

Cross Walk

Purifying by Crucifying

September 3, 2023

Today we're learning to take the steps to walk with Jesus! Because, like *all* walking, it's only a two-part process, but it's *easy* to get tripped up and *stop* before we *start*! So, to *steady* yourself *before* you *stumble*, ask yourself this: **What's in the way of your walk?**

Well last week we heard how Jesus likes to lead us through some scary places because **being made new means leaving the life we know** – and we *fear* the *foreign*! And as long as we're *afraid* to make *that trade* **sanctifying can be terrifying**. But as Bruce pointed out, that's great news! Cuz once fear gets our *attention*, it opens us up to *His help*, fills us with *trust* in *His ways*, and encourages us to *follow His lead*! Which is why Jesus doesn't mind making death threats to scare us straight!



[Like when He bluntly warned everyone:] Whoever wants to be My disciple must *deny* themselves and *take up* their cross and follow Me. [And *where* do you carry a cross? ... *To death!*] – Matthew 16:24 NIV



So it might be *scary*, but for Him to *get* us, *open* us, *fill* us, and *encourage* us, we need to *know* – something's gonna *kill* us! Cuz, **the path that leads us to life, passes through suffering and death!** But, in *addition* to all that fruitful *fear* death *produces*, there's *another* reason *why* we have to *die*:



What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. – 1 Corinthians 15:36 NIV



Get it? You can't plant a new tree with a seed still living on an *old* branch. It's gotta *leave* the tree to achieve its *full* potential. Cuz **there's no new life while attached to the old one!** And we gotta give up the *way* we live in this world the *same way* a *seed's* gotta give up the *way* it lives on its *tree*! And though our *worldly ways* supply *physical needs* for our *physical life*, as long as we're attached to *them*, God can't grow us into what *He* wants us to *be*.

[Y'see:] Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and *dies*, it *remains* only a single seed. But if it *dies*, it produces many seeds. Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. – John 12:24-26 NIV

We have to walk away from the ways of our worldly life to grow into our eternal life. And that's *terrifying*! Cuz it means having the courage to cut off all the *comfort* of our old ways. It means betting *this* life on God's promise of a *better* life. **It means letting go of what you know to grab hold of what you hope.** Cuz when it comes to a *perfect* life of *full* potential *it's all or nothing*. And when the ways of *this world* stand in the way of your *eternal life*, *hate* doesn't seem so strong.

For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. [But:] Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, - 2 Corinthians 5:1-2 NIV

We can't live up there while we're down here, and as we grow closer to God *spiritually*, we start dying to grow closer to Him *physically*! And that changes how we see our relationship with this life:

Don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the *world* becomes an *enemy of God*. - James 4:4 NIV



[Which makes it clear that you have to:] Put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires [for this worldly life]; to be made *new* in the attitude of your *minds* ... [so we can] put on the new self, created to be like God [and to live an *eternal* life]. – Ephesians 4:22-24 NIV



If our worldly ways are the obstacles to our eternal life, **what do we do?!**



Be very careful, then, how you live – not as unwise but as *wise* [And how do we do that?] ... be filled with the Spirit, [cuz we'll instinctually *follow the lead* of whoever *fills our heart*] - Ephesians 5:15, 18 NIV



So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will *not* gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit. – Galatians 5:16-17 NIV

[And] If you [stay attached to those old ways to] live according to the sinful nature you will die [never having grown your own life]; but if *by the Spirit* you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are *led by the Spirit of God* are sons of God. – Romans 8:12-14 NIV

Did you catch that? Being “led by the Spirit” means our misdeeds are “put to death” “by the Spirit”. Because *all* the purifying work of the Holy Spirit comes from *two simple steps*: Filling and killing! Cuz **it's gotta be out with the old before it can be in with the new!**

And just like any other *walk*, one step *naturally* leads to the *other*. Cuz **as we fill with His will to follow His lead**, *inevitably*, **we kill our old ways to live a new life**. And that makes more room for more *filling*, which leads us to more *killing*, and on and on it goes until we reach our full potential. Because just like any other walk **the more you take those two steps the further you'll go**. And it's always the same trade at work in our spiritual journey:

He must become greater; ; [So inevitably] I must become less. – John 3:30 NIV

[And] Those who love the Lord [will naturally grow to] hate evil. – Psalm 97:10 NIV

[However, to actually] Turn from evil and [thereby] do good; [we have to put the process in motion; and we start when we take action to] seek peace and pursue it. - Psalm 34:14 NIV

And that first step is a *doozy*! Cuz once we *know* that the Spirit *filling* means the Spirit *killing* – **the threat of death can hold us back from leaving our old life**. And we'll *stop* before we *start* if we *wonder* and *worry* about which *old ways* we have to leave for the *unknown* and *new*.

[Because] The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. – Matthew 26:41 NIV

So how do we *motivate* our flesh to *take action*? Well, George MacDonald has got a great *pep talk* to *help* with the first step of our *walk*: **“You will be dead, so long as you refuse to die.”**

Isn't that nice? It's a sweet reminder that **you're already doomed if you don't walk away from your old ways** – cuz everything down here dies! But it also means you've got *nothing to lose* and *everything to gain* by trusting God's truth and taking a step. Remember, down here, we only ever have the *two* options: **stay where you are and wait to die** or **leave it behind to go looking for life!** And since *fear* is a part of *either* option – why not see where the path with hope takes you?



And *O! MacDonald* made that point in a much *softer* way when he wrote the *children's* fantasy novel **“The Princess and the Goblin”** In it, an 8-year-old *princess* named Irene discovers an *attic room* where her fairy grandmother appears from time to time. And when Irene wants a way to stay more *consistently* connected, *grammy* gives her a *ring* attached to a ball of string that *she* keeps.

“But I can't see it,” says Irene. **“The thread is too fine for you to see it. You can only feel it.”** So Irene tests it and sure enough, it works! **“Now listen,”** says her grandmother, **“if you ever find yourself in any danger, put the ring under your pillow, and follow the thread wherever it leads.”**

“Oh, how delightful! It'll lead me to you!” **“Yes, but remember, it may seem to you a very roundabout way indeed ... but you must not doubt the thread. Of one thing you may be sure, whether you hold your end or not, I am always holding mine.”**

Well, later on, little Irene hears a group of *goblins* break into her house! So she secures her ring and begins to follow the thread – knowing it's leading her to grandma and safety. But, to her dismay it takes her *outside*, and straight *toward* the *goblins'* dark cave!

But still, she *trusts* and *follows*. And after the thread leads her inside, it takes her through a *series* of confusing passages and right into a wall of stones! A dead end. **“Well,”** she thinks, **“at least I have the string to guide me back out.”** But, when she *tries* to follow it *backwards*, she *loses* its feeling. And she realizes, **the thread can only be felt forward.**

So she bursts into tears *alone* and *afraid* – but eventually comes to grips with her only option: she has to feel her way forward ... *through the wall*. So the small and scared child summons all her strength to start tearing down the wall stone by stone.

And though her fingers are bleeding, she pulls and pulls – when *suddenly* she hears a familiar *voice*. It's Irene's good friend *Curdie* who has been *imprisoned* in the *goblins'* dark cave!

Astounded, he asks, **“However did you come here?”** Irene replies that for some reason, her grandmother had sent her, **“and now I've found why!”** But as her friend heads *out*, *Irene heads in!* **“Where are you going? That's where I couldn't get out.”**

“I know,” she says, **“but this is the way my thread goes, and I must follow it.”** And as she *does*, she escapes to *prove* that **the thread is trustworthy because the one who gave it is trustworthy.**

So **is that how you feel about where the Lord is leading you?** Cuz that's the goal! Once we believe He's trustworthy, even an 8-year-old girl has the courage to walk through certain death and live!



And when you start to feel the fear, don't forget, God gave us a life-line just as reliable as *Irene's* string; **our thread is God's Word**. And it lights up every scary place His Spirit ever leads! Cuz we're told:

Your Word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path. – Psalm 119:105 NIV



His Word shows us the way to our life. So **to fearlessly follow His ways, we need to fully fill with His Word!** And anticipate an adventure because just like the thread that led Irene through some painful obstacles to overcome, **Scripture can sting while it saves**. It *does* give us the lines that lead to the Lord, but **it confuses and convicts before it comforts**. Cuz to fill us with His will while He kills off our old ways, God's Word pulls double-duty as both His faithful way and fearful weapon called



The sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. – Ephesians 6:17 NIV



Cuz when we walk according to God's Word, we're not just led to our destination, we're *trimmed* and *transformed* to survive once we arrive!

It turns out, when we follow His thread through His Word, it challenges and changes us in both *profound* and *painful* ways. But with *purpose!* All **the killing and filling is meant to prune and prepare** us to live our new life. And despite the pain along the way, in the end, it's always worth it!

Irene's journey killed off a sheltered, scared, and helpless child to produce a bold, brave, and wise princess. And likewise, the humble, confident, and faithful royalty *you're* meant to be up there, can't come to life until the selfish, scared, and skeptical you gets put down, down here.

[Cuz] Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

[So] Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. - Galatians 5:24-25 NIV

It can feel like *God* may be leading you down *dark paths* to *dead ends*, but **the ultimate destination is always into His arms**. And if we just *keep* following *forward*, we'll prove it when we get there! **We just have to know that GOD is trustworthy** and keep taking things one step at a time, fully believing that the places where we're frozen by fear are just temporary. And we can push through!

Remember, Jesus wasn't led *TO* the cross He was led *THROUGH* the cross. And likewise, **the Spirit doesn't lead us TO death, He leads us THROUGH death; to LIFE!** Because just like everything else God grows, every one of His children "does not come to life unless it dies"

So no, **carrying our cross is no walk in the park!** It's a walk of faith and it's an exercise in love. It's what needs to happen for God to *get* us, *open* us, *fill* us, and *encourage* us to let go of our old life and grab hold of the life we've always dreamed of. And because He knows how hard that can be, He promises to walk with us every step of the way, to push us through every obstacle.

So, **what's in the way of your walk?** It doesn't matter. Cuz when the Lord leads, if you can summon the strength to just put one foot in front of the other, **even death itself can't keep you from life!**

Father God, thank You for loving me in spite of my sin; forgive me and cleanse me by the sacrifice of Your Son, my Savior; and free me and lead me by Your Spirit and Word, as I seek to trust and follow Jesus Christ, as the Lord of my life. Amen.