

A friend from my past recently released a book called *A Path Called Compelling*. In it, he invites readers to think about the Christian faith as a path or trail to travel, rather than a destination to arrive at. His hope, as he explains early in the book, is not to *convert* people, but to present the way of Jesus as a compelling and beautiful road which may be so compelling that others may want to join in walking it. This image is a very biblical one! Early Christians were called “Followers of the Way.” The Greek word that we translate to “way” in that context was the word for a path or a road. So I love this metaphor and have used it myself. This morning, though, something happened that got me thinking about some implications and challenges that come with walking a journey rather than settling in a destination. Let’s talk about that on the Covenant Weekly Podcast Season 2 - Episode 34 - Out on the Trail.

Intro Music

This morning I was up in good time. I processed the Lectio 365 for this morning while I ate a good breakfast. Then, before I got into the rest of my work for the day, I decided to go for a walk to enjoy nature while doing some learning by listening to podcasts. One of my favourite places to walk is the Simcoe County Forest Tracts that are behind my subdivision. It is a group of four tracts and trails in a forest where Midland, Penetang, and Tiny Township converge. It tends to be quiet and the trails are pretty obvious. The trails are not, however, all straight.

I went out this morning and began on familiar trails. Eventually, when faced with a decision about which to follow, I followed a trail that went further away from my starting point, not sure where it led. I followed it, and then another branch of the trail that led me further on and not in a straight line. After walking for quite a while, I decided that I’d better take a trail that would take me in the

direction of home. When one such trail came, I turned onto it. And turned again. I have a decent sense of direction so I thought I was okay and this new trail began to descend, which is what I knew I eventually needed to do. But then I saw a sign that said, “Private Property.” That didn’t seem to be right if I was heading home. Rather than languishing confused for a long time, I pulled out my phone and opened the map. My GPS indicated that not only had I not turned in the direction of home, but I was also almost as far away from it as I could be within these trails. What I thought was north was actually east. Even once my GPS helped me get walking in the right direction east to west, my sense of direction led me to *feel* like I should turn left when I actually *needed* to turn right to head towards home.

Hopefully, without taking the metaphor too far, this relatively brief experience on a trail can help us think about what the journey of faith is like. Here are four quick thoughts.

1. The path of faith has been walked on before us.

When we are invited to follow Jesus, we are invited to join in on well-marked trails. Millions and millions of people have walked the Jesus way before us. We don’t have to bushwack and try to make up something new on the journey! That being said...

2. We are the only ones who can walk *our* journey.

While there are paths that people have laid out before us, we have to walk our journey. We can’t just coast on someone else’s walk. No matter how great the past was that was walked by our parents or grandparents, our preacher or teacher, the founders of our churches or denominations, the saints of centuries past or even those who wrote our scripture...our steps need to be our own. Certainly, we can learn from their path and follow in their footsteps, but the steps we take are our own. And while we’re walking it’s good to recognize that...

3. Just because you follow a clearly visible trail doesn't mean you'll get to where you actually need or want to go!

Lots of people walking will make a lot of trails. And sometimes trails get laid because someone and then some people *think* it will lead in the right direction. But when we follow it, we discover it took us the wrong way. Sometimes we get so turned around (and I've both experienced this and seen this a lot in the church) that the actual way of Jesus can't be seen. We're walking a trail, but going in the wrong direction. But we don't yet *know* we're going in the wrong direction because the trail we're on is so well-marked. No matter how well-intentioned and disciplined we are, this can happen when we're walking our faith journey. That being said...

4. It's okay to get lost once in a while.

Because we get lost doesn't mean we've failed or messed up. If you aren't open to getting lost you'll likely spend most of your time either *not* on the trail or standing around in one spot looking at a map trying to figure out how to walk. I suspect this is one of the greatest tragedies of Christendom - the time in history we are emerging from in which those who called themselves Christians were in the majority. Millions of hours, millions of books, and countless energy has been spent *talking* about and debating about the road we're supposed to walk rather than actually getting out there and walking! And that doesn't include the amount of time spent correcting and judging others because we don't think they are walking on the right trail. If we aren't getting lost sometimes, perhaps we aren't really walking! And we shouldn't be afraid to get lost because...

5. Getting lost doesn't mean you don't know *generally* where you are and it doesn't mean you're in danger.

We don't like the feeling of being lost. And there is something in most of us that makes us feel nervous or anxious when we can't identify exactly where we are or the direction we need to go. But more often than not, we have a *general* sense of where we are even if we don't know specifically. And because of that

general sense, if we keep walking eventually we'll get to somewhere or someone who can point us in the right direction. Obviously, this presumes we have a general sense of where we are. Getting out there walking without that can be devastating. I would compare that with being spiritually open to get onto *any* trail going in any direction from anywhere. But that isn't the Christian journey. We are seeking to limit our trails that seem to be aligned with the way of Jesus, as best we can discern it. As such we have a *general* sense of where we are. And, as such, we really aren't in too much danger. Things may get hard. We will, at times, need to rest. There may even be times others need to carry us on along the path. But we have an assurance that God's not going to abandon us on our journey...no matter how lost we get. And as much as we don't like getting lost...

6. There is something gained by being out on the trail and often, getting lost can be an opportunity for you to get *more* of the good things you need! Today, because I got lost, I got to see parts of the trail system I never would have otherwise seen. Today, because I got lost, I got more fresh air and exercise than I would have otherwise. Today, because I got lost, I got to finish another podcast episode that challenged me in how I read and understand the Bible. Sure...there were a few more bug bites and scratches on my ankles. But I was out walking which was better for me than just sitting for an extra hour in my recliner or laying in bed. The same kinds of things can be true when we're on our journey of faith. The good we gain from being on the trail will far outweigh what we leave behind and when we get lost, if we will remain open to it, it often creates an opportunity for us to get even more of the good we need!

Announcement Music

Reminders this week:

- *This coming Sunday, June 11, we are having a Coffee & Conversation after our morning service. We invite you to bring napkin-friendly snacks*

to share during our after-service conversation. We will also be having something special as a part of our service together and we hope to see you there!

- *On Sunday, June 18 we will be celebrating Father's Day and we have a treat for each of the men who are with us that morning. That will also be our final morning of live streaming our services before the summer.*
- *On June 25, we are going to have our end-of-year/summer kick-off BBQ. Weather permitting, we'll be outside for a time of worship and short reflection before eating together. We invite you to bring a side (something like a salad) and a dessert to share for the BBQ. And we encourage you to bring lawn chairs to sit in. If you want to bring some lawn games to play during the BBQ, you are welcome to do so! In the case of inclement weather, BBQ but we'll stay inside and spread out around the building to eat.*
- *On July 2 we will begin our summer where we try to offer a variety of gatherings and activities. Some of our summer gatherings will be offsite. Others will be shared activities rather than gatherings. We are hoping to have our schedule published and ready for you to see by this coming Sunday so that you can plan accordingly. We are looking forward to a fun and uplifting summer together as a church family.*

This is going to be my last Covenant weekly before the summer. I'm going to take a break from it as I plan for the weeks and months to come. I'm not certain how many listen to or read this, but I hope it's been helpful to you who have.

Now as you continue your journey this week, I pray you are encouraged. May you keep your eyes on the well-worn paths before you and on Jesus as the one who is the way. Whether the steps you take this week are the hardest you have ever had to take or are light and filled with zest, I pray you will enjoy the

company of a fellow traveller. And, although I am not Irish, in keeping with the idea that we are all on a journey, I finish by offering you this traditional Irish blessing:

May the road rise up to meet you.

May the wind be always at your back.

May the sun shine warm upon your face;

the rains fall soft upon your fields and until we meet again,

may God hold you in the palm of His hand.

Peace to you.