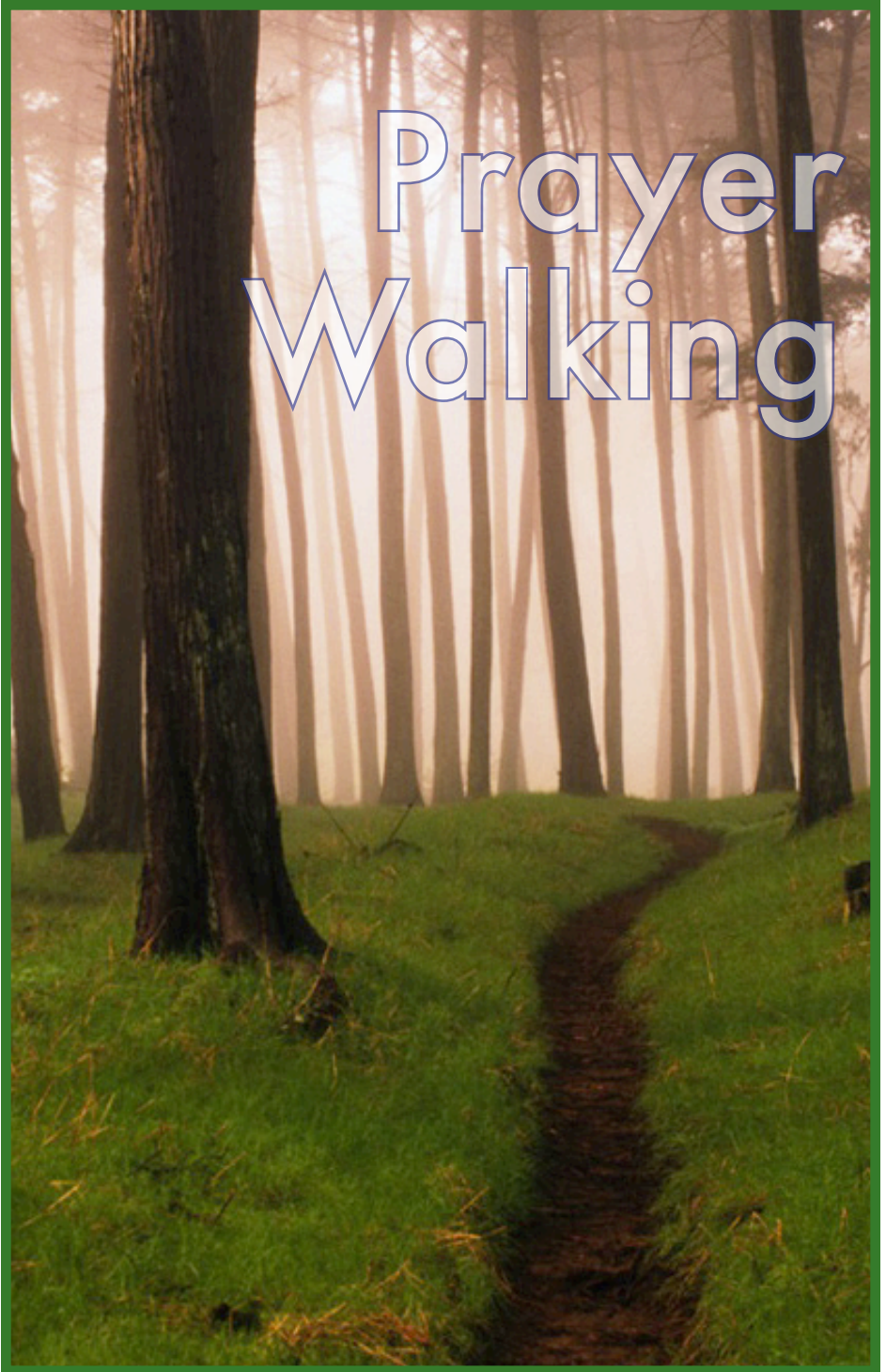


Prayer Walking



— Prayer Walking —

What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

— Micah 6:8

Solvitur Ambulando is an ancient Latin phrase that can be translated, “*it is solved by walking.*”¹ Over the centuries walking has helped many people step away from the chaos, think through problems, make decisions, and come back with a plan.

Perhaps this is why the Christian life is often described as a pilgrimage, a journey, a spiritual walk with God that strengthens our relationship with him, and in turn, deepens our love and concern for others.

Long before they had a Temple, God’s ancient followers developed a prayer tradition — and it was mobile. David Hansen writes:

*“From Abraham to David, the Hebrews were a shepherding, moving folk. They lived out-of-doors easily, though not painlessly. Following the scent of green pastures, they passed through death valleys, ascended passes and crossed rivers. Wandering lay at the core of their psyche from the beginning, and it shaped their life with God.”*²

Both Jesus and Paul say, “watch and pray” (Matthew 26:41; Colossians 4:2) and a powerful way to “*watch and pray*” is to **Walk and Pray**. Take a stroll up the trail, around the neighborhood, or through the park, in conversation with God. Talk to God about your problems and decisions. Ask God to help form your plans. Allow the walk to fuel the prayer, and the prayer to inform the walk. After all, “*Elijah didn’t hear the still small voice in a library*” (1 Kings 19:11-13).³

Praying outdoors while walking was a way of life for God’s people long ago. They didn’t drive or fly to their destinations. They walked, often for hours, days, or even weeks. And during these long trips, they would think about God and pray while they walked. In fact, there is a collection of fifteen psalms that seem to have been written as traveling psalms. They are usually called Psalms of Ascent. Scholars continue to study their origin and purpose, but most commentators understand them in light of the prevailing tradition that they were sung or recited by pilgrims traveling to Jerusalem for the three annual feasts that were commanded in Exodus 34.⁴

Prayer Walking is simply putting feet to your prayers. Instead of sitting, kneeling or standing, as you pray — walk. Instead of bowing and closing your eyes, keep your eyes wide open to what God might show you. Some have called Prayer Walking praying “onsite” with “insight.”

Prayer Walking is not about praying constantly with a never-ending flow of words. It is about quietly noticing, remembering, pondering, and reflecting on God, on yourself, and on the growth of your inner life.

And let’s not forget — we are not the only ones walking.

*Be sober, be vigilant;
because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion,
seeking whom he may devour.*

— 1 Peter 5:8 —

PRAYER WALKING IN THE BIBLE:

Today’s travel is filled with technological distractions. If we travel by car, we have radio talk shows, podcasts, and music. If we fly, we can bury ourselves in our phones, laptops, tablets, or an onboard movie. In ancient times the primary source of transportation was walking, and there is no doubt that God’s ancient followers combined their long, thoughtful days and weeks of walking with prayer.

1. **Enoch** was a man who walked with God (Gen 5:24). And while we are not told much about him, we do learn something about the faith moving through his family. His great grandson, Noah, became the only righteous man God could find on the planet.
2. **Abraham** was the beginning of the nation that would settle in the land Canaan. He was told by God, “*Look around from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west ...Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you.*” (Gen 13:14-17).
3. **Joshua and Caleb** walked through the land of Canaan and reported to Moses (Num 13).
4. **Psalms of Ascent** (Psalms 120-134) were sung/prayed while traveling up to Jerusalem.
5. **Jesus** walked from village to village, from north to south, teaching the Twelve as they traveled through Galilee, Decapolis, Perea, Samaria, Judea, Tyre, and Sidon.
6. **The Apostle Paul** made three missionary journeys (Acts 13-20) and walked extensively through the cities of Asia Minor planting churches.

PRAYER WALKING SCIENCE:

When we go for a walk, our heart pumps faster. More blood and oxygen is circulating through our body, not just to the muscles, but to all the organs — including the brain. So, our thoughts are clearer and more creative.

And because we don't have to devote much conscious effort to the act of walking, our attention can be given to prayer. We can talk to God. We can overlay the world we are walking through with thoughts and concerns from our job, our family, our spiritual condition, and more. Walking through God's creation provides the energy, courage, and calm we need to put our thoughts and feelings into words. I like the way Ferris Jabr describes how walking helps us think:

“Studies suggest that spending time in green spaces — gardens, parks, forests — can rejuvenate the mental resources that man-made environments deplete ... Attention is a limited resource that continually drains throughout the day. A crowded intersection — rife with pedestrians, cars, and billboards — bats our attention around. In contrast, walking past a pond in a park allows our mind to drift casually from one sensory experience to another, from wrinkling water to rustling reeds.” ⁵

PRAYER WALKING THEMES:

Think of your walking geography as a large prayer labyrinth to walk through and pray. In fact, your own neighborhood or a nearby park could function as this labyrinth. All through the area there will be corners to turn and places to change direction. At each corner your prayer can change its focus as you make the turn.

1. **You and God's Creation** — As you begin your walk, silently notice how God is everywhere in his creation, growing and alive all around you.
2. **You and God** — As you make the first turn, start to pray about your own faith.
3. **You and Your Family** — Make the next turn and pray about your family. You could change from one family member to another as you make turns through your walk.
4. **You and Your Ministry** — Perhaps the next series of turns could be opportunities to pray for your church, your city, and for wisdom to help individual people.
5. **You and Scripture** — What words and phrases from scripture does God bring to mind? Why are they arising in your heart and mind?

6. **You and Your Future** — Open your mind to possible changes God wants to make in your life. Is he taking you in a new direction? Ask him to give you guidance.
7. **You and Spiritual Formation** — Is God forming your spirit? Is your heart soft and open to him? How can he form holy habits within you, and purge you of ungodly habits? Are you working with him or resisting him?

If you need to, find a place to pause in your walk and write down what you are thinking about and what you are learning. You may want to pause several times.

As you anticipate the end of your time of prayer walking, include a stretch of slow walking that includes Breath Prayers (examples) —

Inhale — “Lord Jesus”

Exhale — “Have mercy on me”

Inhale — “Create in me”

Exhale — “A clean heart O God”

Inhale — “Not my will”

Exhale — “But yours be done”

Inhale — “When I am still”

Exhale — “I know you are God”

Perhaps the most profound relationship between walking and praying reveals itself at the end of the walk. You are back at your house or your office with fresh thoughts and ideas, ready to act on a decision you have made or a conversation you need to have. You have once again, with the help of your God, made peace with your circumstances or life situation, and you are ready to meet the rest of the day ahead.

1 Bonnie Smith Whitehouse, *Afoot and Lighthearted: A Journal for Mindful Walking* (New York: Clarkson Potter Publishers, 2019), p. 9.

2 David Hansen, *Long Wandering Prayer: An Invitation to Walk with God* (Gettysburg, PA: Bible Reading Fellowship, 2002), p. 43.

3 Hansen, p. 30.

4 The Feast of Unleavened Bread (Passover), The Feast of Weeks (Pentecost), The Feast of Tabernacles (new year).

5 Ferris Jabr, “Why Walking Helps Us Think” in *The New Yorker* (September 3, 2014)

Bob Chisholm
Prestoncrest Church of Christ
Spiritual Formation Ministry

www.prestoncrest.org