

Just Walking Isn't Enough

When was the last time that you went for a walk? Walking is something that we do for various reasons. Some of us walk because it is good for our health. Others may spend much of the day walking because of what their job entails. Some may only walk when they need to take their dog out for exercise. Others of us may walk just for the pure enjoyment of being outside in God's creation. Regardless of the reason we may walk or the reason we don't walk, most health experts will tell us that we need to do more walking to stay healthy. Walking can provide some great benefits to our health if we do it consistently. It helps us keep the weight off, strengthens our heart, and helps control blood pressure among other benefits.

While we may know the benefits that walking provides us that does not mean that we are going to do anything about it. Many folks think, "I should get some exercise, I should go for a walk," but then simply remain sitting. Exercise is an individual decision and it is not enough to just desire to go for a walk. You have to actually do it. You are free to walk or to sit still, but the decision you make will affect your health.

I. The need to walk in God's Word for our spiritual health

If you came to worship today for physical fitness advice you've come to the wrong place. However, we do have some advice from the Word of God on spiritual fitness and it involves walking in the Word of God. In our reading today from Psalm 119 we are told that, "Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path." God invites us today and every day to be in his Word, assuring us that he is with us to guide and lead us. What a great opportunity our Heavenly Father gives to us by giving us His Word. We don't have to wonder what he is thinking or wonder about his nature or desires for our lives and this world. We hear our Father's heart directly from Him in the word of Scripture.

In an article on physical exercise, the author encouraged people to walk at least 30 minutes a day. He asserted that just 30 minutes can make a huge difference in your health. While spending 30 minutes a day focused on our physical health would be good for all of us, what about our spiritual health and our walking in God's word? What would happen to your spiritual life, and therefore to the life of the church, if everyone of us spent 30 minutes a day reading the Scripture? As followers of Jesus, we really should have that daily time with Him in His Word, taking advantage of the opportunities we are given to study His Word in Bible studies, in small groups, through personal devotions, and the like. And here is even better news: unlike food we eat and must watch so that we don't eat too much, we never need worry about "overeating" when it comes to reading and digesting the Word of God. Perhaps we need to start thinking that taking a daily nourishing meal of God's word would improve our spiritual body, mind and spirit.

In my visits to many people in the hospital those who are confined to bed for a long time actually lose the use of their legs. The muscles begin to weaken from not being used. Without walking on a regular basis, legs that once worked well are useless. Many times, with therapy and determination, the muscles can be strengthened so that those who may not be able to walk now can walk again.

Many Christians also spend too long a time without being active in the reading of the Living Word of God. They have become stuck in their spiritual growth. Being stuck

in their spiritual growth they often will find it spills over to other aspects of their lives. In fact, many have wandered from the faith. They fail to apply the teaching of this Word in their lives and as a result they have become spiritually unhealthy. As the church, one of our tasks is to build up the Body of Christ to true spiritual health so that we might be better equipped to reach those outside the church.

One example of how the church at large is doing this is through the mites of the LWML. City of Hope in Cleveland, Ohio, is one such project supported by the LWML and local churches. Through the ministry of willing volunteers, lives now and lives eternally are being changed. They are providing for spiritual health as well as physical health to the community by opening “Urban Family Learning Centers” in Cleveland, Akron, Youngstown, and Cincinnati. These programs are reaching out to children and families with Saturday Schools that provide a weekly round of music, crafts, and Scripture memorization along with a nourishing meal. Our communities need men, women, and children who are spiritually strong and healthy, and these people, by the power of the Holy Spirit, are working to make a difference.

II. The need to walk in the right direction.

Walking daily in the Word of God can help empower us through the Holy Spirit to serve our fellow human beings with the love of Jesus. That same word, though, also calls us to remember who we are and to show us the error of our ways. The author of Hebrews warns us, “For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” He reminds us that you and I need to know the truth so that we walk in the right direction. While most of us don’t like to be corrected, correction is beneficial. Think of it like going to a doctor for a checkup. He may listen to your heart and say, “I do not like what I am hearing.” Now if the doctor would say that to you, would you want to know what the problem was? Or would you rather not know and remain ignorant of the problem inside of you?

God’s Word is what we need to walk in the right direction in our lives — sharper than a two- edged sword! Perhaps some are not in the Word because they do not want to hear what the Word has to say to them. The Word penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joint and marrow. The Word of God judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart of man—your heart and mine. It cuts through the baloney (if you will) of life and lays it out on the table. That is how the Word of God in the law does its work. It exposes the disease of sin, so that the healing can begin with the Gospel. Without that exposure, the sin can fester, grow, and lead to death. But when brought to the Light of God’s News in Christ, the healing begins.

Psalm 119 speaks to us and says, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.” We enjoy the blessing that God gives to us as his children gathered together here around His Word and Sacrament in worship. But we need him guiding not just our steps on Sunday morning but throughout the week. His Word is the lamp and light every day because He knows the pathway that we are on. He sees the snares and things that would trip us up along the way. He sees the detours that would tempt us to turn aside.

We need His word to keep us walking in the light and in the truth of his Word. Sometimes that truth convicts us because it points out the sin in our life, yet we need to hear it. That Word of truth calls us to repentance, reminds us of the truth of a Friday that we call Good on which Jesus died for our sins. And the Word reminds us that the victory

won on Easter was for you and me. We can walk in the truth that Jesus' blood was shed for us so that our lives now and forever with him are assured.

All of us need to hear the truth of God's Word. One of the mite missions of the LWML brings the truth of God's Word by supporting a female missionary to work with Muslim women. She is in a hostile environment, where the Word of truth is suppressed. Where there is a desperate need for the light of God's Word. Women in the Muslim world are not allowed to have conversations with men who are not their husband or close relatives. But they need to know that truth! The goal is to touch the lives of Muslim women with the Good News found in Christ.

St. Paul, Luther, and many others have devoted themselves to the study of the Word of God. Nourished by that Word, they were able and you are able to live a new life in Christ. It is through the Word that we receive the message of hope found only in Jesus.

III. The need to change our habits

So how much do you walk for your physical health? It may depend on how healthy you want to be. How much do you walk for your spiritual health? Do you need to change how much you walk in God's Word? There is only one way we can change our use of God's word. We need the help of the Holy Spirit to change our poor habits of walking in God's Word. When a child is learning to walk, there are many times he or she falls down, but they always get back up. Maybe you have fallen down in the study of the Word. Now is a great time to get back up again. The more you practice, the better you will become by the strength that God provides. As the children of God called to be His very own through baptism we have a desire to hear from our Father. Our struggle, like many things in life, is that we have the best intentions and plans until it actually comes to beginning or beginning again on that walk in God's word. No one enters a marathon without lots of training before the starting gun is fired. That training begins with a first step. Using God's Word on our daily walk also starts with small steps.

This week, just like last week, we have seven days - ahead of us. If we just spend 30 minutes every day in God's Word that would be 210 minutes this week with God. For some that may be too big of a first step. Instead start with spending 5 minutes for 5 days this coming week in God's word. Reading and concentrating on what God would have us hear from His Word would make a lot of difference in your spiritual health.

III. Walking in the Word changes lives

What comfort, strength, guidance, and love we find in the Word of God! Yet there are many in our neighborhoods and world who do not know the Word. Groups like the Lutheran Women's Missionary League help equip people to proclaim the love of Jesus throughout the world. Mission grants help raise money for supporting the work of those walking in the path of Jesus around the world, training pastors, equipping youth to restore homes while sharing the love of Jesus, and providing medical care in the name of the great physician Jesus Christ.

There are many ways that we can walk in the Word to make an eternal difference in the lives of those around us, but it starts with our connection to Jesus. He is the one who gives us the strength through the Spirit to know the truth of the Word and to proclaim that truth in Word and deed in our lives and through the lives of people throughout the world.

Isaiah declared, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" You have some beautiful feet here this morning. You have been given a wonderful message

to proclaim in the world. We proclaim that Word by supporting the work of our congregation and the LWML, making sure that all people hear the Word of God, the message of sin and grace, the Good News of Jesus as the Savior of all people. God will indeed strengthen you this week as you spend time with Him in His Word and as you go forth to proclaim the joyous Word of Christ in your families, neighborhoods, schools, and world. Amen.