



"The path of least resistance makes all rivers, and some men, crooked."

—Napoleon Hill

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Walking in Our Father's Footsteps

As most of the United States is going through one of the most relentlessly brutal winters in many years, it brings to mind the famous and oft-quoted words of William Shakespeare, spoken by his King Richard, which begin the soliloquy that opens the play, *Richard III*:

Now is the winter of our discontent
Made glorious summer by this son of York. . . .

Richard laments his lot in life and how his own dire circumstances have made him into the evil man that he is. To him, his physical deformity and the difficulties of his life have driven him to choose the path of evil.

John Steinbeck uses part of this phrase as the title for his last complete novel, *The Winter of Our Discontent*, published about six years before his death. His story takes us into [the world](#) of Ethan Allen Hawley, a member of a formerly wealthy and socially connected family whose fortune his father had lost. Ethan must then endure the supposed trials and indignities of a severely reduced economic and social lifestyle.

To make just a modest living for himself, his wife, and their children, he must work as a grocery store clerk, but in spite of his diminished status, he struggles to maintain his integrity and the moral high ground within the corrupt society around him. Under the pressure of difficulties within his family and society and of what he believes are injustices toward him, he ends up lurching between immorality and integrity, justifying his own actions and confidently assuring himself that he will never be corrupted by the immoral behavior of those around him.

Shakespeare's King Richard claims that his own difficult circumstances of life left him no choice but to follow the path of evil, as he proclaims later in the soliloquy:

And therefore since I cannot prove a lover
To entertain these fair well-spoken days,
I am determined to prove a villain. . . .

Steinbeck's Ethan Hawley deceives himself into believing that he will not stray from the path of integrity, but he, too, becomes evil and a contributor to the corrupt society around him.

In spite of a 500-year gap between these two characters, both purportedly reflect their creators' attempts to show the evil and moral degradation of societies that were becoming desperately bogged down on the disastrous path of moral corruption. Shakespeare and Steinbeck both use their characters and their circumstances to reflect the pattern they saw developing in their own particular societies, as the standards of moral and right living were degrading into immorality and meanness. Both characters' paths led to disaster.

We realize that the path of righteousness is not always an easy one. Yet, if we diligently remain on it, not following our own lusts and desires but the One who has gone before us, we will be successful beyond measure. [God](#) warns us that seeking our own way and compromising His standards will point us in the wrong direction, but trusting Him will produce what we truly need.

My Son, do not forget my law, but let your heart keep my commands; for length of days and long life and [peace](#) they will add to you. . . . Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. ([Proverbs 3:1-2, 5-6](#))

Ponder the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established. Do not turn to the right or the left; remove your foot from evil. ([Proverbs 4:26-27](#))

Pondering the paths of our feet according to the established route taken by our Elder Brother [Jesus Christ](#) is critical to our success in making our way through this difficult anti-God world, and most importantly, to get us where God wants us to be.

This past Sunday, while enduring this relentless "winter of our discontent," we had a serious problem with ice building up from the end of the high-efficiency furnace vent that projects from the side of our home. Our youngest son, Mark, came over with his six-year-old son, also named Mark, to take care of the problem. Our son trudged through the snow across the front yard and down along the side of the house to get to the ice buildup.

After he was about halfway across the yard, our grandson tried to follow him, but he literally became stuck in the two-feet of snow that covers our lawn. My wife Nancy was standing on the driveway behind him, and she called to him, telling him to work his way over and walk in his father's footsteps. Our grandson began to make his way across the yard by staying in those footsteps. It was certainly not an easy walk, as his father is at least twice as tall as he is, so the distance between steps was far longer than his own natural stride. But as long as Mark thought about the path of his feet and made the oftentimes strenuous effort to stay in his father's footsteps, despite teetering and sinking occasionally, he successfully ended up with him.

God constantly provides us the opportunity to tie the events of our lives to the truth of His Word and to rejoice in seeing the real path before us. [Do we see God](#) in the circumstances of our lives, or is this merely "the winter of *our* discontent" that leads us to lament our lots in life and compromise the

standards of righteousness that are now ours through Jesus Christ? Can we see from the many things happening around us that God's judgment is coming down on modern Israel for the same reason He destroyed Judah? Of them, He says in [Isaiah 30:1](#): "'Woe to the rebellious children,' says the LORD, 'who take counsel, but not of Me, and who devise plans, but not of My Spirit, that they may add [sin](#) to sin.'"

Are we beseeching God to direct our steps so that we can find the right path, just as my grandson did? Are we then carefully staying within the footsteps set before us, even though they may be a stretch, listening to God every step of the way? Consider [Isaiah 30:18-21](#):

Therefore the LORD will wait, that He may be gracious to you; and therefore He will be exalted, that He may have mercy on you. For the LORD is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for Him. For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem; you shall weep no more. He will be very gracious to you at the sound of your cry; when He hears it, He will answer you. And though the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of [affliction](#), yet your teachers will not be moved into a corner anymore, but your eyes shall see your teachers. Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left.

Is this how it is for us now? Are we truly hearing our Teacher's voice? Are we walking in our Father's footsteps to get to where He wants us to be today? If we do, we *will* reach our ultimate destination, the [Kingdom of God](#).

- Mark Schindler

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Knowing, Following, and Striving for Christ](#)

by Martin G. Collins

Christians are set apart from others because they believe Jesus Christ rose

from the dead and that He is alive and actively interceding for us right now. Because of this, we must know, follow, and strive to conform to Christ's image. Our goal is to know Christ on a personal and intimate basis, knowing the power of His resurrection. This knowledge should be a practical understanding of His power and of the depths of His suffering, leading to a daily pattern of life that will become eternal. Only by knowing Christ can we possibly know the Father. Nothing is truly knowledge unless it is practiced in daily life, empowered by God's Holy Spirit. Part of knowing Christ is to share His sufferings, enduring persecution. We should make every effort to diligently live for Christ, living among those who are spiritually dead. God had a purpose for calling us, an event which begins a new process of spiritual life, being conformed to the image of His Son. We have an obligation to follow Christ. Discipleship is personal. We should never base our Christian living on the circumstances of a brother or sister in Christ. Fighting and overcoming our carnal human nature is not easy, but the rewards for doing so are enormous. Nothing we give up in this life will compare with the trade-off in God's Kingdom. It is a total win-win proposition. We need to let go of the past, and press forward to the goal of conforming to the image of Jesus Christ.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Servant Leadership: Practical Meekness](#)

by David F. Maas

Much has been said and written about leadership in the church in the past several years. David Maas writes that godly leadership is an outworking of the virtue of meekness.

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