

Naked Travelers

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Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18

“You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways.”

Movement 1 – Walking with the Lord

Do you want to walk with the Lord? Do you want to walk in the side of righteousness, walk in the light and experience the hope that Christ offers? Do you want to walk with the Lord?

This seems like an obvious question. It seems like the kind of question that should be rhetorical because the answer should be obvious, “yes.” I would assume that all of you would say yes, it is the Sunday school answer. Of course we would say, “yes” to such a question. Of course we want to walk with the one who offers us mercy and love. Of course we want to walk with the one who offers us forgiveness and repentance. Of course we want to walk with the one who offers us life. Do you want to walk with the Lord, of course you do. It is an obvious question with an obvious answer. But let's for a moment imagine that we need to think about it. Let's, for a moment think what a non-believer might ask about such a question. Why should someone walk with the Lord, give his or her life to the Lord? Why would you answer yes to the question, do you walk with the Lord.

It is because of who Jesus is. His persona, his personality and his power captivate us. It is like finding a political candidate who has a kind of passion, a kind of charisma that is captivating and empowering. You meet this person and say, “I want to be on that person's team,” because of his or her ideals, personality and magnetism. Or if you find weight-loss plan that excites you and has results. Like the craze of the Atkins diet some years ago, it is a plan that lets you eat good food that is encouraging and still helps you to loose weight. Or maybe it is like joining a group that gives you a new sense of identity. It is a group of people that excites you, that helps you relax and you want to walk with that group and be with that group. The desire to walk with the Lord is something like all of these things but more. There is something magnetic about Christ. There is something life enriching about Christ. There is something affirming about Christ, but there is more. There is more than just a charisma and results and affirmation. And we do more than just join a campaign, than adopt a new way of life, or go to group meetings. Walking with the Lord is more than that.

If you were to find yourself at the time when Jesus walked amongst us, with the crowds following Jesus, maybe you might ask people around you why they were following Jesus. Some might answer that the miracles have caught their attention. Some might say that the teachings really resonated with them. Some may say that Jesus was the beginning of a rebellion to overthrow Rome and they were ready for the true king of Israel. Some may say that their friends had brought them. But maybe you would bump into a woman who was possessed with a demon. Or maybe you would brush shoulders with a man who was blind but then was given sight. Or maybe you would overhear the conversation of a man whose child was sick and then was healed by Jesus, or a prostitute who was protected by Jesus. Maybe you would hear how Christ had given them life. Maybe you would hear how Christ had given them hope, grace, mercy and forgiveness.

Maybe you would hear them talk about a before and after. Before one was blind, before one was lame, before one was possessed, before one was sick, before one lived in sin. But after an encounter with Christ life had changed. After an encounter with Christ, life was new, life was fresh and seen as a true gift from God. They follow Christ because of the life they have received from Christ.

I had a friend in college who converted to Christianity, gave his life to Christ and started walking with Christ. He was taken in by the hope, the grace and the love that Christ offers to all of us, and wanted to really walk, really walk with Christ. He explained that when he gave his life to Jesus, his old life was gone; he died and took on a new life. He was born again, and to embrace this transformation, he threw out everything that represented his old life. All of his CDs, posters, books, and even clothing were thrown to the side and he took on a new life with Christ. He was walking with the Lord because of the life he found in the Lord.

Do you want to walk with the Lord? Do you want to live the new life, the powerful life that Christ offers? Do you want to find yourself in the shadow of the master, in the potter's hands so that you can truly live? Do you want to walk with the Lord? In the Lord we find life, in the Lord we find hope, in the Lord we find forgiveness and we find grace. We want to walk with the Lord.

Movement 2 – Our Sunday Best

What does it look like to walk with the Lord? We can talk about the walk, but what does it look like? How are we supposed to shape our lives when we say that we are walking with Jesus? What does it look like to walk with the Lord?

What do you think it should look like? What changes do you think should happen, external and internal? How should we act, talk, play and pray if we claim we are walking with Jesus? I would imagine that many of us would put on our Sunday best. You know what I am talking about, the Easter bonnet, the pressed and tailored suit, the polished shoes and the matching child and parent outfits. We would make sure that we are cleanly shaven, that we have made up our face in an appropriate way (we don't want to look garish), that we have matched our socks, and made sure that our underwear is clean. We would put on our Sunday best if we were walking with the Lord.

My friend that I mentioned, the one who threw out many, many great albums when he took on his new life took on new clothes as well. He didn't wear a suit all the time, but he did make sure he was wearing some kind of Jesus paraphernalia every day. He had the tee shirts, the polo shirts, the hat, the pants, the shoes, the socks, and who knows what else. He wanted to show his new life with his clothes. But he didn't stop there. His speech changed. Those of us who used to hang out with him and listen to *Beastie Boys*, *Parliament*, and *Chili Peppers* with him noticed a change in his speech. He began to talk about Jesus a lot more. He mentioned the Lord in every other word. He would take every opportunity possible to mention how the Lord has blessed him, and how some of us (he certainly wasn't talking to me) needed to spend more time in prayer. He began to talk about our favorite bands with a voice dripping with condescension. He found more and more opportunities to criticize televisions, the Hollywood establishment, and society in general. His speech changed, his mannerisms changed, and in a way he had changed. I remember asking him one day what had happened. I knew about his conversion, and I was very happy for him. He had found life and that life through Christ

is good. But I asked him why the complete change. He looked at me and said that when he accepted Christ as savior he was given a new life, he was clothed in the Holy Spirit. He was merely wearing his new clothes as he walked with the Lord. These were his Sunday best.

Maybe we feel like we should do the same. If we say we are walking with the Lord, then maybe we should show it. Maybe we should wear our Sunday best all the time. Maybe we should adopt the Jesus speech, maybe we should try to be showy in our faith, and let the world see that we are Christians. Show that you are walking with the Lord by being nice and polite even if it is through gritted teeth. Show that you are walking with the Lord by saying, “praised be to God” and “isn’t the Lord awesome” every chance you get even when it feels forced and contrived. Show that you are walking with Lord by making your life into your Sunday best. The late psychologist, Karl Jung said that humanity has a tendency to put on Masks to hide our true persona, but maybe we should put on a mask. Maybe we should let the world see our nice new clothes, our fine fabric of our lives that we have through Christ. Maybe we should put on the mask of Christianity and let the world see that we are walking with Jesus.

Movement 3 – The Real Church

How long could we keep it up? How long will the clothes stay in good order? How long until they get stained, until the crease wears out, until the hair begins to fall out of place and our Sunday best no longer looks as shiny as it should? How long could we keep it up?

Let’s be honest, there are times when we don’t live and show our Sunday best. There are times when we are tired, when we are hurting, or when we don’t feel as close to the Lord as we would like. I remember one time when I was sitting in my office and working on a sermon (not this one) and I was having a difficult time. I was not connecting with the text. I was not feeling the Holy Spirit, I did not feel moved, and was staring at a blank page waiting for something to come to me. It was a moment when my frustration level was a little higher than normal. Then the phone rang. Not thinking, I picked up the phone and answered.

“Can I speak to the pastor?” Still not thinking I answered,

“This is the pastor.”

“Well pastor, isn’t it a blessing to serve the Lord?” Now if I was wearing my Sunday best I would answer right away, “It sure is,” or, “more than I ever imagined,” or something appropriate like that. But I wasn’t wearing my Sunday best. I was frustrated, tired and not thinking clearly and answered, “well, let’s see, what do you want to sell to me?” This was probably not the nicest thing to say. It was probably not the way to talk to someone if I was in step with Christ, but sometimes my clothes get wrinkled, and messy and I can’t keep up my Sunday best.

This happens to all of us. We get tired. We find ourselves worn down, and sometimes we find ourselves turning from the Lord in our thoughts and actions. We find ourselves wearing our Saturday clothes. These are the clothes that we wear at the end of the week, when we don’t want to take the energy to look good. When we let down our guard with the appearance of our faith. We don’t normally walk with Jesus in our Saturday clothes, our sweatpants and tee shirt. Our holy jeans that have nothing spiritual about them, these are our Saturday clothes. In these clothes we fall back to our old lives.

Sometimes we wear our Saturday clothes to church. Sometimes we find ourselves becoming critical, judgmental, argumentative, and divisive in church. Sometime we wear our Saturday clothes and close the doors to the church, wanted to be isolated and alone. We go to church, but we still wear our Saturday clothes. It reminds me of the Corinthian church that Paul wrote a number of letters to. This was a church that was ecstatic about its new life with Christ, and the new clothes. Yet there were many, many times when the members of the church put on Saturday clothes. For communion the rich, the ones who did not have to work late would attend worship early, take communion and eat the food for the following agape feast. Little was left for the poor, the hard working members of the church. This selfishness comes out of Saturday clothes.

Sometimes we wear our Saturday clothes under our Sunday clothes. This is the most insidious, like a wolf in sheep's clothing we conceal our old life with new clothes hoping that no one will notice. Yet the world notices. Especially those in younger generations have seen and noticed how so many Christians tend to wear two different outfits. Many have noticed the hypocrisy of the church. Many avoid the church because of the bitterness, the wounds, and the hurts that are often inflicted there. Time and again we have faced the accusation of young and old. Many Christians are walking around, showing off their fine Sunday clothes, showing how they are walking with Jesus (or at least claim to be walking with Jesus), and yet like the child in the parade honoring the emperor they point and say, "they are not wearing any clothes." Our Sunday clothes become transparent when we fall from our walk with the Lord, and we all tend to fall. Lets be honest, the church is so much like an egg, clean and smooth on the outside, but when the fragile shell is broken we find ourselves with a mess on our hands. We work hard, we strive to maintain the Sunday best, but Saturday keeps coming through.

Movement 4 – God Sees All

God sees and God knows. Sometimes we can keep up the front so that others cannot see. Sometimes we can guard and cover and hide our Saturday clothes, but God sees, God knows, and we cannot hide from God. Look at the Psalm for today and hear about the piercing knowledge of the Lord. God knows when you sit down or when you rise up. God can hear our thoughts, our words and our desires. God can see through our Sunday best to our Saturday worst. When you sneak that extra piece of cake, God sees it. When you sneak through the red light, God sees. When you think ill of someone, God knows, hears and sees. There is nothing we can hide from the Lord. God sees the mediocrity of our lives the low parts of our lives and the high part of our lives.

It reminds me of Orwell's classic novel *1984*. Remember one of the main characters in the book? Big Brother. Big Brother is the totalitarian regime that watches everything, even the thoughts of individuals. Big Brother sees you when you are sleeping and knows when you are awake. This is what the Psalm is suggesting as well, that God sees all and knows all and there is nowhere we can go where we can escape the Lord. Nathanael was sitting under the fig tree and thought he was alone. He thought he was alone when Phillip told him about Jesus. But Jesus saw him, and knew him from afar. The Lord knows and sees all that we do and all that we are. We can't hide from the Lord. We can't hide our thoughts, our wishes, and our desires. We can put on a nice hat but God still knows our mind. We can wear a fine suite, but God still knows our thoughts. One commentator describes it as God having foresight for what we are going to do,

insight into our thoughts and wishes, and oversight of our very lives. We cannot escape the knowledge of the Lord. God sees and knows.

Movement 5 – Honesty with the Lord

So let's be honest with the Lord. Let's show what we have, put all of our cards on the table and be honest with the Lord. Let's tell everything that we have done. Let's have a time to confess and be honest with the Lord. It reminds me of a scene in the movie *Goonies*. Chuck was being interrogated by some thugs who wanted to know where the rest of his friends were, and demand that he tells everything. So Chuck tells everything, like the time in third grade when he cheated on his history exam, or when in fourth grade when he stole his uncle's toupee and glued it to his face to be Moses in a play, and on and on. Chuck began to confess everything that he had ever done. Let's do that with the Lord. Let's fall on our knees and say "I'm sorry," and why. Let's be honest with the Lord.

Yet don't think we have to now be perfect. Don't think we now have to live always in our Sunday clothes. We should work, and strive and try to live that way, but the honest reality is that we can't always be perfect. We are going to fall and sin and turn from others. Continue to be honest with the Lord.

The Psalm is not meant to scare us into perfect people. The psalm is not meant to make us shape up and be holy because God is watching. God is not Santa Clause or some other apparition of bedtime stories told to keep a child in line. No, the Psalm is inviting into a relationship with God that names the knowledge that God has of us. God's knowledge is an active knowledge that is with us as we live our lives. It is not a condemning knowledge, but one that liberates. God's knowledge looks through our Sunday clothes, our Saturday clothes, to our own selves honest and naked before the Lord. This is liberating. When you fall on your knees and say, "I'm sorry." When you express before the Lord all the wrong you have done, and share the ways you have not been true, then you may wonder if you are still right to walk with the Lord. You may wonder if you are still a person of worth in the eyes of God. Here is where God's knowledge is powerful. God formed you, made you, and knows you better than you can know yourself. God sees past your weaknesses to who you truly are, and loves you. God calls out the true you, the honest you and blessed you. God knows you for your goodness and offers you grace to make you whole. Now the thoughts of the Lord can be seen and received as wonderful. Now the thoughts of the Lord are powerful and amazing because we are seen for who we truly are: blessed children of the Lord.

So be honest with the Lord. Let the knowledge that God has of you shape your own understanding of yourself. Let your relationship with God shape your identity as someone who is known and loved. Be honest with the Lord.

Movement 6 - Naked Travelers

Let's walk naked with the Lord. Let's walk with the Lord in such an honest and authentic way that only our true selves can be seen and known. Let's be naked travelers with the Lord.

Remove the Sunday best, for that will eventually become a façade. Remove the niceties, the speech, the pleasantries, and anything else that feels forced and false. Remove the Saturday worst as well. Don't stay in a life of brokenness and fallenness, but

continue to try to walk with the Lord. Try to walk with the Lord, letting God cloth you, and show you the way to go.

Walk like the emperor did showing off his new clothes, but we are not fooling ourselves. We are walking honestly and authentically. And when the child of the world points to us and says the truth. When a child of the world points to us with cynicisms and skepticism claiming that we are not really wearing our best, that we are not always perfect, that we are not always holy, and that we are not the picture that so many expect the church to be, respond by saying, “your right.” Show your vulnerability, show your weakness and turn to the Lord for support. Say, I may be broken, I may stumble and falter and fall from time to time, but I have been made by the Lord. I have been tenderly and wonderfully and fearfully made. I am known by the Lord. I am known in my inner most being. The Lord sees through my weakness and my faults and still names me as a blessed child.

The late youth pastor Mike Yaconelli once said, “The power of the Church is not a parade of flawless people, but of a flawless Christ who embraces our flaws. The Church is not made up of the whole people, rather of the broken people who find wholeness in a Christ who was broken for us.” This is what we confess, this is what we wear as we walk with the Lord, our own brokenness and our flaws, and we become witnesses to the power of Christ.

Do you want to walk with the Lord? You can. You can walk with your tattered clothes, with your messy lives, and with your wounded hearts. You can walk with your slips, your spills and your stains. You don’t need to put on your Sunday best, but just go as you are. You don’t need to try to show that you are holy, but be honest with your blemishes and the places where you shine. Be honest in your walk with the Lord.

And then rest in the truth, the grace, and the promise that we will be clothed with power of the Holy Spirit. We will be clothed with the power of the Lord. Where we are weak, God will make us strong. Where we stumble, God will pick us up. Where we are held back, God will send us forward. When we close our eyes, God will open them. God will redeem us, justify us, and sanctify us, and we will be worthy to say, “Yes, I want to walk with the Lord.” But by the grace, but by the glory of God do we walk. But by the power, but by the mercy do we walk. But by the cross, but by the cross, do we walk with the Lord and made holy and righteous people of the Lord.

AMEN