



May/June 2023

Today

refresh, refocus, renew

Fruit
OF THE
Spirit

ALSO: WALKING THROUGH THE BIBLE

Friends:

If someone asked you, “What should everyday Christian living look like?” how would you answer? One of the best summaries for picturing Christian living is the fruit of the Spirit: “love, joy, peace, forbearance [patience], kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23). During the month of May, Pastor George Koopmans explores the Bible’s teaching on these qualities and how we can more deeply grow into them.



For the month of June, I had the privilege of writing about many occurrences of “walking” that we find in Scripture. I was moved to write on the subject because last year I hiked for three weeks on the Appalachian Trail. Throughout those weeks of trekking through beautiful and sometimes dangerous settings in God’s creation, I reflected on many biblical scenes: God’s time with Adam and Eve in the garden, Abraham’s journey with God, Jesus’ walking among us, and more. I pray that these reflections will encourage you—wherever you are—in your walk with God.

May you be refreshed, refocused, and renewed in God’s Word!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kurt Selles". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the end.

Kurt Selles

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“Fruit of the Spirit”
George Koopmans



**“Walking through
the Bible”**
Kurt Selles

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ReFrame
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june

Walking through the Bible

Kurt Selles

I have loved hiking for as long as I can remember. When I was in high school, I had my first opportunity to hike a short stretch of the Appalachian Trail, an iconic path stretching 2,190 miles (3,524 km) through the eastern United States from Georgia to Maine. That was decades ago, and I have often dreamed of hiking the entire trail. The busyness of work, family life, and ministry, though, have not allowed for the six months needed to complete such a long trek.

In April 2022, however, I was able to hike the Appalachian Trail for three weeks—and while doing so, I took the opportunity to reflect on “walking” in the Bible. As the main form of travel in the ancient world, walking is mentioned many times in the Bible. And in that context, walking can mean more than just going from place to place. In the Bible, the Hebrew word for “walk” (*halak*) can also refer to following God’s way as we live for God in his world.

As I hiked along the Appalachian Trail last year, I often felt like I was walking through the Bible as well. Come and join me on this stroll through the Scriptures and on mountain trails, and along the way we’ll see God at work in our own lives too!

Kurt Selles is the director of ReFrame Ministries, which publishes these Today devotions. Kurt is a graduate of Calvin Theological Seminary and Vanderbilt University. Kurt has served as a missionary in Taiwan and China, and he has also taught missions. Kurt and his wife, Vicki, have three adult children.

TWO KINDS OF WALKING

Observe the commands of the LORD your God, walking in obedience to him and revering him. —Deuteronomy 8:6

“A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step” (Chinese proverb). Early one morning in April 2022, I took the first step on a hiking trip along the Appalachian Trail, which stretches from Georgia to Maine in the eastern United States. While enjoying God’s good and beautiful creation, I also meditated on the theme of “walking” in the Bible.

Since ancient times, walking has been the most common way for people to go from place to place. It’s no surprise, then, that walking is mentioned more than 200 times in the Bible. Whether people took short strolls or long journeys, they moved forward one step at a time. In the Bible, the Hebrew word for “walk” (*halak*) can also refer to following God and living for him in his world.

In Deuteronomy 8 we find examples of both kinds of walking. God’s people had been walking in the wilderness for 40 years. And now, preparing to enter the land that God had promised them, they were reminded to walk in the ways of the Lord and to honor God in all they would do. And God promised to bless them abundantly.

Wherever we walk today, on short strolls or a long journey, may each step remind us to walk in God’s ways and to honor him.

Lord God, help us always to walk with you in our journeys near and far, seeing your hand in our world and striving to please and serve you. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

WALKING IN THE GARDEN

The man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day. . . .

—Genesis 3:8

While hiking the Appalachian Trail, I enjoyed the early April wildflowers blooming along the pathway. I particularly noticed a crocus with a beautiful white flower. Sadly, its stem had broken, and it drooped sideways. It reminded me of the first walking scene in the Bible.

Adam and Eve must have enjoyed walking with God “in the cool of the day” in their garden home. But in today’s story from Genesis 3, they were deeply anxious. Earlier in the day, they had disobeyed God, doing the one thing God had told them not to do.

God had created Adam and Eve to live in fellowship with himself, with each other, and in harmony with the earth and its creatures. In their disobedience, however, they tried to hide from God, and, as the story continues, we see their alien-

ation from each other and from the rest of God’s good creation.

When he comes to walk with them, God finds Adam and Eve cowering in shame. God explains the consequences of their sin. But in his judgment on the serpent, we glimpse God’s promise to redeem fallen humanity back to fellowship with himself, with each other, and with his world.

As I hiked through Appalachia in April, I found it was often comfortably cool late in the day, and this drew me to look forward to walking with God and all his family in the world he has promised to redeem.

Lord, you have made us for fellowship with you. Thank you for redeeming us through Jesus—to love you, others, and your world. Amen.

MISSING THE MARK

"I will be a restless wanderer on earth, and whoever finds me will kill me."
—Genesis 4:14

While hiking the Appalachian Trail, how can you know if you're on the right track? You simply follow the white trail markers, or "blazes," painted on trees along the way. If you see the white blazes, you know you're still on the path. Yet stepping off the trail and getting lost in the woods is not uncommon. For a hiker, that can be a dangerous sort of "missing the mark."

In our passage today, Cain turns away from walking with God and is lost.

In this appalling story showing the depths of human sin, Cain attacks and kills his brother Abel because he feels slighted and resentful. The brokenness caused by sin blooms fully in this first murder in human history. Looking back now, who can count the lives lost because of sin?

When God confronts Cain with his hideous deed, Cain isn't sorry. He is concerned only about his own fate. He is terrified that others will follow his example and kill him. Though God graciously marks Cain to protect him from violence, Cain remains lost as a wanderer and a fugitive.

In the Bible the Hebrew word for "sin" (*hatta't*) literally means "missing the mark." In our alienation from God and from others, we miss the mark. We are *all* lost. But Jesus finds us and sets us on the right path, the way of following him and loving others.

Lord Jesus, we are lost without you. Help us to walk in your ways and to love others, just as you have loved us. Amen.

WALKING WITH GOD

Enoch walked faithfully with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.
—Genesis 5:24

Walking a long-distance trail can give you a feeling of timelessness. Although the landscape changes, the day-to-day rhythm remains the same: walk, eat, sleep; repeat. The life of Enoch, an early descendant of Adam and Eve, also has a sense of timelessness about it. He lived for 365 years and did not die!

Yet Enoch's lifespan was short for his family. Enoch's father, Jared, lived to the age of 962. At age 65, Enoch had a son named Methuselah, who lived to be 969 years old!

The four short verses about Enoch's life don't tell us much, but we do learn one crucial fact about him: "Enoch walked faithfully with God." In his long life of stepping through each day, Enoch walked in a way that pleased God. In fact, God was so pleased with Enoch's

faithful walk that he spared Enoch from the curse of death.

Certainly there is mystery in this story. Yet there is no mystery about how to please God. God calls us to walk faithfully with him, trusting him, honoring him, and serving him. God will probably not take us away as he did with Enoch, but we have the comfort of knowing that Jesus, who conquered sin and death for us, has promised never to leave or forsake us when our own lives end.

Lord Jesus, help us to walk faithfully with you, looking forward to the day when we will join with you and all your faithful followers forever! Amen.

WALKING WITH GRIT

Noah did everything just as God commanded him.

—Genesis 6:22

About 3 million people hike along the Appalachian Trail each year. About 3,000 people try to walk the entire trail—from Springer Mountain in Georgia to Mount Katahdin in Maine. But only about 25 percent of those manage to finish. It takes grit to hike 5 million steps!

Noah had grit. Noah's story isn't about walking a trail, but about building an ark. And if you've ever built anything, you know that it involves many steps in a process. Gathering materials, measuring, cutting, fitting, shaping, joining, finishing. Piece by piece, the ark took shape. God had commanded Noah to build an enormous lifeboat on dry land. It took Noah years to complete what seemed an impossible, ludicrous project. Imagine the courage, resolve, and sheer stamina it took to work on the

ark day after day as his neighbors mocked him.

God chose Noah not for his grit but for his *faith*. When he received God's command, Noah didn't hesitate. Though he may have had doubts, he acted in faith, step by step, until the ark was ready.

Hebrews 11:7 commends Noah for his active faith. In the face of what seemed ridiculous and impossible, Noah walked with God. We may not finish every task we try to accomplish for God's kingdom, but if we step out in faith in obedience to God, we walk with the Lord in his strength.

Lord Jesus, help us to live by faith in you, with courage, confidence, and boldness in following, obeying, and serving you in the world. Amen.

GO, WALK!

"Go, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you."
—Genesis 13:17

It was damp and cold when I woke in the morning at Matt's Creek on the Appalachian Trail in Virginia. After crawling out of my sleeping bag, eating some cold oatmeal with nuts, and loading my pack, I was back on the trail. My destination for that day was the Punchbowl Shelter. As I walked, the clouds slowly drifted away and the sun broke through. By mid-morning it was a lovely day, and I was thinking about Abraham's long walk through Canaan.

God had brought Abram (whom he later renamed Abraham) and his household on a long journey from Harran (in present-day Turkey) to the land of Canaan (present-day Israel). God had made promises, and Abraham had trusted God, taking him at his word (Genesis 12:1-7).

As we can see in today's passage, God promised to give Abraham all of the land that he could see around him in Canaan. And God said, "Go, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you." God promised to bless Abraham and his descendants there, and Abraham settled in that land and worshiped the Lord.

As I reached Punchbowl Shelter, I gave thanks for Abraham's example. God might not call us to journey on foot, but he does call each of us to follow him in faith and faithfulness. And through Jesus, a descendant of Abraham, God keeps his promises to us.

Lord Jesus, give us the faith and faithfulness to follow where you lead, trusting in you. Amen.

WALKING INTO THE UNKNOWN

So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide.

—Genesis 22:14

Leaving Cornelius Creek on the Appalachian Trail one morning in Virginia, I began the long, steep climb to Apple Orchard Mountain. Stopping frequently, I leaned against trees to catch my breath. As I struggled up the mountain, I thought about Abraham's hike into the mountains with Isaac.

God told Abraham to take his son Isaac to the region of Moriah and to sacrifice him as a burnt offering on a mountain there. So Abraham obeyed. Reaching the mountain, they slowly climbed to "the place God had told him about." Isaac noted that they had no lamb for the burnt offering, but Abraham said, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." Abraham then bound his son and placed him on the altar. But as Abraham took the knife to sacrifice his son, God

stopped him, saying, in effect, "Now I know that you trust me above all else."

What a horrifying scene! We might ask, "What kind of father is Abraham? And what kind of God is this?" Or perhaps we should ask, "What was God actually planning and revealing here?" Looking back, we see that while Abraham was being tested, he also trusted God to provide the lamb in place of his son. And looking ahead, we see that God provided his own Son, Jesus, as the Lamb of God, who died in our place to pay for our sin and give us eternal life (John 1:29; 3:16)!

Father, while we struggle to understand this test of Abraham, guide us to live by faith, knowing that your own Son gave up his life for us. Amen.

THE 'ROLLER COASTER'

"Do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you."

—Genesis 45:5

After a grueling afternoon on the Appalachian Trail, I stopped to rest, exhausted, by a gurgling stream. I'd been hiking the "Roller Coaster," a section of trail with ten steep ascents and descents in the mountains of Virginia.

The steep rises and plunges of the "Roller Coaster" reminded me of the experience of Joseph. As a young man, Joseph was bright and full of life, the favorite of his father. That drove his brothers crazy with jealousy and envy, however. And one day those brothers took revenge, selling Joseph into slavery in Egypt. There we see him rise and fall, gaining honor but also getting thrown into prison for a wrong he did not commit. But God was with Joseph, and eventually God raised him to become a ruler in Egypt, second only to Pharaoh the king.

Later, when his brothers came to Egypt to buy food because there was a great famine, they found themselves in the hands of Joseph and were afraid he would take revenge on them. But Joseph had learned about depending on God. He saw God's watchful care in all the ups and downs of his life, and he saw how God had planned to save many lives through him.

As we experience ups and downs in life, we can take comfort that in all circumstances God is with us, redeeming and purifying us for work that he has planned for us to do (Ephesians 2:10).

Lord Jesus, help us to take comfort in your sure and steady hand and to trust in your purposes and plans for our lives. Amen.

GOD'S PRESENCE ON THE JOURNEY

In all of the travels of the Israelites, whenever the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, they would set out. . . .

—Exodus 40:36

I had eaten the last of my peanut butter on the Appalachian Trail and needed more food. So at Rockfish Gap, I decided I would leave the trail and go into town to replenish.

That's not how the Israelites made decisions during their wilderness journey. They waited for a signal. God had instructed his people to build a tabernacle, a large tent, to serve as a portable sanctuary for worship. At the tabernacle God would dwell in their midst, and the people could worship him there. God's glory hovered over the tent, and whenever it lifted, they would set out and follow wherever God would lead them next.

The tabernacle in the wilderness pointed forward to the temple that would be built in Jerusalem many years later (1 Kings 6). What's more, both

the tabernacle and the temple pointed forward to another mark of God's presence among his people. John 1:14 tells us that "the Word"—that is, Jesus—"became flesh and made his dwelling among us." The original Greek text there says, more literally, that "the Word became flesh and *pitched his tent* among us, and we beheld his glory." Jesus came to bring God's glory in human flesh among his people, and now, through the Holy Spirit, he lives in our hearts and is present with us wherever we go. He calls us to serve others, and he promises never to leave or forsake us.

Lord Jesus, you came to live among us. Help us to know your presence today and always, as you lead and guide us in our journey to serve you and others. Amen.

A DAY'S JOURNEY

Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, while he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness.
—1 Kings 19:3-4

On a day's hike to Whiskey Hollow, near Markham, Virginia, I clocked about 20 miles, the equivalent of a "day's journey" in the Bible. Though worn out when I arrived, I was pleased to have put some distance behind me.

Elijah's experience after a day's journey was quite different. Entirely spent, he collapsed under a bush. He was physically, emotionally, and spiritually shattered. Before sinking into sleep, he pleaded with God, "I have had enough. . . . Take my life. . . ."

Elijah had just come from a fierce battle with the priests of Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18). Now he was fleeing for his life from the wicked King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. In response to Elijah's utter exhaustion and desperation, God sent an angel to pro-

vide water and warm cakes. When Elijah finally revived, he walked another 40 days and nights to Mount Horeb. There God spoke to Elijah and met with him, telling him the plans he still had for Elijah and for others to do. God gave Elijah renewed hope for the future.

In our own lives, we too can count on God to meet and refresh us in our times of distress and collapse. In fact, God already has done that for us through Jesus, who offers us rest for our souls and salvation to new life (Matthew 11:28-30). We can trust him with every step we take.

Lord Jesus, in our times of desperation and need, renew and sustain us as we journey through this life. Amen.

WRONG WAY

Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked. . . .

—Psalm 1:1

One morning on my weeks-long hike of the Appalachian Trail, I started off in the wrong direction and walked some distance before I realized my mistake. So I turned around and headed back the right way. No harm done. But walking through life in the wrong direction would be quite another matter.

Psalm 1 warns about going the wrong way in life, by walking, standing, and sitting with the wicked. “But,” you might ask, “shouldn’t we befriend sinners, as Jesus did, out of God’s caring love?” Yes, of course. But if we “walk in step” with the wicked, that means going along in *their* direction, on *their* chosen way—not God’s. We are created to live in fellowship with God. When we walk with God, we flourish like trees “planted by streams of water,” strong and firmly rooted in the good-

ness and love of God, bearing good fruit that can help others taste and see the goodness of living for God.

People who reject and turn away from God, however, are lost. They lack a firm foundation and are easily blown away as they seek fleeting pleasures and alluring deceptions in this world.

How do we know we’re on the right path? We need to read, study, and reflect on God’s Word, taking it all to heart. Only in God’s Word and by his Spirit can we find the way to full life and flourishing.

Lord, you have given us your Son and your Word. Help us to read your Scriptures, treasure them in our hearts, and follow the path they set for us. Amen.

WALKING IN THE SHADOW OF DEATH

*Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil,
for you are with me. . . .*
—Psalm 23:4

I went hiking solo on the Appalachian Trail. Before I left for this trip, some friends asked, “Is it safe to hike alone?” Yes, thankfully, it is. You do, however, need to be careful to avoid the companionship of ticks, those tiny arachnids that can make you very sick. And even if I am the only person traveling through a wilderness area, I know I am never alone.

In Psalm 23, God promises to protect his people in the many challenging, difficult circumstances of life. Chief among the promises here is the assurance of God’s presence. God promises to walk with us through green pastures and along babbling brooks when life’s pathways are clear and smooth. God also promises to be with us through thorny stretches, and even through “the darkest valley,” where we may face “the shadow of death,” as

some translations put it. Those are paths that we tremble even to think about.

What assurance does God give of his protection? He promises, “I am with you.” This means that wherever we walk, and in whatever circumstances we find ourselves, we are never alone. Who is our Redeemer? He is Immanuel, which means “God with us.”

Psalm 23 doesn’t promise that our lives will be easy or even safe. But with the promise of God’s enduring presence in our lives, we can walk boldly with him as we seek to serve him wherever we are.

Lord, you have given us your presence through your Holy Spirit. Help us to trust and serve you. Amen.

WALKING WITH A LIGHT

Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.

—Psalm 119:105

My headlamp is a useful piece of gear for hiking and camping. I've used it for walking at night and for finding things in the dark. But during a snowstorm one day, when temperatures dropped well below freezing on the Appalachian Trail, my headlamp battery died, rendering it completely useless.

Thankfully, on our path through life we have a light that won't fail: God's Word.

Psalm 119 is one *long* celebration of God's Word. The psalmist celebrates the eternal truth and reliability of God's Word, calling it a lamp for his feet. Now, this is not like stadium lights, so bright that they seem to change darkness to day. Instead, this is more like my headlamp, for moving along step by step. This light illuminates the step I am taking right now, and then the next one. Knowing God's Word does not

make us God. It reveals the love, faithfulness, and power of the God we depend on. It teaches an obedience that gives us confidence to walk with God on dark pathways.

In this digital age, instant information makes daily tasks easier. Google can show us the fastest route for a trip. YouTube can show us how to hang dry-wall or plant a tree.

But only God's Word can lead us in the paths that God approves and chooses for us.

Lord Jesus, may your Word guide our paths and be the joy of our hearts. Amen.

WALKING WITHOUT FEAR

No lion will be there, nor any ravenous beast; they will not be found there.
—Isaiah 35:9

Hikers frequently ask each other, “Have you seen any bears?”

One morning while I was out walking the Appalachian Trail, a bear suddenly crossed in front of me and scrambled down the hill. As it rooted under a log and watched me pass, I considered what I’d do if it chased me.

It is a comfort to know that on the Way of Holiness described in Isaiah 35, no dangerous or hungry beasts will threaten God’s people.

In many passages Isaiah warns of destruction that will come to God’s people if they don’t turn back to living God’s way. But this chapter brims with joy and confidence for all who remain faithful, seeing that God’s way is best. They are redeemed and restored by God. The desert blooms with colorful flowers.

The struggling and fearful are restored with peace and hope. Like the deer, they leap for joy. The wicked will not lurk on the pathway of holiness. This path is reserved for God’s people.

When we look back at passages like this, we see that they also speak to dangers that we can face in our own turbulent, uncertain times. Ultimately this passage calls us to live faithfully as we walk and wait for the full revelation of God’s kingdom of peace and holiness.

Lord, fill us with your hope and peace as we wait for your kingdom to fully come. Amen.

WALKING THROUGH THE WATERS

"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you."

—Isaiah 43:2

I could see the next shelter as I descended the hiking trail, but a swollen creek crossed my path, and there wasn't a bridge. Seeing no other option, I stepped into the stream and waded carefully across without slipping. It wasn't my first water crossing along the Appalachian Trail, and it wouldn't be my last. Wading through moving water can be dangerous.

In this passage from Isaiah, God assures his people of his presence and protection. When the challenges and crises of life stand in their way like a rushing river, says the Lord, "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine." Using the imagery of surging waters and raging fire, God promises that his people will not be overwhelmed. Later in this chapter, God recounts how he kept Israel safe from the deep wa-

ters and the army of Pharaoh when they crossed the Red Sea (see Exodus 14). God also promises to protect his people from the surging destruction of their own sins. He promises to blot those sins out and to remember them no more.

God, who created us and knows our weaknesses, promises to love us and protect us from dangers both outside and within our own hearts. We see God's faithfulness to his people and, above all, in his Son, Jesus, who fulfills all of God's promises.

Lord Jesus, you protect and provide for us. Help us to trust you in all things and to serve you wherever we are. Amen.

WALKING WITH HUMILITY

Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.

—Proverbs 16:18

Though I use a walking stick for hiking, I have fallen several times. As I crossed Sloan Creek on the Appalachian Trail in northern Virginia, I fell again, and I struggled to get up because of my backpack. I wondered, "Have the many miles and crossings made me a little careless?" After all, Proverbs warns that "pride goes . . . before a fall."

Pride is a vision problem that we all struggle with. In our pride, we fail to see our true place in God's scheme of things. The Bible condemns pride as the very cause of humanity's rebellion and its deadly consequences. Forgetting that we are creatures, we reject God's design for our lives. Thinking that we are superior, we nurture contempt for others.

Humility is the antidote to pride. True humility means clearly seeing our place in re-

lation to God and the world he has made; it means treating God as God, and treating ourselves and others as his loved creatures. That's how God wants us to walk with him—treating everyone with due dignity and grace.

How do we practice humility? We walk humbly with God when we walk with Jesus. By his death, Jesus has redeemed us and set us on the right path. By his example, he leads us. As we follow, filled with his Spirit, we can walk rightly in God's world, respecting and loving everyone.

Lord Jesus, by your obedient life and death, you have shown us how to walk humbly with God. Help us to follow in your steps, serving you and others. Amen.

WALKING ON WATER

Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake.

—Matthew 14:25

At Rock Spring on the Appalachian Trail, I woke to a cold and windy day under threatening clouds. By the time I had finished breakfast, it was sleeting. Soon I was walking in a swirling snowstorm, barely able to see the path ahead.

Walking on snow is the closest I'll ever come to walking on water. Only Jesus can do that.

When Jesus walked across the stormy sea to meet his disciples, they saw that he was more than a teacher. Jesus is God, the Lord of creation. Nature is under his feet. He transcends natural law and controls the wind and the waves.

Inviting Peter to step out of the boat and onto the water, Jesus called Peter to trust in him. And Peter had to trust Jesus fully, embracing his leading and guidance in the slippery,

uncertain place he was walking.

Jesus calls us to trust him too, and, like Peter, we often fail. When we see where we are stepping, our doubts quickly become terrorizing, and we feel ourselves sinking helplessly into the deep. Jesus calls us to look to him alone, and he reaches out his hand to us. Turning to Jesus, we are again in the care of the One who controls the wind and the waves. Jesus will never let us sink.

Lord Jesus, give us the faith to trust you wherever you lead us along the paths of life. In your name we pray. Amen.

WATER OF LIFE

"Whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."
—John 4:14

I sat on a fallen log to rest at Gravel Springs on the Appalachian Trail. There I was able to drink from the crystal clear, icy cold spring water flowing from the mountainside. After a long, hot afternoon of hiking, the water tasted delicious.

Jesus stopped for a rest and a drink of water at a town in Samaria. A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus asked her for a drink. She was surprised that he would talk with her. In those days, Jewish people usually treated Samaritans with contempt. She was even more surprised when Jesus talked about the *living water* that he could give, saying it would become a spring "welling up to eternal life" to quench her thirst forever.

Water is essential for life. Nothing living can survive long without it.

But Jesus was not talking about physical water here. He was referring to himself. Jesus is the living water, and through the work of the Holy Spirit, eternal life will well up like springs of water in the hearts of all who love and follow him (John 7:38-39).

Without water, we can't survive. Without the living water of Jesus, we are spiritually dead. But Jesus promises to give us living water that wells up and flows from within us, refreshing us and others in our daily walk with him.

Lord Jesus, fill our hearts with your Holy Spirit so that living waters of eternal life will well up and flow from within as we walk with you and serve you each day. Amen.

WALKING TO A DESTINATION

They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid.
—Mark 10:32

Many hikers start the Appalachian Trail at Springer Mountain in Georgia. Only a fraction, however, complete the entire trail. To make it all the way up Mount Katahdin in Maine at the end of the trail, the destination must become an unshakable goal.

Though Jesus meandered through Galilee and Judea during his ministry, he had one final, unshakable destination in mind, and it was deadly. When he told his disciples he was going to Jerusalem, they were astonished. They knew only too well the ugly jealousy and hatred that the religious leaders had for Jesus. They feared for his life, not to mention their own.

Though he had told them about this before, Jesus' disciples hadn't grasped the purpose of his mission. He was

going to fulfill the Scriptures' promise of a suffering servant, who would take the sins of fallen humanity on his shoulders (Isaiah 52:13-53:12). He went to Jerusalem to die on a cross there—in order to give us new life and eternal hope. Thank God that he didn't quit!

We all face hardships in this journey of life. When we feel like quitting, we need to remind ourselves that Jesus kept marching toward his destination. And now that we are freed from sin and death through him, we can share Jesus' hope and peace with everyone around us.

Lord Jesus, despite the hardship and suffering you endured, you never gave up on redeeming us. Help us never to give up on you. Amen.

COMING IN THE NAME OF THE LORD

"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!"

—Luke 19:38

The mountain view across a vast meadow on the Appalachian Trail was lightly dusted with snow under a brilliant blue sky. I could see for miles across the valley. It was Palm Sunday, and I paused to reflect on the first Palm Sunday, when Jesus and the crowds descended the Mount of Olives and headed into Jerusalem.

Spying him, crowds of people were filled with patriotic fervor. Hailing him as their king, they laid cloaks and palm branches on the path in front of him, shouting, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" Somewhat mistaken, they believed he would be Israel's national savior who could free them from the rule of the Roman Empire. But Jesus had come for a far greater purpose—and just a few days later the same crowds

were shouting, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

Jesus *is* the Savior—not merely of Israel or any other nation, but of all people who believe in him. In his mercy, God gave the crowds not what they wanted but what they—and we—needed most.

Later on Palm Sunday in Appalachia, I met a Christian brother named Dave. Standing on the trail, we prayed together, celebrating the Savior.

Jesus saves us from our sinful selves and gives us the peace and assurance we need in order to live and walk with God.

Lord, our wants are so many and are often so shallow and frivolous. Thank you for giving us what we need: new life and peace in you. Amen.

A HEAVY BURDEN

A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Rufus and Alexander, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross.
—Mark 15:21

After I stocked up on supplies, my pack felt heavier as I made the long climb to Blackrock Hut on the Appalachian Trail. It was Good Friday, and as I struggled a bit, I was reminded of the terrible weight Simon of Cyrene had to carry on the first Good Friday long ago.

The Bible tells us very little about Simon. We learn that he was from Cyrene, a Greek city in North Africa, and that he had two sons. We don't know what had brought Simon to Jerusalem, but we do know that some Roman soldiers forced him to carry Jesus' cross. That grotesque instrument of torture could have weighed as much as 165 pounds (75 kg).

Toiling through the narrow streets of Jerusalem, Simon walked along near Jesus as he staggered toward execution outside the city. We don't know

what Simon thought about him, but what a sight Jesus must have been—exhausted, bleeding, and mangled from being flogged, humiliated, and brutalized. Though he carried the heavy cross, Simon may well have felt more sorrow for Jesus than for himself.

We too should feel sorrow for Jesus. Even more, we can be thankful for his costly love. And just as he gave himself for us, he calls us to choose his path of costly love and to follow him.

Lord Jesus, we can't imagine the pain and suffering you bore for our sin. Help us to love and serve you with all of our hearts. Amen.

EARLY-MORNING JOY

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb.

—Luke 24:1

On Easter Sunday morning I woke around 4:30 a.m. at Hightop Hut on the Appalachian Trail. Unable to sleep, I got up and hiked for an hour in the dark, carefully dodging the many rocks along the trail. Though I caught only a glimpse of the sunrise, I thought about the resurrection of Jesus as I walked.

Very early “on the first day of the week,” a few women who had been following Jesus plodded to the tomb where his crucified, dead body had been laid on Friday. Though filled with grief, they brought spices to anoint his body out of love and respect. To their astonishment, however, they found that the stone sealing the tomb was rolled away and that the grave was empty! Then, even more surprising, two angels in blinding white clothes greeted

the women, saying: “He is not here; he has risen!”

Can you imagine the women’s surprise and confusion as they raced back to Jerusalem? Though they didn’t understand, they were bursting with joy: *Jesus is alive!* They couldn’t keep this news to themselves: they *had* to tell others. And the rest of the New Testament announces the same joy that these women discovered that morning.

Filled with this same joy, we too should share the good news of Jesus with the people we meet on the paths of life.

Lord Jesus, rekindle in our hearts each day the joy of your resurrection, and help us to share our joy with everyone we meet. Amen.

A SURPRISING WALK

They got up at once and returned to Jerusalem.

—Luke 24:33

On the Appalachian Trail, I hiked more than 10 hours one day to Elk Pond Mountain. Buoyed by spectacular views of Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains, I clipped along in the morning. But by late afternoon I was dragging.

That's not how it was for two followers of Jesus, though, as they retraced the seven-mile journey back to Jerusalem from the village of Emmaus.

Luke doesn't tell us much about them, but earlier that day they were deeply engaged in discussing Jesus' death and their surprise about his empty tomb. They didn't even notice when Jesus himself quietly joined them on the road. Hearing their bewilderment, Jesus challenged their understanding about him, clarifying that the Messiah came to suffer and die before rising again to enter his glory. When they

reached Emmaus, they invited Jesus in to eat. And in the breaking of the bread "their eyes were opened and they recognized him" as the risen Lord! Then Jesus suddenly vanished. Forgetting all fatigue, they jumped up and raced back to Jerusalem.

Following his resurrection, Jesus was full of surprises, and they advanced his purposes in fulfilling God's plan of salvation. Even today, though we know some things about the final outcome of God's plan, we can't be sure of all the details. So let's be sure to keep worshiping and serving him as he leads us by his Spirit.

Lord Jesus, you are risen, indeed! Help us to be on the lookout for your on-going work in our lives and in our world. Amen.

MOVING OUT

"You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."
—Acts 1:8

Climbing "The Priest" on the Appalachian Trail was quite a challenge. Though it's not the tallest mountain I have climbed, I struggled to the top. Sections of the trail were barely visible, forcing me to scramble over rocks in some places. The splendid views from the summit, though, were worth the effort.

The last scene of Jesus' earthly ministry took place on a hill called the Mount of Olives. Jesus went there often with his disciples. After much walking over three years, they had reached a turning point in their journey together. There Jesus gave his disciples a startling command—to spread the word about him from Jerusalem to the surrounding areas of Judea and Samaria, and "to the ends of the earth."

Jesus' disciples were completely unprepared and un-

equipped to accomplish this task. But he also gave them a promise. After he ascended to heaven, he would continue to be present with them through the Holy Spirit. With and through the Holy Spirit, the disciples were to begin sharing the good news about Jesus to all nations.

The book of Acts and the rest of the New Testament show that Jesus' disciples did that. And where they left off, new disciples took over, all the way down through generations of Christ-followers to us. Thankfully, we have the promised Holy Spirit to lead the way for us as well.

Lord Jesus, fill us with your Spirit to share your good news and love to the ends of the earth. In your name, Amen.

IN THE NAME OF JESUS, WALK!

"In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."

—Acts 3:6

I had to watch my steps while hiking through a stretch called Raven Rocks on the Appalachian Trail in West Virginia. Giant boulders line the trail there, and sharp rocks litter the path. I gingerly danced through them, knowing that an injured ankle could end my walking for a while.

Soon after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost (Acts 2), Peter and John met a man who had never been able to walk. He saw them entering the temple one day and asked them for money. Peter said he had no money but would gladly give what he did have: "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth," Peter said, "walk." Peter took the man's hand, and the man's feet and ankles instantly became strong. So he began "walking and jumping, and praising God."

Stories like this one from the early church demonstrate the healing power of Jesus as his disciples spread the good news of salvation in Christ. Many of these stories include physical healing, and sometimes even the dead are raised to life.

Today we still see Jesus' healing power at work, but not always so dramatically. Yet even if our bodies are not healed now, our spirits are made whole with God's peace and hope. And the good news about Jesus empowers us to praise God as we wait for the day of his coming again.

Lord Jesus, give us the heart and zeal to share what we have as we spread your good news everywhere. Amen.

“TELL ME, PLEASE”

The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about . . . ?”
—Acts 8:34

At Cove Mountain on the Appalachian Trail I had shelter from an all-night rain. The next morning I was back on the trail. No one needed to tell me where to go. I headed north, as I did every other day of my three-week trek.

Philip, however, whom the Spirit called in our story today, had instructions on where to go. An angel of the Lord told Philip to go south to the desert road leading from Jerusalem to Gaza. There Philip met an Ethiopian official who was returning home from Jerusalem. The Spirit then led Philip to stay near the man and to help him understand a passage he was reading from Isaiah. Philip explained that the passage was about Jesus, the Son of God, who came to die for our sin, and then Philip baptized the Ethiopian, just as the man asked him to do.

Through his Spirit and the Word, the Lord still commands us everyday. God calls us to walk in his ways, loving the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and loving our neighbors as ourselves.

Does God speak to us in other ways, such as the way he spoke to Philip? God certainly can speak to us in dramatic ways, but more often the Spirit of God speaks to us in quiet, subtle ways through his Word and with the help of other believers (like Philip). We should always be following God’s Word and listening for his voice, especially as he nudges us to share the love of Jesus.

Lord Jesus, help us to listen for your voice and to share your love with the people we meet every day. Amen.

WALKING TOGETHER

"Everyone who believes in [Jesus] receives forgiveness of sins through his name."
—Acts 10:43

On my way to Big Meadows on the Appalachian Trail, I walked for some distance with Dave, an Australian "bloke." We chatted and shared notes and complaints about the trail. Though it was pleasant to talk with a fellow hiker, it was challenging to keep an eye on the trail and to keep up with Dave.

Acts 10 tells us the apostle Peter walked more than a day's journey conversing with some Gentiles. As a devout Jew who would have shunned contact with non-Jews, this was a new experience for Peter. But God had explained to him in a vivid dream that he wanted people of all nations to be saved and to worship him. So when Peter learned that a Roman centurion, who worshiped God, needed to hear the good news about Jesus, Peter went with some Roman soldiers to Joppa to meet their commanding

officer. That day Peter shared the good news of Jesus and baptized the centurion and many others there who believed and were welcomed into the family of God.

Thank God that Jesus has destroyed the walls separating us from people of other nations and cultural backgrounds. All who believe "are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:29). Still, we often tend to rebuild walls that keep us apart. Like Jesus' apostles, we need to learn to embrace others who are different from us—and when we do, we experience the breadth of God's love.

Lord Jesus, you came so that we can walk together with all of your followers and share your good news of peace and hope. Amen.

ON THE MOVE FOR JESUS

I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers . . . in danger in the city, in danger in the country. . . . I have labored and have often gone without sleep . . . and . . . without food. . . .
—2 Corinthians 11:26-27

After stopping for supplies in Front Royal, Virginia, along the Appalachian Trail, I enjoyed a delicious breakfast of buckwheat pancakes smothered in maple syrup. And sleeping in a bed the night before had felt luxurious after many nights of sleeping on the ground.

The apostle Paul had known many more hardships, however, in his travels to spread the good news of Jesus. Called to be a witness to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15-16), Paul traveled to countless destinations, often on foot. And not only were many of his journeys rough, but he also frequently suffered at the hands of hostile people. At times he was beaten, flogged, and even pelted with stones. He was shipwrecked three times, and he was thrown into prison. Several times he had to flee for his life. (For more about

these struggles, see Acts 13-28 and 2 Corinthians 11-12.)

Of all of Jesus' disciples and followers, Paul may have suffered the most on his many journeys. Yet he boasted in his weakness so that the power of Jesus could be revealed. Ultimately he boasted in Christ, who suffered so much more for him and for us. Our own hardships too reveal the weakness that brings us closer to Jesus, our Savior and our strength.

Lord, when we are weak, we are strong for you. Help us to let go of ourselves and to trust your working in us as we serve you and others. Amen.

WALK IN THE WAY OF LOVE

Follow God's example, therefore . . . and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.
—Ephesians 5:1-2

As I neared the end of my hike on the Appalachian Trail, I reflected on the hikers I'd met along the way. I didn't catch many given names, but I could remember some hikers' trail names: "K-Bar," "Poppins," "Pioneer," "Red Dawn," "Rhino," "Shorts," "Motel," "Tank," "Rosie Eagle," and "Two-Step," to name a few.

These "trail aliases" don't reveal much, but they may hint at traits or preferences. Most of my conversations with hikers centered on miles hiked, the next stream, weather, gear, or the trail itself. Some conversations took place for a few minutes while resting along the trail; others took place over a few evenings at the same campsite. Sadly, those fellow hikers and our conversations are now fast becoming wisps of fading memories.

How much meaning do we give to the brief moments when we meet with fellow travelers on life's journey? God, who created *every* human person who has ever lived, knows each one intimately— and that makes every person we meet precious. Though it may not be possible to share the word of Christ with every person we meet, perhaps even our most fleeting encounters can be opportunities to share something of his love. To cultivate an attitude of love surely means keeping our eyes on Jesus and letting his love for us flow out to everyone.

Lord Jesus, as we walk with you each day, help us to share your love with the people that we meet.
Amen.

WALKING BY GOD'S LIGHT

The city does not need the sun or the moon . . . for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light. . . .
—Revelation 21:23-24

After returning home from my long hike on the Appalachian Trail, I still walk every day. Now my walks are on city side-walks, where I frequently meet neighbors pushing strollers and walking dogs.

The final scenes in the Bible portray life in a city where God lives with us and provides all its light. This city also includes “the river of the water of life” and the tree of life for healing the nations.

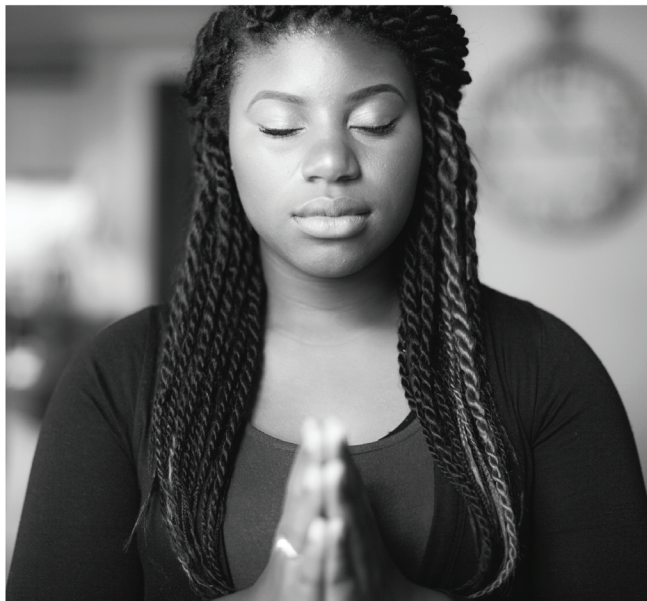
Soon after God completed his masterpiece of creation, our human parents disobeyed and plunged this world into misery. From that tragic moment on, the Bible records the depressing consequences of sin. At the same time, thankfully, we see God’s salvation plan unfolding, despite the forces aligned against it.

Finally, in Revelation, we see life restored and made new in a city. But this is no ordinary city. The sun is not needed—God’s glory gives it light, and the nations walk by this light. Jesus has completely conquered sin. God’s children freely live and work and play here, flourishing in full life as God intends for us.

Without this city of light at the end of the tunnel of human history, we could easily be tempted to give up in despair. It takes faith to keep walking with hope toward what God has promised. Like the countless believers who have gone before us, we need to walk faithfully, trusting God as we serve him.

Lord Jesus, help us to trust you as we walk in and toward your light. Amen.

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