

# The Road To The Kingdom

by Mike Ford

*Forerunner*, November 1998

Have you ever had this happen to you? You are faced with a problem and are in a quandary, wondering which way to go. Several options are open before you or maybe none at all—at least that you can see. You pray for direction, "Which way do I go, Father?" yet a clear answer seems to elude you.

Many times I have told people that I would like to wake up in the morning, stroll outside for the newspaper and open it up to see—on the front page—a big headline: **Mike Ford, Here Is Your Answer!** But I have been bringing in the paper for longer than I care to remember, and not *once* has an answer to a dilemma been in it! God does not work that way.

Yet David writes in Psalm 16:11, "You [God] will show me the path of life." Many other verses say similar things. God will lead us along the path of life, a path leading ultimately to the Kingdom of God. Since God does not lie, why do we feel lost so often, not knowing which road to take?

Remember those "Road" pictures from many years back? Bing Crosby and Bob Hope were on the *Road to Rio*, the *Road to Zanzibar* and so on. We need to take a closer look at the "path of life" and the "way of righteousness" so we can have a better picture of the Road to the Kingdom.

## A Blazed Trail

In the oft-quoted Psalm 23, David writes of God, "He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake" (verse 3). The same person says in II Samuel 22:33, "God is my strength and power, and He makes my way perfect." What is this "path" and "way" he mentions?

In the previously mentioned Psalm 16:11, *path* is translated from a Hebrew word for "a well-trodden road, a caravan path, a customary road." In Psalm 23:3, the original word means "a track, a path for wagons, a broad path." Similarly, *way* in II Samuel 22:33 describes "a trodden road." In the New Testament, the Greek word most writers use is *hudos*, meaning "a highway, a natural path."

What we see is that these paths God speaks of are not hidden, lost or vague. They are "well-trodden," wide enough for caravans and wagons. In other words, others have traveled the way of God before us and made it passable. Christ blazed the trail (it is one of His titles, see Hebrews 2:10) and others have followed in His steps (I Peter 2:21; I John 2:6), beating the path down as they went.

The path is not overgrown and invisible. Granted, Matthew 7:14 warns us that the way leading to eternal life is narrow and difficult and few find it, but it does not take much travel to keep a road clear. The road to the Kingdom may not be an interstate highway, but neither is it concealed or secret.

## Hiking Linville Gorge

My wife Carol and I recently took a trip to Boone, high in the mountains of western North Carolina, where we stayed five days. Each day we hiked some of the trails of this beautiful portion of the southern Appalachians, mostly to view waterfalls.

One day we went to Linville Gorge, part of the Pisgah National Forest. The gorge is formed by Jonas Ridge on the east and Linville Mountain on the west, and the Linville River flows at the bottom. Elevations on this heavily wooded, steep and rocky terrain range from 1,300 feet on the river to 4,120 feet on the mountain.

Wanting to see Linville Falls, we bought a few supplies and a topographical map for a day's hike at an outfitter's store, and off we went. When we arrived, we found that the trails leading to various views of the falls were well-marked and not too difficult. We visited three different overlooks, each one more lovely than the one before.

I believe it was at the second overlook that I noticed, way down at the bottom of the gorge—3,000 feet below us—people! Several people were sitting on boulders out in the middle of the river. I wondered, "How did they get there?"

I pulled out my trusty map, but after several moments, I still could not figure out how they had reached the bottom. "They must have taken an unmarked trail," I said to Carol.

As we hiked the next mile or so to the next overlook, I began to check out side trails. The main trail was fairly well-marked and very beaten down. It was certainly not a paved road—we had to cross fallen trees and look out for roots and rocks that might trip us—but all in all, an easy trail. The side trails, however, looked as if they were made by wild animals or by heavy rains—or maybe by people going to the bottom.

After the last overlook, we started back the way we had come. Suddenly, as we walked along the ridge thousands of feet above the bottom of this deep gorge, I spotted what looked like the perfect way down to the river. So, following my instincts, we left the main trail.

We headed down, climbing over boulders, crawling across downed trees, and ducking under brush. After maybe a hundred yards of this slow progress, we came to a bluff. I pushed through the trees and found myself looking *down* on treetops below me. At about this time, Carol began to question my instincts and my leadership abilities seriously.

I read recently that the famous woodsman, Daniel Boone, while being chased by a band of Indians, once found himself in a similar situation. When he burst out onto a bluff, he looked behind him—at the Indians—and in front of him—at the trees—and jumped! He fell sixty feet onto the top of a giant tree, from which he calmly climbed down and escaped.

I did not want to see the river quite that badly, so we retraced our steps up to the main trail and then back to our lodging. A few days later, after some research, we returned to Linville Gorge. To get to the bottom, we simply had to cross above the falls, and a well-marked but steep trail took us to the river. Had we looked at the map more closely, we would have discovered that a paved spur-road off the Blue Ridge Parkway leads directly to a ranger station at the head of the trail to the bottom!

### **Steps to Take**

With this travelogue in mind, we need to examine a few points on how we can know which road to take to the Kingdom.

When we are faced with uncertainty and we must make a decision, what is the first thing we do? We pray for God's direction of course. Psalm 5:8 says, "Lead me, O Lord, in Your righteousness because of my enemies; make Your way straight before my face." The word "way" literally means "a packed-down road," and figuratively it connotes a course of life or a mode of action. So King David, a man after God's own heart, prayed for God's direction just as we do.

In Psalm 27:11, David prays, "Teach me Your way, O Lord, and lead me in a smooth path, because of my enemies." Here, David uses the same word for "way" as he did in the previous verse, and "path" is a well-trodden road. Thus, he is begging God to show him a course of action, to set him on an easily discerned road, to make the correct decision clear to him. This is not very different from what we would ask and do.

After this, we must search for God's answer. A clue: It will not be in the morning paper! God can answer us in many ways, and even when He does not seem to be answering, He gives us an answer!

It has probably happened to all of us, but many times, as I have been reading my Bible, an answer seems to leap off the page. Since "there is nothing new under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:9), chances are that a similar problem and solution have already been written in the Bible. Romans 15:4 and I Corinthians 10:11 tell us that God's Word holds countless examples for our learning and admonition.

Sometimes, God helps us to see the solution when we fast. Fasting often clears up the murkiness in our thoughts, and the way to go becomes plain.

At other times, God responds through our meditation. For years, I felt I had failed miserably in the art of meditation. I perceived it to be an activity too deep for my shallow brain. In reality, though, it is nothing more than thinking long and hard about something. All it takes is a little quiet time, maybe after one's prayer time, to think the problem through.

Proverbs 4:26 reads, "Ponder the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established." The "path" in this verse is a broad path. The Amplified Bible renders this verse, "Consider well the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established and ordered aright." Moffatt's translation puts it, along with verses 25 and 27,

. . . let your eyes look straight ahead, gaze right in front of you; keep a clear path before you, and ever make your footing firm; never turn to right or left, draw back from a wrong step.

Meditation is simply thinking about what the next step should be.

### **Stand, Look, Ask—Act!**

I did everything wrong out on the trail at Linville Gorge. I took my eyes off the clear path before me. I turned right off the trail. I left firm footing. Fortunately for us, I adhered to the last admonition: I drew back from a wrong step.

With God as our guide, if we think things through, He will point us in the right direction. What is our next step? We have prayed, searched the scriptures for an answer, maybe fasted and meditated. Now we must seek counsel.

Notice Jeremiah 6:16 from the Moffatt version: "'Stand at the cross-roads,' the Eternal said, 'and look for the old path, ask for the good road and take it, so shall you be safe and prosper.'" In this chapter God through Jeremiah is warning of coming disaster, and His words are useful in both the larger scope of end-time events and in our daily struggles.

"Stand at the cross-roads" implies some kind of journey at a point where a decision is required. "Stand" means just that; we should not go forward until we know where we are going.

"Look for the old path" exhorts us to search out the way traveled by our spiritual forebears. This old path is the road that leads to happiness and life, where they are waiting to share the glories of the Kingdom with us.

"Ask for the good road" tells us to seek help in making our decision. We need to do more than look ourselves, we need to ask others who may know more about the path than we do. Other Christians may have faced the same crossroads earlier in their lives, and their wisdom could be very helpful.

If I had sought out someone in Linville Gorge, if I had asked for "the good road," I could have avoided bumbling around in the bush. Late in his life, a biographer asked Daniel Boone if he had ever been lost. After all, he had explored uncharted territory for most of his life. Boone answered, no, he had never been lost, but he had been "bewildered" once for about three days! Unfortunately, no one else was around he could ask.

For us, seeking counsel might mean consulting with the ministry, our family or others whose opinion we value. Whomever we ask, we need to consider their advice seriously, appreciating their unique perspective and experience. Although we may receive nothing useful at times, we must look for that fleck of gold amid the silt we dredge up.

After we "ask for the good road," God says "take it." If we have done all the steps—prayed, searched the Scriptures, fasted, meditated and sought counsel—it is time to choose the road and take it! Procrastination, stalling, or indecision will not get us anywhere. We must act.

Notice David's confidence in God:

God is unerring in His ways, the Eternal's promises are tried and true; He shields all who take shelter with Him. For who is God save the Eternal? Who is steadfast save our God? God is my stronghold, God is a perfect guide to me. (II Samuel 22:31-33, Moffatt)

James advises us to ask God for wisdom, and He will give it to us (James 1:5). We can confidently step out on the road we have chosen and continue our journey without fearfully looking back. God takes pleasure in those who step out in faith (Hebrews 10:38). God is our Guide! If we have done our homework, we can look straight ahead and move out!

It is only natural to hesitate when we come to a crossroad, but we will have no cause for alarm if we follow these biblical steps. We need to remember to avoid the game trails as well as the "broad way" that the world travels.

The path of righteousness is the Road to the Kingdom, and it is clearer than we may think, more traveled than we may realize. Our map is the Bible, purified seven times and perfectly accurate. Most of all, Christ has blazed the trail before us, setting out way marks and clearing most of the obstacles out of our way.

God is our Guide. How can we fail to reach our destination?