Dear Open Door Family,

One of my favorite old Christmas videos is Holiday Inn with Bing Crosby and Fred Estaire. In one scene a driver for the Inn has been asked to make sure an individual does not make it to the Inn for a performance. So, as he is driving along he suddenly swerves onto a dirt road; he tells the passenger it is a "shortcut". Then he swerves into another even smaller road and the passenger, who has been to the Inn many times, questions him. He answers by saying it is a "shortcut to the shortcut" and in a matter of moments they end up in the middle of the river. So, now you are wondering why would shortcuts come to mind? As I was looking at these verses it made me think about how many people believe there is a shortcut to heaven or a shortcut to spiritual maturity. Encarta defines shortcut like this: "a way of saving time and effort in doing something." That is great if you are trying to find a quicker way to get home or a quicker way to shovel the snow. But there are NO shortcuts for getting to heaven - there is ONE WAY.

Matthew 7:13-14 (NLT) "You can enter God's Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose that way. [14] But the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it.

That gate is pretty clear - it is Jesus and the Cross. Christmas is that wonderful time of the year when we remember HOW God sent Jesus as a baby to grow to live and eventually to DIE for us. God gave His Only Son so that we could have a relationship with Him. But we cannot by-pass the Cross if we want to be saved. We cannot take any shortcut to heaven. I believe these verses are referring specifically to salvation. There are no shortcuts; there is only ONE WAY to God and that is through the Cross of Jesus Christ.

James 1:2-4 (NIV) Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

Colossians 1:27-28 (HCS) We proclaim Him, warning and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

Yet, as I thought about it I realized that there are NO shortcuts to spiritual maturity either. The implication in James is that as we face trials, accepting them joyfully we learn to persevere. As we learn Perseverance we grow in maturity. James is describing a process that will repeat itself over and over as we grow in our walk with Jesus. The implication in what Paul says to the Colossians is that growing into spiritual Maturity would take time and effort. So, the question we need to ask ourselves is, are we looking for shortcuts in our RELATIONSHIP with God? Are we seeking to avoid the hard things that shape and mold us into the image of Jesus? Are we trying to take a shortcut around the study and discipline needed to grow in our knowledge, love, and intimacy with our Lord? Getting to know God is not something that I can do in "my spare time" or only when I feel like it. A growing, deepening relationship with Jesus takes effort, commitment, and dedication. There are NO shortcuts.

PRAYER: Lord God, help me to remember that the time I invest in pursuing You, and knowing You, is time well spent. Lord, I do not want to look for shortcuts in my walk with You. I know there are none. Please give me a growing thirst for You and Your Word.

Pastor Mark Kieft

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