

The Hard Road is Where You'll Find the Lord

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Recently, there has been a lot of construction downtown where I live. Cones, dusty white rock, makeshift fences and lots of expensive equipment have lined the streets for months. This makes it difficult to drive near the downtown square, very difficult actually, because most of the roads around here are one-way. Shops that used to be one block away are now five or six, and sometimes you can't park anywhere close because a whole section of street is blocked off. Thankfully, you can get everywhere, as long as you follow the detour, which may include a brisk walk on the sidewalk after parking a little way off.



But you can't get there on the road you had in mind when you left your house, and you may have to walk uphill.

These detours are a picture of what it's like to follow Jesus. Although we know the destination and the way, the Lord often inserts trials that seemingly get us off track. But in reality, we would never reach the end without them. And so trials of all shapes and sizes are God's gifts to us because they derail our plans, change our minds and force us to turn when we want to go straight.

The Lord will lead you on the hard road

Here is something worth review: following Christ doesn't result in a life without difficulty. Trials are normative, and pain is God's chosen way to work out holiness and dependence in our lives. He is a vinedresser who carefully prunes every branch. He is a loving father who disciplines all his children.

Therefore, because of his careful love for you, he will *direct* you down hard roads of suffering.

But, take heart; the hard road is where you'll find the Lord. As strange as it sounds, this is a reality for every believer—God is working in and

through the most painful circumstances in our lives. And he is *there*, right beside you, leading you, helping you.

He is there because his sheep walk through darkness and need a Shepherd. He is there because the enemy means to kill us, and Jesus promised to lose none. And perhaps most comforting of all, he is there because *you* are there and he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

The Lord has already walked the hard road

As Jesus made his way to Golgotha to accomplish the Father's will, he was physically unable to carry his cross. A man named Simon was enlisted to finish the journey. Bloodied, beaten, struck and scourged—Jesus was too weak to bear the heavy beam. Do you think of Jesus like this? Physically unable, in searing pain, dreading the greater pain of punishment that awaited him, and yet he continued.

As difficult as they were, these last days of Jesus' life were not abnormal. Suffering met him at every turn. Jesus was, "made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest." (Heb 2:17). He is not, "unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are." (Heb 4:15) And he, "learned obedience through what he suffered." (Heb 5:8).

We walk where Jesus has already been.

Therefore, don't despise the pain of God's hard roads. With time, you'll treasure these paths and find that they led you best. With time, you'll understand that God was there for each step.

"Fear not, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are mine.
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you.

Isaiah 43:1b-2