

I like to go for walks, largely because at this point in my life, I’m out of options. My days of running and jumping are long gone, unless I’d like to undergo surgery. So as long as I don’t miss a step or fall into a hole, walking is a good, low-impact form of exercise for me—pretty much the only one left.

Fortunately, I have come to enjoy a good walk, and we live in a region where there are abundant scenic trails. Many studies have suggested that walking is very beneficial, which has given rise to a subculture in which reaching your ‘step count’ is a big deal. So on one hand, walking is second nature for most of us—we were designed to do it. But on the other hand, we seem to be paying more attention to walking than ever before, which is a good thing, and it lines up with a simple yet deep thought about life with God.

What I mean is this: In today’s Epistle Lesson, the apostle writes “Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.” As you have received Jesus, so walk in him. The idea of walking in Jesus invites our consideration—in other words, it is supposed to get us thinking, what does this mean?

There’s actually a series of comparisons happening throughout this entire passage, all of which are meant to get us thinking creatively about life with Jesus. The theme of baptism is woven into the discussion, which makes sense, because the apostle is ultimately talking about Christian identity. And according to the apostle Paul, Christian identity is nothing less than connection with Christ—not just using Jesus as an example to follow but experiencing a spiritual link with Jesus that pours life and grace into us.

This is reflected in the very words Paul uses. “...so walk in him.” There are all kinds of things the apostle could have said: Walk with him; walk like him; but instead he writes ‘walk in him.’ This concept of locating our ‘selves’ in Jesus is something Paul returns to again and again in his writing, and at the very least it indicates union with Jesus; connection with Jesus; we are now attached to Jesus in such a way that everything that is true of Him is true of us. If you let yourself ponder that, it’s truly astounding. The way God the Father regards His Son is the same way He regards you, because you are joined to His Son. This is where the blessing of baptism really comes into play. This union—connection—linking—joining to Jesus was forged at your baptism. Paul says as much beginning at verse 11: “In him [Jesus] you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.”

Now here’s one of the comparisons I was talking about. Paul says that baptism is a newer, greater form of circumcision. It puts off the old flesh of the sinful self, not by a surgical procedure, but by something even more dramatic. Paul says that the circumcision of Christ—or baptism, if you will--consists of being buried with Jesus and raised with Him. Do you hear how

active this is? My old self, corrupted and ruined by sin, has been buried in Jesus' tomb. In its place, a new person, clean and free, has been raised to life because Jesus was raised to life. Baptism makes me personally involved in the things Jesus did to rescue humanity. That's why Paul goes on:

"And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross."

Baptism writes you into the story of Jesus. It creates a connection between you and Jesus so that he gets all your bad stuff and you get all his good stuff. God looks at you with the affection and love He has for his Son. You can live with **that** as the foundation of your identity—as the main thing that makes you **you**. Accepting this is true is what faith is made of. So we can trace back to the beginning and here it is again, "...as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith..."

Quickly, what does that walking in Jesus look like? Well, first of all, it is **intentional**. If you are walking for exercise, for example, you have to carve the time out of your schedule to do it; you should probably have the right footwear on; there is some deciding to do and preparation involved. Walking in Christ is very similar. Your union with Jesus is real—and every day you face choices that will either nurture that connection or strain it. Will you feed your lifeline to Jesus or will you ignore it? Listen to what Paul says here: "...as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught." Walking in Christ involves being taught the truth of His Word; it involves learning as much as you can about Jesus. This language is so great of being rooted in Him, and built up in Him. We are being urged here to cultivate our link to Jesus by digging into the truth of God's Word.

That brings me to point number two: Walking in Jesus also means **identifying and avoiding obstacles**. Many public trails are well marked and some even have barriers or fences to keep you from danger. If you're walking a private trail, it might not be so easy, and in any case, you can't mark off every root, rock or stump. You just have to watch out. It's no different spiritually. That's why Paul writes, "See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ." There are philosophies, lies, and human traditions that can trip you up, injure your faith, or even prove fatal. We don't have time to list them all; but the apostle gives us the key to recognizing them and avoiding them when he says "...and not according to Christ." You can get right to the heart of any worldview or philosophy by asking 'what does this say about Jesus?' Does it get Jesus right? Does it address Jesus at all? Again, what this demands of us is an intentional process of learning who Jesus is and why it matters to get him right. After all, you and I are connected to Him by baptism and faith.

Point number three is this: walking in Jesus only happens **step by step**. Some people don't like hiking because it's too slow; but it is what it is. Walking is one step at a time and it is not a sprint. When you're hiking, you want to move at a decent pace, but part of the point is to enjoy

the journey; to take in the sights and sounds. You can't skip through certain parts of the trail, you can only go through them one step at a time. Sound familiar? Walking in Christ happens day by day, sometimes moment by moment. Think back to the language Paul uses. You are rooted in Christ, but roots don't grow deeply overnight. You are built up in Christ, but every building project I've ever seen takes time. Walking in Christ is deliberate and growing in this union takes time. There may be parts of this path that you don't like a whole lot, but then there are glimpses of beauty that Jesus enables you to see that make it all worth it.

And finally, the fourth point is that walking in Christ results in **abundant thanksgiving**. There are moments on just about every trail walk where I'm just happy to be there—happy to be able to walk; happy at the wonder of the created world; it feels good and is good for me to be out there. That's the outcome of walking in Christ, according to Paul. Once more: "...as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, *abounding in thanksgiving*."

If you deliberately dwell on your union with Jesus, and do so day by day, step by step, you'll find an unspeakable thankfulness on your walk. Some parts of the path will be completely joyous and other parts will be grueling—the most difficult terrain you've ever seen. But no matter what is going on at a given moment, as you walk in Christ, you'll hear these words: You are my beloved child. I am well pleased with you." It was true of Jesus; it's true of you. What else is there to do but give thanks?