

The Journey of Life: The Roads We Travel — Part 1

written by Tim Jennings, M.D. | May 29, 2019



Filled with all its challenges, stressors, sickness, and conflicts, life can be hard. Many people come to see me in the midst of their struggles, desperately searching for a better way to live. But, as I teach them to find practical strategies that will help them cope, I have also discovered that our understanding of reality — how life works — has a direct impact on our understanding of what is happening to us and our ability to cope with the stress.

As we journey down the road of life, everyone one of us will run into bumps and potholes, make wrong turns, and sometimes even have wrecks — but the mindset, understanding, attitude, and beliefs we hold along the way will not only determine the reactions we have when we're hit with life's stressful challenges, it will change the paths we choose to steer onto in the first place.

Yes. We can learn to take smoother paths, to anticipate and avoid the potholes of life, and to stay on course for our eternal goals, such that when life hits us hard, while we may be battered and bruised, we will never be defeated.

But not all methods of travel are equally healthy, adaptable, or capable of getting us through those

rough patches. As you travel the roads of life, consider which way you would like to navigate them:

Walking in Ignorance

Many in the world today are doing little more than floundering. They have no knowledge of God, no understanding of how life was created to operate, no insight into God's designs and methods. They are not purposely seeking evil; they are not seeking to harm; they're not predators. These are hurting people longing for a better life but who are lost in their ignorance. They try so hard to handle the pain of life's problems, yet they get discouraged when their efforts never bring lasting peace. The apostle Paul speaks of these needy people in this way:

At that time you were apart from Christ. You were foreigners and did not belong to God's chosen people. You had no part in the covenants, which were based on God's promises to his people, and **you lived in this world without hope and without God** (Ephesians 2:12 GNT).

In this world of sin, there is no hope of completing the journey of life successfully without God. However, the Bible also tells us that there is hope for those who are in ignorance:

As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had **when you lived in ignorance**. But just as he who called you is holy, **so be holy in all you do**; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy" (1 Peter 1:14-16 NIV84).

Those who walk in ignorance don't have to stay in ignorance. Jesus is the light that enlightens all minds (John 1:9). When we come to know Jesus as God, as our Creator, who is love and whose laws are the reality upon which our lives are built, we not only develop a saving relationship with Him, but our minds also become enlightened to understand how life is supposed to work. We develop new insights that enable us to discern which turns in the road of life to take, paths that keep us going in the right direction (Hebrews 5:14).

Those who walk in ignorance are those who don't know God and His methods of love. If you are walking in ignorance, I encourage you to get to know God, for this is the road to eternal life (John 17:3).

Walking in Illiteracy

Many who come to my office overwhelmed with anxiety and stress identify themselves as "Christian." They attend church, and most of their friends are "Christian." Yet they have essentially no real knowledge of Scripture. They say they believe in God, but they are biblically illiterate. In an online article entitled "The Scandal of Bible Illiteracy: It's Our Problem," Dr. R. Albert Mohler Jr. writes:

Researchers George Gallup and Jim Castelli put the problem squarely: "Americans revere the Bible—but, by and large, they don't read it. And because they don't read it, they have become a nation of biblical illiterates." How bad is it? Researchers tell us that it's worse than most could imagine.

Fewer than half of all adults can name the four gospels. Many Christians cannot identify more than two or three of the disciples. According to data from the Barna Research Group, 60 percent of Americans can't name even five of the Ten Commandments. "No wonder people break the Ten Commandments all the time. They don't know what they are," said George Barna, president of the firm. The bottom line? "Increasingly, America is biblically illiterate." [See Barna Group's website.]

Multiple surveys reveal the problem in stark terms. According to 82 percent of Americans, "God helps those who help themselves," is a Bible verse. Those identified as born-again Christians did better—by one percent. A majority of adults think the Bible teaches that the most important purpose in life is taking care of one's family.

Some of the statistics are enough to perplex even those aware of the problem. A Barna poll indicated that at least 12 percent of adults believe that Joan of Arc was Noah's wife. Another survey of graduating high school seniors revealed that over 50 percent thought that Sodom and Gomorrah were husband and wife. A considerable number of respondents to one poll indicated that the Sermon on the Mount was preached by Billy Graham.[\[1\]](#)

As unbelievable as it may be to you, I can confirm all this to be true. When I ask my Christian patients if they know some of the most basic Bible stories, most admit that they don't.

The Bible tells us that the historic events it details were recorded for a reason:

Now these things occurred **as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things** as they did... These things happened to them **as examples and were written down as warnings for us**, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come (1 Corinthians 10:6, 11 NIV84).

The Bible is filled with stories to educate, enlighten, and inspire us—to teach us about God, His character, and His design laws for life and to show us what happens when we choose to break His design protocols for life. These stories also give evidence of God's goodness, grace, and kindness, showing that He is like a loving parent who never needs to be influenced to be good to us and who is always seeking our good. In fact, as Paul asks, don't you realize "that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?" (Romans 2:4 NIV84).

It is by reading the stories of Scripture and seeing a murderer, Moses, transformed into a loving friend of God and who is taken to heaven—or a betrayer, adulterer, and murderer (David) experience a new heart and right spirit to become a man after God's own heart; or a king (Manasseh) who led a nation into the grossest idol worship and participated in child sacrifice be restored to righteousness—that we see the goodness of God and are won back to trust in Him. We can say, "If God can forgive, heal, and save these people, then He will heal and save me too, if I let Him."

And then there are the stories of people like Joseph or Job. We read how they were faithful and true yet still experienced betrayal and terrible loss because of the evil of others; yet we see that when they kept trusting God through their painful ordeals, they saw God bring good out of the evil. Such stories inspire us with hope and give us a perspective larger than our immediate trouble, allowing for the possibility

that we are serving a higher purpose than we can immediately understand.

One Christian author put it this way:

God never leads His children otherwise than they would choose to be led, if they could see the end from the beginning and discern the glory of the purpose which they are fulfilling as co-workers with Him (Ministry of Healing, 479.2).

But if we don't know the history, the reality, of God's' actions through time, then when life's problems come, we are prone to doubt God—we lose hope, get discouraged, and often simply give up.

Those who walk in illiteracy claim a belief in God but don't actually know what He's doing. I encourage you to read about God's hand in history and to no longer have a faith floundering in biblical illiteracy.

Walking in Infancy

These are also those who believe in God, and have given their hearts to Him, but they have never grown up to understand God's methods and principles. They walk through life following the direction of some other human being. They put their trust in the testimonies or experiences of others, allowing them to be a guide. They haven't thought things through for themselves; they haven't developed their own ability to differentiate truth from error. They constantly look to some other authority (pastor, priest, a list of beliefs, a creed, a Bible commentary) to tell them what to do or what to believe.

Yet these sincere believers live in fear—of making a mistake, of getting deceived, of being led astray, or of not doing something right. They are afraid to think for themselves lest they are wrong, so they defer their decision-making to others. The Bible describes such people:

We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil (Hebrews 5:11-14 NIV84).

Letting others think for us prevents us from developing the ability to think for ourselves. If we don't know why the truth is the truth and why a lie is a lie, then we are not settled into the truth. In other words, we remain vulnerable to believe lies, to be led astray; we are not intimately acquainted with righteousness, with living in harmony with God intelligently and purposely, so that nothing can deceive us.

God wants us to grow up, to learn to think and to reason for ourselves (Isaiah 1:18-20; Romans 14:5). When we do, life becomes easier to cope with because we have greater insight and understanding as to what is happening and, therefore, we can make choices in harmony with God's principles to deal with life's challenges.

Those who walk in infancy are those who let others lead them through life and never learn to think for

themselves. If you have been walking in infancy, I encourage you to grow up in Christ, to develop by practice the ability to discern the right from the wrong, to fix your eyes on Christ and stop allowing others to do your thinking for you.

Next week we will finish our exploration on The Journey of Life: The Roads We Travel

[1] <https://albertmohler.com/2016/01/20/the-scandal-of-biblical-illiteracy-its-our-problem-4/>