



Desired Paths

*The path we choose can tell us a lot about ourselves ... and our **faith**.*

PRESENTED TO:
Ekklesia Christian Life Fellowship: November 9, 2024
by Pastor David McCowan.

Scripture

- ❖ And we also thank **God** continually because,
 - ▶ when **you** received the **word of God**, which you heard from us,
 - ▶ **you** accepted it not as the **word of men**,
 - ▶ but as it actually is, the **word of God**,
 - ▶ which is at work in **you** who **believe**. (1 Th. 2:13)

2

Scripture

- ❖ For **you**, brothers,
 - ▶ became **imitators** of God's churches in Judea, which are in **Christ Jesus**:
 - You **suffered** from **your own countrymen** the **same things** those churches suffered from the **Jews**, (1 Th. 2:14)
 - who **killed** the **Lord Jesus** and the **prophets** and also drove us out. (1 Th. 2:15a)

3

Scripture

- ❖ They displease **God** and are **hostile** to all men
 - ▶ in their effort to keep **us** from speaking to the **Gentiles**
 - ▶ so that they may be saved. (1 Th. 2:15b)
- ❖ In this way,
 - ▶ they always heap up their **sins** to the **limit**. (1 Th. 2:16a)
- ❖ The **wrath of God** has come upon them at last. (1 Th. 2:16b)

4

Scripture

- ❖ When did this happen?
 - ▶ [After this, **Paul** left **Athens** and went to Corinth. There, he met a **Jew** named **Aquila**, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from **Italy** with his wife **Priscilla** because **Claudius** had ordered all **Jews** to leave Rome.] (Acts 18:1-2)
 - ▶ A brief statement in **Divus Claudius 25** mentions agitations by the "**Jews**," which led **Claudius** (Roman Emperor from AD 41 to 54) to expel them from Rome:
 - "Since the **Jews** constantly made disturbances at the instigation of **Chrestus**, he [the Emperor Claudius] expelled them from Rome."

5

Scripture

- ❖ But, **brothers**,
 - ▶ when **we** were turned away from you for a **short time** (in person, not in thought),
 - ▶ out of our **intense longing**, we made every effort to see **you**. (1 Th. 2:17)
- ❖ For **we** wanted to come to you — certainly I, **Paul**, did, again and again — but **Satan** stopped us. (1 Th. 2:18)
- ❖ For what is our **hope**, our **joy**, or the **crown** in which we will **glory** in the presence of our **Lord Jesus** when he comes? Is it not **you**? (1 Th. 2:19)
- ❖ Indeed, **you** are our **glory** and **joy**. (1 Th. 2:20)

6

Scripture

- ❖ How can we thank **God** enough for you in return for all the **joy** we have in the presence of our **God** because of **you**? (1 Th. 3:9)
- ❖ Night and day, we **pray** most earnestly that
 - ▶ we may **see** you again and
 - ▶ supply what is lacking in your **faith**. (1 Th. 3:10)
- ❖ Now, may our **God** and **Father** himself and our **Lord Jesus** clear the way for us to come to **you**. (1 Th. 3:11)

7

Scripture

- ❖ May the **Lord** make your **love** ...
 - ▶ increase and overflow for **each other** and for **everyone else**,
 - ▶ just as **ours** does for you. (1 Th. 3:12)
- ❖ May **he** strengthen your **hearts** so that **you** will be
 - ▶ blameless and holy in the **presence** of our **God** and **Father**
 - ▶ when our **Lord Jesus** comes with all his **holy ones**. (1 Th. 3:13)

8

Scripture

- ❖ So when **we** could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in **Athens**. (1 Th. 3:1)
- ❖ We sent **Timothy**, who is our brother and God's fellow worker in spreading the **gospel of Christ**,
 - ▶ to strengthen and encourage you in your **faith** (1 Th. 3:2)
 - ▶ so that **no one** would be unsettled by these **trials**. (1 Th. 3:3a)
- ❖ You know **quite well** that **we** were destined for **them**. (1 Th. 3:3b)

9

Scripture

- ❖ In fact, when **we** were with you,
 - ▶ **we** kept telling you that we would be **persecuted**.
 - ▶ And it **turned out** that way, as you well know. (1 Th. 3:4)
- ❖ For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your **faith**. (1 Th. 3:5a)
- ❖ I was afraid that in some way ...
 - ▶ the **tempter** might have tempted you, and
 - ▶ our **efforts** might have been useless. (1 Th. 3:5b)

10

Scripture

- ❖ But **Timothy** has just now **come** to us from you and has brought **good news** about your **faith** and **love**. (1 Th. 3:6a)
- ❖ He has told us that you always have **pleasant memories** of us and that you **long** to see us, just as **we** also long to see you. (1 Th. 3:6b)
- ❖ Therefore, **brothers**, in all our **distress** and **persecution**, we were encouraged by you because of your **faith**. (1 Th. 3:7)
- ❖ For now, ...
 - ▶ we **really live**
 - ▶ since you are **standing firm** in the Lord. (1 Th. 3:8)

11

Desired Paths

Introduction

Introduction

- ❖ **Experienced hikers** know there is **one rule** of the trail you don't break:
 - ▶ Do not take **shortcuts**.
- ❖ Nevertheless, not all **shortcuts** are created equal.
- ❖ Some simply **cut the corner** off a 180°, so what's the **problem**?
- ❖ The **problem** is that if you take **short shortcuts**, you might become accustomed to taking **longer ones**.
- ❖ Then, you **discover** that you're on the **wrong trail**, separated from your **hiking companions**, and **lost**.



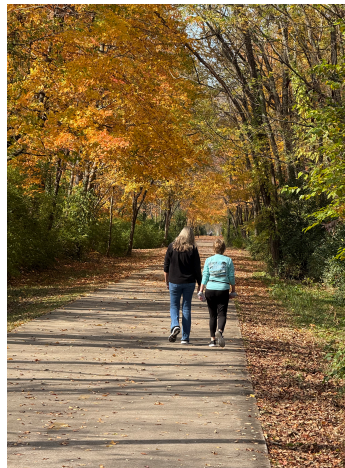
Introduction

- ❖ One of the **big truths** of the **Bible** is that “**small sins** lead to **larger sins**.”
- ❖ It's a version of the ‘**domino theory**,’ a concept that may have lost its shine in some circles, but it's a **guiding principle** in matters of **ethics**.
- ❖ It's worth noting that **national** and **state parks** invest **significant resources** in crafting **paths** that
 - ▶ not only guide **hikers**
 - ▶ but also shield them from **potential dangers** and the **risk** of getting lost.
- ❖ Nevertheless, **many people** ignore these **warnings**.



Introduction

- ❖ I often ride my **bike** on the **Brighton Rail Trail**, which was once the C&O passenger rail line from Lexington to Washington, D.C.
- ❖ The **tracks** are now gone and replaced with **concrete pavement**.
- ❖ However, along this **path**, you see something very strange.
- ❖ People have carved **dirt paths** off into the woods, and no one knows where these **paths** lead.



What the Bible Says!

Desired Paths

Desired Paths

- ❖ The Bible is all over the idea of **paths** — the good ones and the bad ones.
- ❖ In fact, just in the **Wisdom Literature**, there are 207 verses that refer to **paths**.
 - ▶ Youths oppress my people; women rule over them. **O my people**, your **guides** lead you astray; **they** turn you from the **path**. (Isaiah 3:12)
 - ▶ Make level **paths** for your feet and take only **ways** that are firm. (Proverbs 4:26)
- ▶ Make me know your ways, **O Lord**; teach me your **paths**. (Psalm 25:6)
- ▶ Oh, the **depth** of the riches of the **wisdom** and **knowledge** of God! How unsearchable his judgments and his **paths** beyond tracing out! (Romans 11:33)
- ▶ This is what the **LORD** says: "Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the **ancient paths**, ask where the **good way** is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls. But you said, 'We will not walk in it.'" (Jeremiah 6:16)

18

Desired Paths

- ▶ **Blessed** are all who **fear** the LORD, who walk in his **ways**. (Psalm 128:1)
- ▶ Her ways are pleasant ways, and all her **paths** are peace. (Proverbs 3:17)
- ▶ I guide you in the way of wisdom and lead you along **straight paths**. (Proverbs 4:11)
- ▶ In the way of righteousness, there is life; along that **path** is immortality. (Proverbs 12:28)
- ▶ The man of **integrity** walks securely, but he who takes **crooked paths** will be found out. (Proverbs 10:9)
- ▶ I walk in the way of righteousness, along the **paths** of justice, (Proverbs 8:20)
- ▶ A voice of one calling: "In the desert, prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a **highway** for our God. (Isaiah 40:3)
- ▶ A man who **strays** from the **path** of understanding comes to rest in the company of the **dead**. (Proverbs 21:16)

19

Desired Paths

- ❖ The **Bible** strongly emphasizes the importance of choosing—**desiring**, if you will—the **right path**.
 - ▶ There are **right paths** and paths that are not so right.
 - ▶ There are **good choices** and not-so-good choices.
- ❖ Ultimately, it's our **decisions**, both good and bad, that shape our journey.
- ❖ We have the **power** to steer our lives in the direction we **desire**.
- ❖ But if what we **want is bad**, we will always go down the **wrong path**.

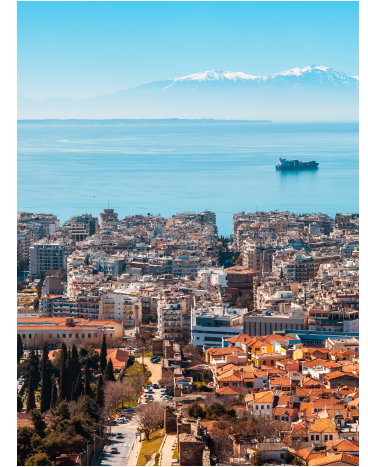


Desired Path

The Path of Faith

Desired Paths

- ❖ In today's reading from **Paul's** first letter to the church in the city of what we now call **Thessaloniki**, we find a **message** that is as **relevant today** as it was in ancient times.
- ❖ Paul's idea of what makes for **good paths** is a question we all grapple with.
- ❖ What **path** should we pursue that will give us the best chance of reaching our **desired destination**?



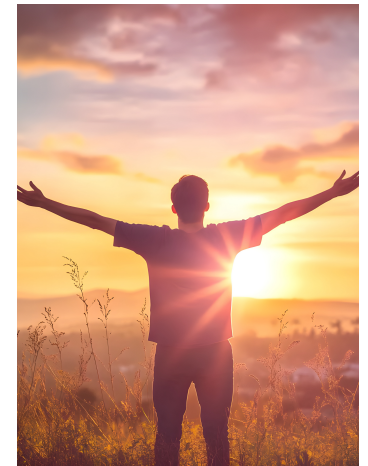
The Path of Faith

- ❖ **Paul** writes,
 - ▶ “But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought us the **good news** of your **faith**” (3:6).
- ❖ Later in the same reading, he adds,
 - ▶ “Night and day we **pray** most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your **faith**” (3:10).
- ❖ The Thessalonians' **faith** was **praiseworthy**, yet the Apostle Paul wanted to make it even better.
- ❖ So then, what does it mean to walk on the **path of growing more faith**?



The Path of Faith

- ❖ **Faith** is the **confidence** we have in a person, group, or thing. It can also be based on our having confidence in ourselves.
- ❖ So, if we have **confidence** in **God** and believe he has the **power** to do what he has promised, then we are well on our way to having **faith**—especially when we put it into **action**.
- ❖ **Jesus** performed numerous **miracles**, not as mere displays of **power** but as **evidence** that he could be trusted and was speaking on God's behalf.



The Path of Faith

- ❖ The writer of **Hebrews** says it like this,
 - ▶ Now **faith** is the **substance of (or response to) things** hoped for, the **evidence of things** not [yet] seen. (Hebrews 11:1 KJV)
- ❖ Another way, one may say this,
 - ▶ **Faith** is our **response** to things we **expect** to see in the future.
 - ▶ Or, **faith** is the **substance** of what we do when **God** speaks, instructs, or warns.

25

The Path of Faith

- ❖ Therefore, what was the **substance** of the **faith** of the Thessalonians?
- ❖ Was it their,
 - ▶ **Turning from idols** to serve the **living God**.
 - ▶ **Loyalty** to the **faith** despite **severe persecution**, especially when **cut off** from all **apostolic support**.
 - ▶ **Ministering in love** for **one another** in a **chaotic** period of the church's life.
 - ▶ **Or all of the above**.
- ❖ What was so remarkable about the **Thessalonians Church** is that they stayed on the **path of faith** despite **trouble, trials, and persecutions**.

26

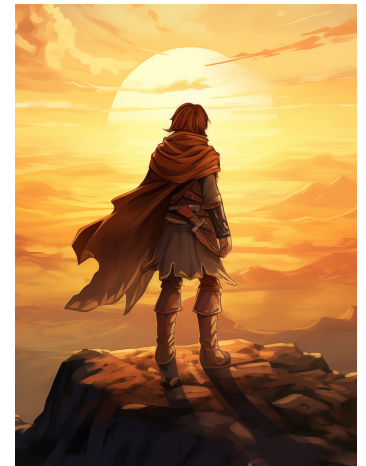
The Path of Faith

- ❖ **Faith** enables us to **persevere** in the face of **trials**, to find **hope** in the midst of **despair**, and to experience **joy** even in the midst of **sorrow**.
- ❖ By **faith**, Paul could write to the Corinthians,
 - ▶ “We are **afflicted in every way**, but **not crushed**; **perplexed**, but **not driven to despair**; **persecuted**, but **not forsaken**; **struck down**, but **not destroyed**” (2 Corinthians 4:8-9).
- ❖ Getting **knocked down** but **not knocked out** and **getting up** again takes **perseverance**, which comes from **sincere faith**.



The Path of Faith

- ❖ The **Bible** is full of people who, with **sincere faith**, **persevered** under **trials**.
- ❖ They are called the “**great cloud of witnesses**.”
- ❖ Their names include ...
 - ▶ Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham,
 - ▶ Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses,
 - ▶ Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah,
 - ▶ David, Samuel, and the prophets.



The Path of Faith

- ❖ Again, what did all these **people** have in common?
 - ▶ All these people were still living by **faith** when they died. In other words, they **persevered** to the end.
 - ▶ They did not receive the things **promised**; they only
 - saw them and
 - welcomed them from a **distance**.
 - ▶ And they admitted that they were **aliens** and **strangers** on earth. (Hebrews 11:13)
 - ▶ Again, they **persevered** to the end of their lives because they were looking for something beyond this **present age**.

29

The Path of Faith

- ❖ **People** who say (or feel) such things **show** that they are looking for a **country** of their own. (Hebrews 11:14a)
- ❖ If they had been thinking of the **country** they had left, they would have had an opportunity to return. (Hebrews 11:14b)
- ❖ Instead, they actively longed for a **better country** — a **heavenly one**. (Hebrews 11:15)
- ❖ Therefore,
 - ▶ **God** is not **ashamed** to be called **their God**, for
 - ▶ he has prepared a **city** for them. (Hebrews 11:16)



The Path of Faith

- ❖ No wonder the writer of Hebrews says,
 - ▶ Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a **great cloud of witnesses**,
 - let us throw off everything that hinders and the **sin** that so easily entangles and
 - let us run with **perseverance** the **race** marked out for us. (Hebrews 12:1)
- ❖ So then, how do we do this?
 - ▶ Let us fix our eyes on **Jesus**, the author, and perfecter of our **faith**, who, for the **joy** set before him,
 - endured the **cross**, scorning its **shame**, and
 - **sat down** at the right hand of the **throne of God**. (Hebrews 12:2)



The Path of Faith

- ❖ So, how do we **fix** our eyes on **Jesus**?
- ❖ Do we get all **mystical** and picture **Jesus** in our minds as our **boyfriend** or our **best friend**?
- ❖ Or do we do the following?
 - ▶ Consider him who **endured** such opposition from **sinful men** so that you will not grow **weary** and **lose heart**. (Hebrews 12:3)
- ❖ In other words,
 - ▶ we should consider how **Jesus** always **persevered** under **trials** and **hardship**, never quitting or giving up.
- ❖ Therefore, [let us] **strengthen** [our] feeble arms and weak knees. (see Hebrews 12:12) and **persevere** by keeping on the **path of faith**.

32

The Path of Faith

- ❖ The **point of the matter** is this:
 - ▶ the **Church at Thessalonica** didn't just **persevere** under **persecution** but **flourished** in it,
 - ▶ they **faithfully followed** the **Lord** in everything and did so **without** any **apostolic support**.
- ❖ Why?
 - ▶ ...because, when [they] received the **word of God**, which [they] heard from Paul, [they] **accepted it** not as the **word of men** but as it actually is, the **word of God**, which is at work in [those] who **believe**. (1 Thessalonians 2:13)

33

The Path of Faith

- ❖ They took the **path of faith**:
 - ▶ [They] became a **model** to all the believers in **Macedonia** and **Achaia**. (1 Thessalonians 1:7)
 - ▶ [Their] **faith in God** [became] known **everywhere**. (1 Thessalonians 1:8)
 - ▶ They were a **great source** of **encouragement** for their founding **pastor**.
 - As the **Apostle Paul** says,
 - For now, we **really live** since you are **standing firm** in the **Lord**. (1 Thessalonians 3:8)

34

The Path of Faith

- ❖ So, let us put **God's word** into **practice**
 - ▶ when **things** are going well and
 - ▶ when **things** are **not** going so well.
- ❖ We must do this because ...
 - ▶ our **spiritual growth** and **future hope** are dependent on it and
 - ▶ it matters to **people** around us, as they take notice.
- ❖ Why? **Nothing** is more encouraging in the **body of Christ** than when **people** or a **church** serve God in **difficult circumstances**.

35

The Path of Faith

- ❖ As we journey in **faith**, let's **hold onto** the **truth** that our efforts are **not** in vain.
- ❖ So, let us keep on the **path of faith** and **not** veer off into the **woods**, where we can get hurt or lost.
- ❖ As the **great cloud of witnesses** would want us to know,
 - ▶ **God** has a **special place** for us, and
 - ▶ we should, like **Jesus**, walk the **path of faith**, keeping our eye on the **prize**.
- ❖ It is worth the **sacrifice**.

36

Benediction

- ❖ May **God himself**, the God of **peace**, **sanctify** you through and through. (1 Thessalonians 5:23a)
- ❖ May your whole **spirit, soul**, and **body** be kept **blameless** at the **coming** of our **Lord Jesus Christ**. (1 Thessalonians 5:23b)
- ❖ The **one** who calls you is **faithful**, and he will do it. (1 Thessalonians 5:24)