

ALL GOD'S CHILDREN NEED TRAVELING SHOES

How To Get There

Hebrews 12:1-2 and Colossians 3:12-15

May 18, 2025

When I was a child, the final week of the school year meant dreaming of summer. For me, that meant visits with family in Pennsylvania farm country, basketball camps and 4-H club, and days of unscheduled freedom in the woods surrounding our home. But what I looked forward to most were Wednesday mornings at church. F.I.T.S.—Fun in the Son. Get it? “Son” as in Jesus. And, the hot summer sun.

Every Wednesday, all of my friends from church came. For the morning, we would play jump the creek, freeze tag, water balloon toss. But, first there was a devotion. It was led by our pastor, who also happened to be my dad. Each summer, we followed a children’s version of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, the 17th-century allegory charting Christian’s journey from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City. Along the way, Christian encounters characters with colorful names like Obstinate and Pliable, and joins up with his trusty companions, Hopeful and Faithful. The story invited us, as children, to see faith not as a checklist of beliefs, but as this great adventure. Faith was something to live, to explore, to even get lost in. And in the decades since those summers, I have failed to find a better metaphor for the Christian life. It is indeed a journey.

As Maya Angelou’s marvelous memoir reminds us: *All God’s Children Need Traveling Shoes*. We are God’s people, always on the move.

Back in seminary, both Sara and I were known as two of the more driven people on our campus. In fact, we *may* have competed for an imaginary title of *Most Driven*. I have since conceded. Occasionally, emerging from the library or rushing from class to meeting to work-study, we would encounter Nancy. Nancy was our classmate and a veteran teacher who had discerned her call to seminary later in life. Nancy would stop us in our tracks and calmly repeat the refrain, “Remember, kids, it’s not the

destination; it’s the journey.” I rolled my eyes. And now I realize how right she was. When we focus only on some imagined destinations, some stopping place, we forget that *how* we travel is just as important as *where* we are going. Faith is not about a resting place—it is about how we get there.

In a book he cleverly subtitled *The New Pilgrim’s Progress*, Mark Twain wrote, “Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness...Broad, wholesome, charitable views...cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth one’s whole life long.” This is why trips like our mission trip to Malawi, like our choir’s tour of South Africa, or our annual Footsteps of Faith pilgrimage for our high school seniors, matter. The path we take shapes us as much as the places we go.

So, how *do* we get there?

The Letter to the Colossians was written to a community struggling to sustain the faith that had brought them together. Many were tempted to return to idol worship and pagan practices. Signs of division in the congregation were emerging. Cracks were beginning to show. They needed a word of encouragement. What would motivate them? What would ground them in the truth of the gospel?

You might say this morning’s text is like a travel guide for the journey of faith. It begins with blessed assurance: “As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved...” The point is clear—you did not gather yourselves. God has gathered you. You are holy. Cherished. Beloved.

But that’s only the beginning. As God’s beloved, we are given some directions to follow. In fact, we are told what to wear on our journey. Clothe yourselves with compassion, with kindness and humility, with meekness and patience.

The passage paints a picture of practical faith. Gratitude. Harmony. Love. The path we travel shapes us. And so, ours is a lifelong journey of becoming. And the truth is, becoming can be difficult, even painful.

When our older son, Samuel, was two years old, I found myself out of breath after carrying him up a single flight of stairs. And right then and there, I realized that years of neglecting my physical health had caught up with me. So, I decided it was time to follow through on a long-held dream: becoming a runner.

I began immediately. That is, I bought a pair of running shoes. Exactly one week later, I took them out of the box. Progress.

A few days into the actual running part, my body was sore, and my spirit was discouraged. So, I consulted my running guru, Andrew Kent, a high school senior and all-state cross-country runner. "Andrew!" I said. "Why am I in so much pain?"

Andrew must have read Colossians, because he responded with compassion, humility, and admirable restraint. Gently, he broke the news: I was hurting because...I was desperately out of shape. That's not what he actually said. What he actually said was, "It will get better. You just have to keep running."

Over time, I learned the key to becoming a runner... is running. There is no shortcut. The first mile is never easy. But the transformation is worth it.

For years, I have closed my emails with the words, "With peace, Chris." But it turns out that since the latest iOS update, my phone's autocorrect has other ideas. In the place of my carefully constructed, serene send-off, I have inadvertently sent a number of messages that close, "With pace, Chris."

At first, it was just a funny glitch, but then I realized—it fits.

One of the lessons of running is that pace is everything. It's how we get there. We can't do it all at once, but step by step. Pace. It's how we endure the hard stretches. Pace. It's how we find our rhythm with others. Pace. It's how

we discover a strength we didn't know we had. So now I claim it. *With pace, Chris*. A reminder that the journey of faith isn't about speed or perfection. It's about staying with it, running the race before us, one faithful stride at a time. That's the image the Book of Hebrews gives us. "Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus..." Not a perfect run, but *our* race. Not perfection, but perseverance.

On this journey of faith, I have discovered that I need the presence of community, I need the practice of prayer, and I need the grace of rest. I need it as much as I need air to breathe and water to drink. I need to be grounded in scripture's call to live with compassion, even for myself. And I, like all God's children, need traveling shoes.

And so, this Thursday, I'll lace mine up for a journey I've never taken before. A sabbatical. You won't be surprised to know that I have plans, but much remains a mystery. I'm trying to trust that the journey is as important as the destination, to lean into this blessing one of you sent me last week, "May your muses lead you in new, unanticipated, inspiring directions, much to your surprise."

One more thing before I go. It's about running—and life. Running, I have learned, is not a solo endeavor. I see this not only on my own runs, but at track meets with a rowdy group of fifth graders I've been lucky enough to coach the past two years. Our 22 runners span a great spectrum of paces—some are fast and focused, others are still figuring it all out, and a few struggle just to finish. And at every meet, something sacred happens.

Somehow these competitive kids completely forget the clock. They line the fence for the last runner on the track, cheering loudly all the way to the finish. Sometimes, they jump in and jog alongside a teammate who's clearly hurting. I think of a great cloud of witnesses. I have watched with awe as that struggling runner finds the will to finish, sprinting to the line, embraced by a shouting mob of proud friends. Compassion in motion. Paul's virtues lived out on the track. They get it: the journey, not the destination. They remind me every week: how we run matters. How we get there matters.

And so, *becoming* takes practice—small, steady acts of commitment. Becoming takes community—people who run beside you and see you through. Sometimes, becoming means showing up when you don't feel like it, because someone else needs for you to be there. Sometimes, it means standing firm and taking a risk for the sake of the truth. Sometimes, it means choosing to be kind instead of right, staying when you'd rather walk away, forgiving the one who has hurt you.

Yes, *becoming* is hard because it's the most important work in the world. I've got a long way to go. But I'm learning—again and again—that faith isn't about having it all together. It's the journey. Run with perseverance.

So, listen. Reaching the top does not matter if you have trampled others to get there. The view means nothing if there's no one to share it with. Power, influence, wealth—none of it endures when you've wounded others to gain it. And that's true for individuals, for communities, and for nations, too. *How* we get there matters. The path we take shapes who we become. The ends never justify cruel or callous means. Not for followers of Jesus.

And so, this is what we must become. A church clothed not with coercion, exclusion, or judgment, but with compassion, kindness, and patience. The kind of people who show up for each other, especially when the road gets hard. A church convinced the race isn't about being fastest or flashiest, but about seeing each other through. A great cloud of witnesses, running with perseverance the race that is set before us.

Here is the good news: along the route, there will be manna in the wilderness. There will be fresh water in the desert. And when your strength fails, there will be rest. And, when those shoes finally do wear out, you will be carried to the finish line.

So, friends at Second, tie your laces. Find your pace. Run with perseverance. Walk with grace. Stay together. And I'll see you—down the road.