

Dartmoor in winter can be spectacular in the sun - but grimly miserable without it. Several groups of six Royal Marines corporals undergoing the two-month senior command course were expected to navigate a zig-zag course across about 20 miles of the moors at night, irrespective of the weather, carrying around 45 pounds of equipment. The night I did it, only two sections made it to the finish point - and one of those (mine!) missed the deadline anyway. As the new day dawned, the other sections had to be gathered in, not having made it at all.

Each navigational leg was led in turn by the members of the group. When it was my turn, one of the others said he had had a cunning plan to get a lift from a friend with a large vehicle at this point. This was around midnight and after 40 or so minutes waiting it was obvious he was not coming. I made the decision to move on. But having wasted so much time, I also took the brass-necked decision to bang on the door of an isolated cottage in the middle of nowhere and ask the occupant if he would be kind enough to give us all a lift to a point near our next check point. Remarkably, he did. I suspected this wasn't the first time he'd been asked - indeed, I gave him a blank cheque for his fuel costs; it was never cashed.

Senior command courses usually had around 20% failure rate; on this occasion it was 65% (yes, including me - I think the trainers had found out about my creative navigation/leadership skills). Curiously, the training team was sacked and I subsequently had to do it all again.

There is a sermon to be drawn from every line of this little tale. However, for now I want to draw out this question: what happens if we lose sight of the exercise (in our case, life) and rely on shortcuts or that someone else will do what we ought to have done?

The Jewish people of Jesus's time expected that the presence of God in the Temple at Jerusalem was all they needed to have for their freedom from oppression. God would send His Messiah to destroy the Romans. In AD 70 their "Plan A" was to be dashed forever; they didn't have a "plan B." The Romans sacked the Temple, followed by the great diaspora, partially ending in 1948. However, the Temple has still not been re-established. So how does God keep His promise that he would dwell with His people? What, in fact, was the Temple really? In case you don't join us in thinking about these things, the brief answer is this: it was a focus for God's place in our world; it was *not* a box to keep God in.

The Temple is an overlooked part of the story of Jesus, so as we approach Lent and Easter, my colleague, David Crombie, and I are

going to have some short studies of it on the 5 Tuesdays of Lent, 18.00-1900, starting 7 March. The location will be decided according to the numbers attending, so please let me (738317) or David (730296) know if you are coming.