



WALKING WITH JESUS

By Rev. Will Nelken

Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, CA, on Sunday, November 7, 2021

In the Bible, “walk” is often a metaphor for living one’s daily life, especially one’s lifestyle. Today, would you think with me about *your* lifestyle as a walk with Jesus?

He invites you to come to Him, and to follow Him—but not from a distance. He invites us to walk with Him side-by-side, arm-in-arm, so He can whisper His words in our ears, and nudge us in the direction He has in mind.

But Jesus is in Heaven and we are on earth, so how can this be? Well, that’s why Jesus sent to us the Holy Spirit, so He can be with us “in Spirit” all the time.

Walk by Faith

The Apostle Paul learned how to walk with Jesus in this way. It was not always easy for him, as it won’t be for you, so he offered this advice:

2 Corinthians 5

⁶ Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord— ⁷ for we walk by faith, not by sight— ⁸ we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. ⁹ Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. ¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

The life we live now (at home in the body), physically apart from King Jesus (absent from the Lord), has its special challenges, for which we always need courage.

There are different types of courage, but the kind we need most is **good courage**, or the courage to do what is good and upright. It’s not easy!

We face conflicting pressures from outside, and conflicting pressures from inside.

Outside, the cultural currents (like, contemporary political correctness) swirl hard and fast around us, threatening every day to sweep us off our feet in their direction—away from Christ.

Add to that the pressures we experience from family, friends, co-workers, teachers, and employers to make choices and conduct ourselves the way they want us to—many times, in contrast to what the Spirit is whispering in our hearts.

And, if that weren't enough, our own feelings, worries, and fears stir our imaginations day and night, pushing us in another direction, away from trusting and following Jesus.

In light of this persistent tug-of-war, Paul reminds us that we are called to **walk by faith, not by sight**. In this way, he presented the conflict as heart versus head, or trust versus senses.

The things we may see, hear, taste, smell, feel, or imagine (both good and bad) must become subject to our faith in Jesus. In our former way of life, we were inclined to those senses, and led by them. Now, we have a new way of life—the lifestyle of faith in Jesus.

Be Pleasing to Him

It is a gross error to think that we can continue to live just as we did before—choosing just what seemed pleasing to us—and, at the same time, **be pleasing to Him** who loved us and gave Himself for us. Our old master (self) must be dethroned, so that Jesus can reign in its place.

This is the walk by faith. And like any other journey by foot, you must keep your eyes on the path before you, lest you stumble into a pothole, or trip over a stone, or wander into the brush, or slip in a puddle, or fall into a ditch, or bump into another traveler, or walk into a lamppost!

Our physical and mental senses are good for many things, and should continuously be improved through study and learning (when you stop learning, you stop living), but their skills are limited to the world of tangible things; they are useless in the invisible world of the Spirit that envelopes us all. This is why we need the fullness of the Holy Spirit today!

On a prison ship in a terrible storm, when all hope had been lost, the prisoner, Paul, urged the crew to take courage, saying, *“This very night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood before me and told me, ‘God has granted safety to everyone who is sailing with you.’”* (Acts 27:23)

How did he have such knowledge and assurance? Not simply because an angel had appeared to him, but because the angel had come from **“the God to whom I belong.”**

The walk of faith is not a walk in *blind* faith, but in the confidence that Jesus Christ is who He said He was and will do what He said He would do! This is the God to whom we belong.

And we belong to Him because He laid down His life for us and in our place. He bought us! We are His. Or, are we?

Who do you BELONG to?

We started our lives under the thumb of our parents—we belonged to them (appropriately, for the most part)—and spent our adolescence (most of us) fighting off their “ownership” in order to become our own young man or woman—in charge of our own lives, capable of making decisions for ourselves. And so we have lived out our adulthood... and then we met Jesus and surrendered to His Kingship (at least, initially).

But it takes time and effort to unlearn old habits! And they don’t go away by themselves. They’re not like autumn leaves that just fall off. They need to be stripped away, cut off, killed, buried. Again and again! Sometimes, God does the pruning; Sometimes, He wants us to do it ourselves.

Habits are like “muscle memory”—they require no thought, no effort, no intention. But to unlearn them requires MUCH thought, MUCH effort, and MUCH intention! So, build *good habits*. This requires good courage. Even so, they take less work than unlearning the old.

The Savior was, to Paul, “*the God to whom I belong and whom I serve.*” We, too, belong to Him now, for we were “*bought with a price.*” Do we, also, willingly, consciously, and intentionally “serve Him”?

Who do you SERVE?

Paul introduced himself to the church of Rome as “*a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle and appointed to spread the Good News of God... whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son.*” (Romans 1:1,9)

For his protégé, Timothy, Paul gave thanks to God, “*whom I serve with a clear conscience the way my forefathers did.*” (2 Timothy 1:3)

Paul served Christ, not just in his head, but in his *spirit* (from the heart). And he served Him, not just with talk, but with a *clear conscience*. A motivated servant of Christ, Paul identified his ambition in life as: “*to be pleasing to Him (Jesus).*”

You may not be an apostle, or a vocational minister for Christ, but every person has an ambition for their personhood—to get rich, to be famous, to have power, to know stuff, to own stuff, to do stuff, to be loved, to be remembered, to be right, to do right, etc.

Perhaps you can say (or would like to say), “My ambition is not just to get things done, but to be pleasing to Jesus.” That is a worthwhile ambition. But not easy to maintain. It takes good courage.

Paul was concerned to please the Lord because “*we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.*” As surely as the sun will rise tomorrow morning (actually, more surely), the Day will dawn when all the Church stands before Christ our Judge. He will pass judgment upon us, not for our sins—for He already bore that judgment Himself in our place—but for our deeds.

How did we follow Him? Like we belonged to Him? As His servants? In a manner that pleased Him? Or did we follow Him from afar, like stragglers, self-occupied, indifferent?

Some “card-carrying” Christians do so to *salve* their conscience, instead of keeping it clear. Some do it for *appearance*, to deflect the nagging criticism of others. Some do it for *power*, to take advantage of the faith of others for their own gain.

Paul wanted the Corinthian Christians to be proud of Him as their founder and leader for the right reasons, in contrast to other leaders “*who take pride in appearance and not in heart.*”

2 Corinthians 5

¹² *We are not again commending ourselves to you but are giving you an occasion to be proud of us, so that you will have an answer for those who take pride in appearance and not in heart.*

¹³ *For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are of sound mind, it is for you.* ¹⁴ *For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; ¹⁵ and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.*

Paul was a man of the heart (even though he possessed a great intellect), a leader in integrity, who was controlled by ***the love of Christ.***

What CONTROLS you?

We are all controlled by something (or many things). Bob Dylan had a fling with the Christian faith (if not with Jesus). I don’t know his spiritual condition today, only that his involvement in a local evangelical church was brief. During that period, he wrote and recorded an album of faith-oriented music. One of those songs insightfully declared:

*Indeed, you’re gonna have to serve somebody.
Well, it may be the devil, or it may be the Lord,
But you’re gonna have to serve somebody.*

What controls you? For most people, it's primarily self. Unfortunately, the devil plays havoc with that position, as he prods and provokes, and deceives us into doing anything but what would be pleasing to Jesus.

If you, also, want to please the Lord, you must learn to be controlled by Jesus' love—over your fear, over your worry, over your bitterness, over your hate, over your anger, over your indifference, over your selfishness, over your pride, over your weakness, over your procrastination, over your laziness. All of the conditions I just listed are the result of your sensory life—the report of your physical senses and your imagination. If the love of Christ does not control these, it controls nothing.

Please note: I did not say “extinguishes these,” but *controls* them. When I control my dog, he is right there with me, but He is on a leash and under my command. He obeys me.

For the rest of your life, you will face fear, and worry, and bitterness, and hate, and anger, and indifference, and all the rest, and even more. Life involves the activation of your senses and imagination—apart from them, you would be physically dead.

So, don't expect the eradication of those conflicts, but hope to *control* them as they rise—over and over again—by the wonderful, mighty, invincible love of Jesus Christ. If you ask and obey, the Holy Spirit will bring your conflicting feelings to heel, like an obedient dog.

Don't walk with Jesus from afar. Don't walk with Jesus in word only, but in *deed* and in *truth*. Don't walk with Jesus from your head more than from your *heart*. He is next to you right now. Acknowledge Him (don't ignore Him). Welcome Him, your Emmanuel.

Decide to walk with Him side-by-side, arm-in-arm, in frequent conversation, like a person walks with a Good Friend.