



Which Trail Are You On?

Rev. Thomas Dibble

When it all boils down, this is what you've really got.

- You can live a wasted life, or,
- You can live a wise life.
- It all comes down to the path or the trail you choose to walk on.

Throughout history there have been many famous trails.

- The Appalachian Trail
- The Oregon Trail
- The Natchez Trail
- The Chisholm Trail
- Are just a few of the renowned trails of early America. They were the country's first highway system.
 - But no matter which of these trails you might be talking about today, history clearly shows us again and again that it is wise to stay on the trail. If you were headed to Oregon it was wise to stay on the Oregon Trail instead of trying to blaze a trail of your own. It doesn't take a lot of brains to figure out why. It took countless heartbreaking trips down dead-end trails before the right one was established in the first place. But those who had gone on before had finally found a trail that had all the essentials that would be needed for the journey. And you could count on the fact that those trailblazing pioneers had marked the trail for those of us who would follow after them.
 - The trail then was a path of wisdom. If you stuck to the trail you would be sure to find water to graze your animals, shelter and resting places along the way. Those who had gone on before you knew what they were doing and the marks on the trail were the collective wisdom of years.
 - Let me pause here to say that we too must be careful to stay on the original trails and the proven trails that have been marked so carefully for us.
- **We must stay on the trail of:**
 - The mighty God in Christ Jesus.
 - Here Oh Israel the Lord our God is one Lord.
 - Oneness of the Godhead
 - Repentance of your sins
 - Water Baptism in Jesus Name
 - Infilling of the Holy Ghost
 - But that's just the beginning of the trail. We must continue on down the trail of:
 - Living a sanctified and holy life, blameless, spotless and without blemish from the world
 - The Bible being the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God
 - Divine healing
 - Prayer and fasting and Bible reading
 - Evangelism of the lost
 - These are trails that have been blazed by the Pentecostal pioneers that have gotten us to where we are today and we must not leave them now. I'm glad for the leadership that was in this church for 25 years that said this is the trail and this is the only trail and we are going to travel down this trail. I'm glad for the leadership that said – **STAY ON THE RIGHT TRAIL!**

Which trail are you on?

- Maybe you've never thought about it much before, but YOU are on a trail too. Right now this very instant you are on a trail. It may be the right trail or it may be the wrong trail but either way you're smack dab in the middle of a trail. If you're on the wrong trail there is still time to get on the right one or if you're on the right trail you could choose the wrong one tomorrow. Every morning when you get out of bed you choose the trail that you will travel all over again.

Which trail are you on?

- The Christian life is a journey. Or put another way the Christian life is a trail that is traveled. It's a trail that begins at conception and ends at death. Right now you're about to take the next step and only eternity will reveal how crucial it may be.
- Picture with me a lone hiker on a winding mountain trail. He has hiked the better part of the day over rough terrain making switchback after switchback as he climbs the steep grade. Finally he comes to a wide place in the trail and a large flat rock and there he lifts off the heavy pack from his weary shoulders and sits down on the rock soaking up the late afternoon sun. From there he looks out over the vista and takes note of the winding trail that he has just traveled on. Though the trail is long, the mountain air is crystal clear and the hiker can see a great distance off.
- That's a picture of King David as he looks back over his life in [Psalm 71](#).
5 For thou art my hope, O Lord GOD: thou art my trust from my youth.
6 By thee have I been holden up from the womb: thou art he that took me out of my mother's bowels: my praise shall be continually of thee.
7 I am as a wonder unto many; but thou art my strong refuge.
8 Let my mouth be filled with thy praise and with thy honour all the day.
9 Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth.
18 Now also when I am old and greyheaded, O God, forsake me not; until I have showed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come.
19 Thy righteousness also, O God, is very high, who hast done great things: O God, who is like unto thee!
20 Thou, which hast showed me great and sore troubles, shalt quicken me again, and shalt bring me up again from the depths of the earth.

From this passage we can see that every trail has three parts:

- Past
 - Present
 - Future
- David looks back over the trail and he sees all of the marks of the goodness of God. From the time that he was a shepherd he has seen God intervene for him time and time again. There was the lion and there was the bear and there was Goliath and there was all of the times that God had sustained him along the trail and the old king's heart swells with pride. God certainly has been good to me.
 - Let me pause again to say that yes God certainly has been good to me as well. I can't really complain about anything in my life. I didn't say that everything was a bed of roses. I didn't say that life was easy street. But I said looking back at the goodness of God and where I could have been today instead of in his presence, I really can't complain. GOD HAS BEEN GOOD! Those of you who are living for God today, if you were honest this morning you would say too that God has been good to you.
 - God was good in David's past. Now in the present David has become a marvel to many. He is not a shepherd anymore but a King. He is not responsible for his father's sheep but he is responsible for all of the people of the nation of Israel. He shakes his head in wonder as he thinks – from a shepherd to a king. God has been good to me just today alone.
 - But then he looks ahead to his future on the trail. Old age has crept up on him and his hair has turned gray. His eyes don't work the way they used to. His strength doesn't surge the way it had. And he humbly asks God to be as faithful to him at the end of the trail as he was at the beginning.
 - David said in Psalm 37, I was young and now I'm old and still I have never seen the righteous forsaken or his seed begging for bread. I want you to know that God will keep you all the way to the end IF you stay on the RIGHT trail.

- The right trail has really been marked quite clearly for us to follow. We may never know just what is around the next bend in the trail but it has been marked so we can stay on the right trail. The Bible says that the rain falls on the just and the unjust. On the right trail there will be hard times and circumstances that press in on us. There will be disappointments and times of heartache and loss. There will be struggles and trials along the way. But the trail has been clearly marked in order to stay on the right trail. And the trail has been marked clearly in the word of God.

Psalm 1:1

1 Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the trail of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

Psalm 27:11

11 Teach me thy way, O LORD, and lead me in a plain trail, because of mine enemies.

Psalm 36:1,4

*1 The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, that there is no fear of God before his eyes.
4 He deviseth mischief upon his bed; he setteth himself in a trail that is not good; he abhorreth not evil.*

Psalm 119:35

35 Make me to go in the trail of thy commandments; for therein do I delight.

Psalm 119:105

105 Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my trail.

- Over and over the Bible speaks of the trail. Job, in the midst of all his suffering and hardship, knew that he had to stay on the trail if he wanted to survive.
 - **Job 23:11**
11 My foot hath held his steps, his trail have I kept, and not declined.
- Solomon, the wisest man on the face of the earth, had plenty to say about life on the trail.
 - **Proverbs 4:14**
14 Enter not into the trail of the wicked, and go not in the trail of evil men.
 - **Proverbs 4:18**
18 But the trail of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.
 - **Proverbs 4:26-27**
*26 Ponder the trail of thy feet, and let all thy trails be established.
27 Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil.*
 - **Proverbs 10:17**
17 He is in the trail of life that keepeth instruction: but he that refuseth reproof erreth.
 - **Proverbs 15:19**
19 The trail of the slothful man is as an hedge of thorns: but the trail of the righteous is made plain.
 - **Proverbs 15:24**
24 The trail of life is above to the wise, that he may depart from hell beneath.
 - **Proverbs 16:17**
17 The trail of the upright is to depart from evil: he that keepeth his trail preserveth his soul.

Which trail are you on?

- There are actually three different trails that the scripture talks about and knowing the difference between them is the most important thing in life.
- Jesus taught about two of these trails in the Sermon on the Mount.
 - **Matthew 7:13-14**
*13 Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the trail, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:
14 Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the trail, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.*
- Most people are on the wrong trail. It's big and wide – It's a ten-lane highway. There is plenty of room to spread out and get comfortable. All you have to do is set the cruise control and then let the miles fly by. But that's the trail that leads to destruction. Stick with this trail and sooner or later you will crash and burn. It's the trail of disaster. It's the trail of a wasted life.
- The narrow trail is the right trail. It doesn't even begin to resemble the wide trail. It's no highway or turnpike with landscaping in the middle. In fact, it can be a very difficult trail to be on. You'll find it monotonous at times. You'll find it frustrating at times. There will be times where you will be struggling and wrestling with discouragement. It will cause you to ask the question: "Is it really worth it to be on this trail?"

The songwriter said one day:

- It's going to be worth it all.
- It's going to be worth it all.
- It's going to be worth it all some beautiful happy day.
- It'll be worth every long mile
- Every heartache and every trail
- It's going to be worth it all some beautiful happy day.

Why? Because this trail, though difficult and narrow and rough, is the trail of wisdom. It's the right trail.

You are on a trail today and it must be the right trail. Which trail are you on?

- If you are not on the right trail you will get to the end of your days and look back over the trail and realize that you've wasted your life and I don't think you want to do that. Moses, one of the greatest men to walk on the trail of life didn't want to waste his life either.

- That's why he recorded these words:

- **Psalm 90:10; 12**

- *10 The days of our years are threescore years and ten; (or our time on the trail) and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.*

- *12 So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.*

- The options in life boil down to two things. You can live a wise life or you can live a wasted life. Which trail are you on?
- Moses realized that most men get seventy years. If they are fortunate they might get into their eighties. But then it's over. And quite frankly the end of the trail isn't too far off for most of us. If your thirty today you realize that you have maybe 40 more years left. But that's nothing because one day you'll wake up and you'll be forty or fifty and you will wonder what happened to the last ten or twenty years. By then you've gotten a grip on the fact that life isn't forever. It's very short and it's over before you know it. David captured this thought so well in Psalm 39.

- **Psalm 39:4-6-7**

- *4 LORD, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am.*

- *5 Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity. Selah.*

- *6 Surely every man walketh in a vain show: surely they are disquieted in vain: he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them.*

- *7 And now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in thee.*

- To put it another way those seventy or eighty years are going to melt away like the morning fog. They are just like a vapor. It's here one moment and then gone the next.
- At this very moment in your life you are following a trail. It's a trail that you have chosen. If you are on the right trail, be careful to stay there. If you are on the wrong trail, there is still time to change directions.

Which trail are you on?

We have talked about two trails so far this morning.

- The broad trail and
- The narrow trail.
- So what is the third option? The third option is a shortcut. It's sort of a phantom trail that always promises more than it can deliver. There's always one thing that you can be sure of with a shortcut and that is that sooner or later it merges with the trail to destruction.
- Solomon tells us about the trail called a shortcut in the book of Proverbs.
 - **Proverbs 14:12**
12 There is a trail which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.
 - **Proverbs 16:25**
25 There is a trail that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.
- Shortcuts always offer the hope of an easier trail but they often wind up destroying those who take the easy way out. Just ask the men of the Donner Party, who destroyed the lives of those they loved by opting for a shortcut. They surely hadn't intended to do that. But they didn't count the cost and measure the risk sufficiently, and it cost them big-time.
- In April of 1846, Jacob and George Donner, along with James Reed, organized a group of farmers and their families to seek a better life out West. Their journey became a nightmare of such

proportions that the Donner Party has become nothing short of legendary.

- Everything went well for the eighty-one people in the wagon train until they reached Fort Bridger, Wyoming. There the men in the Donner Party read a leaflet written by a man named Lansford Hastings. Hastings claimed that he had found a “shortcut” to California. His “new trail” would take the wagon train through Utah and Nevada.
- If the men of the Donner Party had only known it – their own lives – and the lives of their wives, sons, and daughters – were hanging in the balance as they discussed Hastings’ leaflet. It’s like that with disastrous decisions, isn’t it? At the time you make the call, it doesn’t seem like all that big a deal. One way looks just as promising as another.

Yet as Solomon affirmed:

- There is a trail that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.
- The leaders of that wagon train made a cataclysmic decision. They decided to leave the proven trail and put their families at risk by taking a shortcut along an unknown trail.
- They should have turned back when they found that their “shortcut” wasn’t anything like Hastings promised in his leaflet. But they kept bulling on ahead, encountering delay after disastrous delay. They had to cut their own trail through the timber of the Wasatch Mountains in Utah, which set them back weeks. Then, west of Salt Lake, they encountered an eighty-mile stretch of salt desert that just about did them in.
- This so-called shortcut was nothing more than an untried, untested route that had been successfully navigated in the past only by a few salty old mountain men. But the Donner Party were not experienced mountain men. They were simple farmers who were way out of their element.
- When they finally reached the Sierra Nevadas – the last obstacle to reach California – they were dangerously behind schedule. The shortcut had developed into a long cut. Snow welcomed them in the mountain passes – snow they would never have encountered if they had stuck with the tested and proven trail. The snow didn’t let up, and they soon realized they had been caught in this high mountain pass dangerously short of provisions.
- In fact, they were trapped.
- That winter turned out to be one of the worst ever in those mountains. Several families attempted to get over the mountain passes, while others hastily built crude cabins to provide shelter for their families. One group of fifteen men decided to trek the hundred miles to Fort Sutter to get help. Seven of them made it. By the time the rescue parties reached the camp, tragedy was everywhere.
- The rescuers were in as much danger as those they were trying to rescue. Many more rescue parties attempted to help, but every group met overwhelming challenges. The snow was so deep that horses and mules could not make it in. As a result, the rescuers could bring in very little food to the starving people, and they had no way to get them out.
- The only way out was to walk. Some members of the party, realizing the utter hopelessness of their situation, went mad. Others resorted to cannibalism in an attempt to keep themselves alive. Tragically, a party that was once unified was now hopelessly splintered. Several murders took place among those who had committed to weather the journey together.
- In the end, less than half of the original party lived to see the next spring.
- None of this had to happen. Yet it did happen, because some shortsighted men opted for a shortcut. In hindsight, these men would have given anything to have stayed on the trail. They were seduced by the myth of another, “better” trail. But that better trail was a mirage. It was nothing more than an empty promise that brought great suffering and ultimate destruction to their loved ones.
- I want you to know this morning that Satan has similar plans for you. He wants you and your family to become a modern day Donner Party. He wants you to pursue a mirage that he will conjure up somewhere along the trail of your life. He will promise you something “better”.
- Go ahead.
- Take his shortcut.
- But if you do, you will destroy everything that God has so graciously given to you. Satan will lead you and your family right into the mountain passes that will slowly kill off everyone. Your wife will go mad, your kids will die of spiritual starvation, and the frostbite of your cold heart will maim them emotionally for the rest of their lives. The moral and spiritual shortcuts in the Christian life can be just as devastating to your family as what took place in the lives of those women and children trapped high in the Sierras.

- That's what happened to Jim Heche. Him was a gifted worship leader who was committed to Christ. He and his wife raised their four children in a solid Christian environment. Jim was doctrinally very conservative, and at one point he and some like-minded friends left their church to start their own. They left due to the theological liberalism they saw taking root in the church. Jim and the other men wanted to raise their families in a church where the Bible was taken seriously. That's how committed he was to the Truth.
- Jim made sure that his family was in church Sunday morning, Sunday evening, and at midweek services. His children were taught the hymns of the church and were encouraged to memorize the Scriptures. The Heche family was a model Christian family. They would have fit nicely into this church.
 - But Jim Heche was a man who took some shortcuts along the way and thought he could cover his trail.
 - ut it's tough to cover the fact that you're dying of AIDS.
 - In 1983, Jim became one of the first men in New York City to die from this new and mysterious disease. His wife and four children had no idea that he was a homosexual. They knew him as a man committed to Christ and to them. It was only after his death that the family began to learn that their husband and father had been taking a shortcut on another trail they knew nothing about. He had been able to hide this other trail from his family, but when he began to die slowly before their eyes, it was clear that the true story would one day come out.
- In fact, his oldest daughter, Susan Bergman, has written a book about her father's shortcut. In *Anonymity: The Secret Life of an American Family*, Susan chronicles the tortuous path down which her father took his entire family. It is a deeply disturbing story because it chronicles not only the fall of an American family, but also of a committed Christian family.
- You've probably heard of another of Jim's daughters, Anne. Throughout her career, she has received acclaim as a gifted performer. But what has brought her more publicity than any theatrical role has been her lesbian relationship with Ellen DeGeneres. The two women recently announced that they were terminating their relationship, which has brought them even more publicity.
- Anne Heche is the product of a Christian home. She was raised in a model family in a Baptist denomination. Accompanied by Jim, she and the rest of the family would often lead the congregation in worship. She had the advantage of an environment that taught her the gospel and the absolute trustworthiness of the Scriptures. But there was one snag. Her father was a man who opted for shortcuts.

So what happened?

- No one can say for sure. There are undoubtedly many reasons why a person would take such a radical turn from what they were taught. But one thing is clear. The story of Anne Heche begins with a father who was attempting to live two lives on two very different trails. Jim was teaching his family biblical values while secretly living what he preached against. He thought he had found a shortcut that would enable him to cover his tracks. But his sin found him out.
- It's called a shortcut – a very dumb shortcut. But then again most shortcuts are dumb.
- You would never think to take your loved ones into the high Sierras and abandon them without clothing and shelter and food in the middle of a blizzard. You would never do that. But yet that's exactly what you're doing when you take a shortcut on the trail of life. That's exactly what you're doing when God is not number one in your life. When God is not number one the whole family pays the price.
- Does the Bible have anything specifically to say about shortcuts? You bet it does. In Psalm 19:13, David asks God to protect him from a very dangerous kind of sin:
 - ***Psalm 19:13***
13 Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.
- A presumptuous sin is a shortcut. A sin that "presumes" is one that willfully and knowingly defies God's specific commands. The line has been clearly drawn, and yet you decide to cross it anyway. You know it's wrong. But you presume on God and do it anyway. That is a presumptuous sin. It's also a shortcut. And the danger with one shortcut is that it leads to another shortcut and then another and another until they rule over you and you can't find your way back to the right trail. That's why David asked God to keep him from shortcuts having dominion over him.
- Shortcuts are slippery trails. They always look better in the beginning but they can mess up your life in a hurry and lead to more problems than you could possibly imagine.
- Let me tell you that there is no shortcut to salvation. In spite of the current false doctrines of the day that say just

believe or just accept or just do this or that. The Bible still says that in order to be saved I must repent of my sins and be baptized in Jesus Name for the remission of my sins and be filled with the gift of the Holy Ghost. That's the only way to be saved – and it always will be.

- There is no shortcut to holiness. The Bible still says to come out from among them and be ye separate and touch not the unclean thing. It still says be ye holy for I am holy. It still says that without holiness no man shall see the Lord. The Bible and God still consider sin to be sin. Just because the standards of the world have changed doesn't mean God's standards have changed.
- There are no shortcuts to living for God. You must do it with all of your heart. You can't just offer him spare time when you have it but he must be first in your life. You're selling your family down the river when you don't live for him with all your strength.
- There are no shortcuts in getting to Heaven. It's God's way or no way. But the enemy will always show up and offer you another way – another trail. You can expect that he will show up with another trail and that it will be remarkably attractive. Satan has always used this tactic. And why not? It's proven to be quite effective. He just shows up with the promise of a better trail. But beware and remember that Satan is a liar. He's always been a liar and he will always be a liar. Jesus called him the father of lies.
 - It was that way in the beginning when Satan who was then called Lucifer decided that he had a better way than God's way. Satan didn't agree with God's way of doing things and so he came up with a shortcut. I want you to understand that it looked so good that he took one-third of the angels with him down the path of destruction.
- He did the same thing in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve. He offered a shortcut and for whatever the reason they bought into it and headed down the trail. But it was the wrong trail and we have been paying for it ever since.
- He did the same thing with King David one day. He tempted him one evening to take a shortcut. But it was the wrong trail. The shortcut lead to adultery and pregnancy and then lies and then murder. The shortcut never did turn out as promised but it led to the wrong trail. It always does.
 - He did it to the angels
 - He did it to Adam and Eve
 - He did it to King Saul
 - He did it to David
 - He did it to Samson
 - He did it to Judas
 - He did it to Demas and
 - He will offer it to you as well.
 - He may be offering you a shortcut right now. The shortcut of:
 - Leave your husband or wife and you will find happiness
 - Compromise your ethics to make the deal work
 - Telling a convenient lie to make yourself look better
 - Sex before marriage
 - Drugs and alcohol
 - Pornography
- No, no preacher, the devil will never offer me a shortcut. Oh really? Satan is so brazen that he even offered Jesus a shortcut. He actually offered him three different shortcuts to what he called a better trail. If Satan tempted Jesus don't you think he offer you a shortcut as well.
- The shortcut will always look so good on the front end. It will look so good at the beginning. But in the end you will pay for it with your life or the life of your family.
- This morning we have talked about three trails. Each one of them has a final destination and you are on one of these trails right now.
 - The broad trail that leads to destruction
 - The narrow trail that leads to life
 - The shortcut that always dumps you on the road to destruction
- Which trail are you on?

