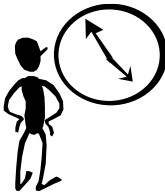


## Inside this issue:

<i>Road Tripping</i>	1
<i>Rededication</i>	2
<i>The Path of the Righteous</i>	3
<i>A.M. Sermon Outline:</i> <b>Spiritual Fathers</b>	6
Duty Rosters	7
Announcements & For the Record	8



## Time of Assembly



### **Sunday:**

Bible Study	9:00 a.m.
Worship	10:00 a.m.

### **Every other Sunday night:**

Worship	5:00 p.m.
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### **Wednesday:**

Bible Study	7:00 p. m.
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## Road Tripping

By Bryan Matthew Dockens

The way to salvation is much like a road trip.

In order even to get started, the traveler depends on others to make his journey possible. The traveler does not build his own road; he depends on others to do that, including paving, striping, and posting signs. Similarly, he who seeks salvation counts on another, God, to make salvation possible. Before the seeker even sets out toward salvation, the Almighty has already provided His grace (Ephesians 2:4-10; Titus 2:11), His mercy (Titus 3:4-5; Jude 20-21), His love (John 3:16; 1 John 4:9-10), and the blood of His sinless Son (Matthew 26:28; Romans 5:9).

The traveler does not chart his own maps; he depends on others to do that, too, whether he buys a Rand McNally foldup map, prints directions from MapQuest, or uses a GPS device. In like manner, the seeker of salvation relies on a third party to point him in the right direction. An agent working on behalf of God informs the curious how to receive forgiveness from the Savior. Preaching is essential (1 Corinthians 1:18-21; 15:1-2; 1 Timothy 4:16).

Making one's way across town, much less across the state or across the country, often involves a number of turns. To get out of the subdivision requires driving a couple private streets, to get out of the neighborhood requires driving a few city avenues, to get out of the county requires driving the beltway, and to get out of the state requires driving the highways. Not one of these streets, avenues, beltways, or highways can get the traveler to his destination without the combination of the other turns. Likewise, the seeker of salvation must not expect forgiveness to be attained without combining all necessary requirements: learning (John 6:45; Romans 10:17), belief (John 3:16; Hebrews 11:6), confession (Matthew 10:32-33; Romans 10:9-10), repentance (Acts 3:19; 17:30), and baptism (Mark 16:16; Romans 6:3-6).

Salvation is available to those who won't stop at learning (James 1:22-25), won't stop at belief (James 2:14-26), won't stop at confession (Matthew 7:21), and won't stop at repentance (Matthew 3:8), but is willing to go all the way and be baptized (Galatians 3:27), and remain faithful thereafter (1 Corinthians 15:58).

## Rededication

By Doy Moyer

There are only a handful of times in biblical Israel's history in which there were reforms to bring the people back to the Lord. Among the kings of the north (Israel), there were no true revivals. Among the kings of the south (Judah), there were a few, but most notable were the reforms that happened under Hezekiah and Josiah. When Hezekiah led the reforms, the people appeared to dedicate themselves to being faithful ([II Chronicles 30-32](#)). Sadly, within a generation or two, that faithfulness waned. Josiah brought back another reform ([II Kings 22-23](#)). This, too, only lasted a short time. One of the lessons in these reforms is that every generation must be rededicated to the Lord. No generation may rest upon the accomplishments (or the failures) of those who have gone before. One generation repenting and reforming is no guarantee that the next generation will do so. All will be accountable before the Lord for their own actions, and even within any given generation, there will be those who will not submit themselves to the Lord.

Christians must take stock of their situation, examine their spiritual condition, and rededicate themselves to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. This world makes it easy to slip away slowly so that we become comfortable with our complacency and soon we are adrift with no anchor. Perhaps this is one reason the Hebrews writer gave the warning: "*For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it*" ([Hebrews 2:1](#)). This takes continual diligence.

The year 2020 was hard, a time in which the world was shaken up by a pandemic and its accompanying problems. Churches were very much affected by what happened because of its impact on the assemblies, classes, and other gatherings. Many churches were no longer meeting except online, and for some, this went on for a year or more. Many others, after weeks or months, began the slow process of trying to reestablish their assemblies. The process has been difficult because it was also attended by many disagreements about how to handle the situation. Some churches have divided, and many have found themselves wondering about the future of their respective congregations.

One of the difficulties that some congregations have faced, though, is that they have members who quit coming altogether and, in some cases, do not give much indication that they are coming back. Is it possible that for some Christians, the pandemic made it so that they could essentially disappear without much accountability? Assemblies have also been hit by the fact that some who previously were faithful to the Sunday evening assemblies and midweek Bible classes have not reestablished their previous habits of re-

turning at those times. For some congregations, these absences really show up in their numbers and can be discouraging to many.

The point is not to judge motives or particular circumstances. Rather, we want to encourage each of us to look at our own motives and circumstances and see where we stand. Have we become complacent? Have we established new patterns and habits that now keep us from being with the brethren more? Are we supporting the work of the congregation through our participation in a way that is encouraging and edifying for all? Can we do better, and if so, how will we engage ourselves to this purpose? We can see a time like this as one that damages our spiritual vitality, or we can see it as an opportunity to meet the challenge and grow closer to the Lord and one another. That's up to us.

Difficult times like this do not get to redefine the work of a local congregation or the body of Christ as a whole. The whole body is still *"held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love"* ([Ephesians 4:16](#)). While a local congregation may need to make some adjustments from time to time, given that what they do is still within the boundaries of God's authority, there should still be full participation and active engagement of its members in whatever else they are doing.

Let us see times like this as opportunities to do some soul searching and to rededicate ourselves to the Lord and His will. The world has once again been shown that there is much corruption and death. We can take this in a fatalistic sense that finds no redemption or hope, or we can take it as another indication that this world is truly not our home and that there is something yet far greater to come. If the latter, then we surely want to *"be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you"* by developing our spiritual attitudes to glorify God ([II Peter 1:10](#)). Restoration and reformation are but a decision away, and by faith, we can and will endure to the end.

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## The Path of the Righteous

By Matthew W. Bassford

*"But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, that shines brighter and brighter until the full day. The way of the wicked is like darkness; they do not know over what they stumble"* (Proverbs 4:18-19).

Look with me at Proverbs 4:18-19. These are two short verses, but they encapsulate everything I love about the word of God. They are simple, they are beautiful, and they are profound. Indeed, they are so profound that I intend to spend all of my time in the pulpit this morning without citing another verse. Let's see, then, what we can learn from a close examination of the path of the righteous.

### The Path

There are three key elements in this proverb that help us to understand it, and the first of the three is the path. Note first of all that Solomon says that there is both the path

of the righteous and the way of the wicked. In other words, everybody is on a spiritual path.

This seems simple, but it's quite meaningful. Sometimes, you run into people who think they are spiritually neutral. They'll tell you that they leave all that God stuff to somebody else and mind their own business. Well, they might think they're neutral, but God doesn't think they're neutral, and the devil doesn't think they're neutral either. Their feet are on a path, and they are headed to a destination.

Second, it's worth noting too that everybody's path starts out dark. Yes, Solomon says that the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, but what's it like before the light of dawn shows up? It's dark!

In other words, both the righteous and the wicked start out without a spiritual clue. When first we hit that age of accountability, none of us have any sense. We may be blessed with godly parents or other mentors, who are sort of like a spiritual flashlight, but those without help are blundering around in the woods at midnight. Max Dawson likes to say that if you haven't wrecked your life by the time you turn 22, you probably won't, but sadly, lots of people do wreck their lives before that. Sometimes their bad decisions leave them with a criminal record or a drug habit; sometimes they cost them their lives and their souls.

Finally, as the above implies, everybody's path is dangerous. This isn't like one of those "trails" in the national parks that are four feet wide, paved, and wheelchair accessible. Instead, it's more like a deer path in the woods in the middle of nowhere. That's the way life is for all of us. It's filled with all kinds of trials and temptations and traps. The devil hopes that we will come crashing into every one of them.

## **The Light of Dawn**

However, the difference between the path of the righteous and the path of the wicked is that the former is illuminated by the light of dawn. This we should understand not literally, but metaphorically, as referring to spiritual enlightenment. The Bible speaks of many ways we can become enlightened. We can study the word, which is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. We can benefit from the instruction of older, more mature Christians. We can pray for wisdom. We can observe the lives of others.

Regardless, this is the key difference between the righteous and the wicked. This is what determines the course of our lives and our eternal destinies. The righteous seek enlightenment and benefit from it. The wicked don't.

Second, because the enlightenment of the righteous is like the dawn, this tells us that the process is gradual. How many of you have ever been outside waiting throughout the time from pitch blackness to a full day? It's not like God flips on a light switch, is it? It's sloooow! Any given point in the process, the change that is occurring is imperceptible.

So it is with our spiritual enlightenment. There are lots of people who want wisdom without Bible study and meditation and prayer. Guess what? It doesn't work like that. If we want God to illuminate our world for us, we have to seek Him day by day, week by

week, month by month, year by year, decade by decade. There are no quick fixes. If we want our path to get brighter, there is no substitute for time and effort.

However, as slow as it is, the light of dawn is transformative. You start out in pitch blackness, then you start seeing dim outlines, then a black-and-white vision of reality. Finally, everything fills in with color, and there's no sign left that such a thing as night even existed.

This is how the illumination of spiritual wisdom is. It changes everything. We see life and the things of eternity in vastly different terms than the people of the world do. The more enlightened we become, the greater the difference between us and everybody else becomes too.

## **Knowing or Not**

This difference consists of knowing or not. The path of the righteous gets brighter and brighter until the course of their lives is fully illuminated. This doesn't mean that the path of the righteous is safe. I have scrapes on my shins right now because I tripped over a branch in the woods in broad daylight.

So it is for us spiritually too. No matter how wise and spiritually enlightened we become, the devil still trips all of us up occasionally. However, we are able to avoid most of the sins that would entangle us, and even when we do get entangled, at least we know what happened and can learn from it.

It is not so for the wicked. The wicked aren't hiking through the woods in the daytime. They're still out there in the dark. Again, this may not be something that we experience normally. The streets of my neighborhood all have streetlights. If I want to, I can go wandering around in reasonable safety.

However, that wasn't the experience of the ancient Israelites, and if we're out in the boonies, even today, on an overcast night, it can get can't-see-your-hand-in-front-of-your-face kind of dark. That's what life is like for the wicked, but they're trying to go down the path anyway, and, as you would expect, they end up tripping over all kinds of stuff. The sins and troubles that the righteous see and avoid are the most prominent features of the lives of the wicked. Spiritually speaking, their shins look like somebody's been whaling on them with a golf club!

Worse still, the wicked don't even know why they're stumbling. They don't get it, they don't learn, and they go on doing the same dumb stuff. You ever known somebody like that? It seems like their life is playing the disaster song on repeat. Over and over and over again, it's the same mistakes. These are people who don't learn because they refuse to learn.

It might seem hard to be righteous. It might seem hard to make that effort to be here Sunday morning and Sunday evening and Wednesday evening. It might seem hard to make time for that Bible reading every morning. It might seem hard to remember to constantly seek wisdom from God in prayer. Do you know what's a lot harder? Not doing any of those things.