. When we begin following the Lord sometimes we may think well I'm ready to take on the world now.

No we're not. We need to actually set down our roots in Christ daily patiently taking the Lord's teaching with us the teaching of others as well that teach us and help us.

You know when you're taking plants God willing it will be soon that you'll be taking plants those of you who take plants out of your greenhouse or cold frame and into your garden the temptation is it looks a nice day let's just take them out and leave them out.

But you need to harden them off. You need to take them out leave them for a while in the air openly then you take them back inside for a number of days or even weeks before they're ready to go out.

What's happening during the time you're taking them out and placing them in the open air while they're getting used to the wind they're getting used to the kind of conditions that make them root more firmly the roots go down more into what they're growing in and then you take them out then they're ready to go out and the Lord is saying to us this is how it is in your Christian life don't think you can just take on the world the moment you become a Christian be patient about this whoever tells you when you're actually converted now you're really ready to serve the Lord just go out and evangelize not a good idea you're going to meet with people who have been in the world a long long time and have met many Christians before and have all the arguments ready in place to try and cut your feet from you spiritually and I'm not suggesting in any way by that that we should just make it an excuse not to serve the Lord openly but what we're saying is build up your spiritual resources as you go on set down your roots in Christ day by day bit by bit learn from the Bible read the scriptures pray even if it is going the long way around as far as you're concerned it takes time to mature as a Christian it takes time to know the Lord to love the Lord fully day by day imagine if you're reading the pilgrim's progress imagine if instead of when the man when Christian left the city of destruction to make his way to the celestial city just imagine if

[46 : 17] Bunyan had written well just take the private jet and go directly there or imagine if he had come to hill difficulty and found that hey this is great somebody's actually made a tunnel through the hill so I don't have to do what previous generations did I can go straight through where would that have benefited him the things that he learned in the struggles of the way the things that he learned from having to climb the hill difficulty or being the slough of despond or all the other things that he met with on the way they were to his advantage ultimately because by all of that he was he was gaining experience he was getting stronger he was more ready than ever before to face what was in front of him now this is friends what the Lord is telling us however easy we might think it would be if we just had our own way a little bit if we were able to choose just a little instead of the way that God is leading us and here the Bible is firmly but gently telling us the way of the Lord is the better way the way of the Lord is the better way you remember Jesus in the desert being tempted by Satan and this is exactly what he faced as you go through the account you have in Matthew and in Luke of the three main temptations there were others as well all of that time that he spent in the wilderness these are the three main ones the gospel writers there focus upon what is the thrust of the devil's attempts what is he trying to do he's trying to make

Jesus take a shortcut he's trying to make Jesus come to the conclusion instead of going around the long way by the way of the cross why would you want to go through Gethsemane why would you want to go to the cross at Calvary I can show you a better way I can show you a quicker way all you need to do is fall down and worship me and I will give you all these things that have been promised you Jesus said get behind me Satan he recognized instantly that this was an attempt to deflect him to divert him from the way of obedience to the father the better way the only way by which we could be saved and that's exactly what you find as you follow the Lord in principle the same thing comes your way take the shortcut don't go as far as just to commit yourself as fully to the Lord and to the reading of your Bible and taking care of prayer and having your quiet times and going to prayer meetings and going to the Lord's table you can actually do without those things just cut these out take the short route

God is saying to you why would you do that when my wisdom has appointed that way for you why would you listen to any other than my wisdom in the way I have chosen for you difficult though it is friends it's always the better way in God's leadership and secondly because it's a way by which we're able to benefit others and I'm going to scoot forward a little bit to the New Testament just now if I can ask you to turn with me briefly to 2 Corinthians chapter 1 and verses 3 to 7 so 2 Corinthians chapter 1 let's read verses 3 to 7 that passage blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ the Father of mercies the God of all comfort who comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God for as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too if we are afflicted it is for your comfort and salvation if we are comforted it is for your comfort which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer our hope for you is unshaken for we know that as you share in our sufferings you will also share in our comfort what is Paul saying there to the Corinthians he's drawing from his own experience he's saying to them you are going through difficulties just as I was you are as a follower of Christ in that sense sharing in his sufferings not his atoning sufferings but the sufferings that he experienced in the opposition of people against him and all the things that were on his way to the cross sufferings of being identified with Jesus and the comfort that comes from God is directed to comfort us in these afflictions these sufferings that we meet with on the way just as it was for Paul himself and indeed for Jesus too in other words what he's saying is the comfort that we receive from God is personal and there is nothing wrong with that we need personally to be comforted to be comforted by God is a wonderful experience a wonderful privilege a very necessary experience but although it's personal it's never to be privatized you must never privatize it in such a way as just keeps it all to yourself what is he saying why have we gone through the afflictions why have we been comforted by God the father of comfort the God of all comfort so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted of God as you patiently endure he's saying these afflictions that's really the essence of benefiting from the afflictions that we go through in this life it's not just for ourselves personally we share these with others of course the word fellowship

Paul in first Corinthians was going thanks to God that he had called these Corinthians into the fellowship of his son as he put it in other words they became joined to Jesus in such a way as were conscious of his the benefits of his death and resurrection but more than that as they shared in the sufferings that he experienced as he met with the opposition of the devil and of the world against him so they share that so they know what that is like but they help each other through sharing out the comforts as well comfort through Christ when you're comforted by God it is so that others will benefit also that they will receive the same comfort with which you have been comforted yourself and every one of us

I'm sure here today knows something of the comfort of God and if you're not yet united to Christ by faith if you haven't given over your life to him if you've not come to entrust your life and your future to him well this is one of the great things that you're missing out on the comforts that come from the Lord to meet you in the stresses of life and especially the deeper traumas and stresses of life that you may be able to comfort others then with the comfort that you yourself have experienced so when you go back then to Deuteronomy and take that with you you can fit that into what's said God did not let them go through the land of the Philistines instead he took them through the way of the wilderness lest the people change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt you see there's the the way that we learn as we go on to meet with the difficulties of life instead of returning back to where we were we keep pressing on in dependence on God let me just go back and go to one other passage we finish and that's in

[54 : 58] Deuteronomy it really I think ties it all together for us Deuteronomy chapter 8 and verses 2 to 3 one of the great things about the Bible is the way that you are able to go to various passages that are tied together in the strands of truth that you find it which is itself an evidence that this is the word of God that God has put all this together for us that's another subject let's go back to Deuteronomy chapter 8 and notice what it says there in verses 2 and 3 you shall remember remember Deuteronomy is a book that's the context of it is there on the borders of the promised land Moses giving a long recap over what their experience was coming out of Egypt things God did for them things God gave them how he brought them to this stage where they're now ready to enter into the promised land you shall remember he says the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these that he might humble you testing you to know what was in your heart whether you would keep his commandments or not and he humbled you and led you let you hunger and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know that he might make you to know that man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of the

Lord what does that remind you of where do you find these words the final words they're used in the Bible they're used by Jesus in the wilderness and repelling the advance and the temptation of the devil here here was the devil coming with his offer of a shortcut and the Lord said to him borrowing taking the words of scripture that he himself had given to Moses man shall not live by bread alone but every word that comes from the mouth of God that's the way of the wilderness that's the longer way round but it's the best way and it's the way that doesn't it just benefiting ourselves it benefits others as well you will face these temptations you face them as a Christian you face them in the ordinary things of life take the shortcut don't just go through the most difficult bits choose your own way the Lord's way is best of most benefit to us and we hope we bring benefit to others through our experiences as well as we share in all of these things together so instead of doing as we ourselves might want to do and wish we could do at times let's hear the words of

Hebrews 13 with which we'll finish Hebrews 13 and verses 12 to 14 so Jesus also suffered outside the gate this is going back to the death of Jesus outside the city of Jerusalem outside the gate so Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured for here we have no lasting city but we seek the city that is to come for Jesus the city the city of heaven back with the father was by the way of the cross for us the city of heaven is by the way of the wilderness the way of taking up our cross daily and denying ourselves and following him that's the better way not the shortcuts let's pray lord our god our father in heaven teach us we pray your ways teach us to walk in your ways teach us to prize your ways take us away we pray from our own wisdom or what comes to us from the world from unbelief from within our own sinful hearts oh lord teach us we pray to follow you more closely to cleave to you a long life's journey enable us in all our times of questioning sometimes of bewildering it to realize that the wisdom of the lord has chosen the way for us and help us we pray to be obedient to you and so we ask now that you bless us bless us through this day bless us this evening bless

Mr. Macdonald as he comes to conduct the service tonight and Lord we ask all of these things for our concluding praise is from Psalm 77 Psalm 77 and that's on page 101 it's in the same Psalms 101 page 101 Psalm 77 verses 19 to 20 to Nistra Catra sorry verses 15 to 20 you have redeemed your people Lord with your almighty arm Jacob and Joseph's children you delivered from all harm the water saw you oh my God they saw and writhed in pain the very depths became convulsed the clouds poured down the rain to the end of the psalm your people like a flock of sheep you guided every day by Moses and by Aaron's hand you led them on the way these verses you have redeemed your people

Lord you have redeemed to me in the Lord where pure almighty are king of and Joseph still renewed here ever come the land the one that saw you oh my God is so unrightened way a ready man speak in for us the

[61 : 56] God for crown the way a the hand the road across the skies as thy king holds them heard
good come the wind the wind was there your life in the world the world the whole that end
of heaven wait your path goes through the sea your

Your way, your height, in water's tread, Your burden, to and stand, your sting.

Your feet, the light, have no longer keep, Your light, is heavy, day.

By Moses' hand, by Ere, Lord's hand, You let them walk the way.

Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the
communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore.

[64 : 05] Amen.