

1 **The Straight Path**

- Finding New Direction and Grace

2 **The Gospel of Mark**

- It is written in Isaiah the prophet: “I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way” — “a voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’” (Mark 1:2–3 NIV)

3 **The Gospel of Mark**

- And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. (Mark 1:4–5 NIV)

4 **The Gospel of Mark**

- John wore clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And this was his message: “After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” (Mark 1:6–8 NIV)

5 **Introduction**

- At the beginning of the gospel of Mark is a straight line.
- Not a circle, but a straight path.
- Point A to point B.
- “Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.”

6 **19th Century Sports Craze**

- How different this is from the American Arenas of the 1870s and 80s.
- Back then, the most popular of sports involved walking in circles on dirt tracks.
- Men and women raced around the clock for six days at a time, and the bleachers at these events were absolutely packed with spectators.
- The sport was pedestrianism. Walking in circles, day after day after day.

7 **19th Century Sports Craze**

- According to The Washington Post (March 30, 2014), these foot-races would last for 144 hours straight.
- Competitors would stop once in a while to take naps on cots, but, aside from an occasional break, they would push themselves to the edge of physical and mental collapse.
- And the fans? They loved it! Watching people walk in circles was the best game in town—for there was no radios, record players, televisions or computers to provide distractions.

8 **First Celebrity Athletes**

- Competitive pedestrians were the country's first celebrity athletes.
- Their pictures appeared on trading cards, and some received lucrative endorsement deals.
- Dan O'Leary, who won a race by walking 520 miles, was the spokesman for Dittman's salt.
- John Hughes was sponsored by the National Police Gazette, and raced with the newspaper's logo across the front of his shirt.

9 **Pedestrianism's Decline**

- Champion walkers were highly paid as well.
- Charles Rowell raced for six days in New York City and won more than \$18,000. That's a lot of cash, especially when you consider that it would be \$425,000 in today's dollars.
- However, by the end of the 1800s, pedestrianism was dead.
- Not because fans got bored with watching people walk in circles, but because of race fixing and doping.
- One famous pedestrian was caught chewing a substance that gave him an unsportsmanlike advantage -- coca leaves.

10 **International Pedestrian Match**

11 **Assorted Pictures**

12 **Walking in Circles**

- We might laugh at competitive pedestrians, but we have to admit that we often find ourselves walking in circles as well.
 - We keep eating the same kinds of junk food, and wonder why it's hard to lose weight.
 - We continue to move in the same social circles, and are curious about why we don't meet any new people.
 - We keep picking on family members in exactly the same way, and then are surprised by a blow-up or fight.
 - We keep doing our work assignments in a repetitive manner, and then lament that we never advance in our careers.

13 **Walking in Circles**

- We worship with the same comfortable songs and prayers, and then complain that we don't feel inspired.

14 **Moving in Circles**

- We very well could be pedestrians! Moving in circles.
- In fact, one of the definitions of the word pedestrian is "lacking distinction, ordinary."

- In fact, the time has probably come for all of us to break out of our endless loops and do something truly distinctive and extraordinary—such as walking the straight path.

15 **John's Purpose**

- When John the Baptist began his ministry his purpose was to ready a people for the arrival of the LORD and His Kingdom.
- In other words, his mission was to call Israel to repentance and for them to stop going around in circles and making crooked paths.
- As the greatest of all Old Testament prophets, John declared, “Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight.”
- The idea here is that when we make our paths straight, we also make straight paths for the Lord’s grace to flow into our lives.

16 **Highway 46**

17 **Interstate 80**

18 **Walking in Circles**

- When people are lost in a forest or wilderness they often end up walking in circles.
- In fact, when there are few landmarks, it is hard to walk in a straight line.
- Recently, The Discovery Channel did an experiment in the Sahara Desert with six people who attempted to see how far they could walk in a straight line.
- All six of them ended up walking in circles.

19 **Guidepost**

- In the book of Jeremiah, God pleads with His exiled people to set up “guideposts” so that they can find their way back to the Promised Land.
- The Lord says to the people, “Set up road signs; put up guideposts. Take note of the highway, the road that you take. Return, O Virgin Israel, return to your towns. How long will you wander, O unfaithful daughter.” (Jer 31:21–22 NIV)

20 **Hungry for Change**

- Why did people flock to see John the Baptist?
- No doubt they were hungry for a life-change.
- They desperately wanted to break out of their self-destructive cycles and move in a new direction, so “people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins” (v. 5).

21 **Guidepost**

- When the crowds came to John they not only expressed their remorse for their sins, but they also were asked for guideposts and how to give new direction for their lives.
- “What should we do then?” the crowd asked. John answered, “The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same.” Tax collectors also came to be baptized. “Teacher,” they asked, “what should we do?” “Don’t collect any more than you are required to,” he told them. Then some soldiers asked him, “And what should we do?” He replied, “Don’t extort money and don’t accuse people falsely — be content with your pay.” (Luke 3:10–14 NIV)

22 **Sectional Map**

23 **Finding Grace**

- When we get lost and can’t find our way because all we’re doing is going around in circles; it’s time we gain some altitude and find a new perspective.
- In Galatians 5:10, the Apostle Paul gives this simple command. Find out what pleases the Lord.
- Why this is important is because when we please the Lord, we don’t frustrate the grace of God in ourselves.
- “By myself I can do nothing; . . . I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.” (John 5:30 NIV)
- “The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him.” (John 8:29 NIV)

24 **God’s Abundant Grace**

- No one had more grace from God than Jesus Christ.
- As the Father declared over Him, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” (Matt 3:17 NIV)
- God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will. (Heb 2:4 NIV)

25 **Quickly**

- When Hezekiah instituted the needed reforms to the worship of God in Judah something very special happened, which provided much rejoicing among the people.
- According to the Chronicler, Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced at what God had brought about for his people, because it was done so quickly. (2 Chr 29:36 NIV)
- This same principle is voiced in Psalms, when God says, “If my people would but listen to me, if Israel would follow my ways, how quickly would I subdue their enemies and turn my hand against their foes! (Psa 81:13–14 NIV)

- Additional evidence is found in Isaiah, Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. (Is 58:8 NIV)

26 Conclusion

- The point of all of this is this . . . when we reform our ways, it makes straight paths for God's grace to quickly flow in our lives.
- This was the message of John the Baptist when he said, "Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him." (Mark 1:3)
- So then, let us consider our ways and make for the Lord not only a straight path for grace to be poured into our lives, but let us make it a super highway where delays, traffic congestion, or detours will not hold back what God has for us in Christ Jesus.

27 Highway 46