

Walking with the LORD

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[0 : 00] Let's pray. Show me your ways, Lord. Teach me your paths. Father, as we come to your word now, please help us to understand it.

! That means we might walk in your paths our whole life through. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, as I said, we're going to spend the next four Sundays looking at different Psalms of David.

All aspects of the Christian life, that relationship that we have with God. And today's title kind of starts that all off. Thinking about walking with the Lord.

I don't know whether you've ever done any long walks, but there are different ways you can go about that. You can maybe glance at the terrain and go, oh yes, I know where we're going, and set off.

I've tried that a number of times. Doesn't always work. You can take a map book with you. And that's great as long as you refer to it often and read it rightly.

[1 : 07] Sometimes if it's a particularly long walk, there might be a guidebook to take along. That will have the map in and some other bits of information as well too. Just to bring some interest and show you some points to look at on the way.

But far better would be to take a guide with you. Someone who knows the way and who knows you. Who can help you understand the paths. Help you understand what you're seeing.

And who will walk with it with you. See, the guide who knows that way won't go wrong, will he? He won't make you do things that you can't cope with. Because he knows you as well.

A guide won't fall apart if it gets wet or stops working. Simply because it's out of range of the latest or the nearest telephone tower. Guidebooks go quickly out of date.

But a guide, well as he walks alongside us. Well he knows the land. He knows the people. He knows the weather. There is no difficulty. He hasn't seen. No emergency.

[2 : 07] He's not prepared for. And since life is so unpredictable. Because it is, isn't it? So time's so hard. We need a guide to walk with us through life.

If we are to truly not just survive but thrive. And since this is God's world. Well we need the Lord to be our guide. Because life is hard.

It isn't always straightforward. This life has many joys and pleasures. We live in a beautiful part of the world. And on days like this it's shown in all its glory. But while we do experience love and we recognise beauty.

And we can all feel a measure of peace and satisfaction. We know this world is a long way from perfect. Just 30 seconds on a news website will convince you of that. As will 10 seconds of honest reflection.

It is just as Jesus said. In this world we will have trouble. And we do. It's part of the human condition. But just because as Christians we experience the same struggles as those who don't follow Jesus.

- [3 : 12] It doesn't mean that we should face those struggles in the same way. Just trying to work things out for ourselves. No, we need to walk with the Lord.
- So what might that look like? Well one of the first things we see here is honesty about the difficulties we face. And David is certainly honest, isn't he?
- Like many of the Psalms it's not entirely clear exactly what was going on in David's life when he wrote this Psalm. What we can say though is that his difficulties included internal struggles and external enemies.
- The external enemies are not identified but they are having a huge impact on his life. He mentions them specifically as enemies in verses 2 and 19.
- But they come up again in verses 3, 4, 5, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20 and 22. The whole Psalm is shaped by the enemies he is facing and the difficulties they are bringing on his life.
- [4 : 16] He's worried that they might triumph over him. He's concerned about their treachery and he's not absolutely sure about the right way to respond. In some respects, verse 15, he feels as if he's caught in a trap.
- His life is in danger, verse 20. He feels outnumbered, verse 19. He's appalled at their level of hatred towards him. And it's not just him, the whole country is under threat as well.
- But David's internal struggles are no less severe. In fact he spends more time in the Psalm speaking about what's going on in his own heart than reflecting on what is going on outside.
- Coming before Almighty God. He is all too aware of the lack of holiness in his own life. He's all too aware of the sins of his youth, verse 7, and his current rebellious ways.
- Some of those may be in the past but he still can't quite forget them. He's too ashamed for that. But he's very aware of his current failings, verse 11.
- [5 : 19] Forgive my iniquity, though it is great. And it's his internal anguish over his own failings to live as he should that is causing him the greatest distress.
- That's why in verse 17 and 18 he cries out, Relieve the troubles of my heart. Free me from my anguish. Look on my affliction and my distress. Take away all my sin.
- Like the writer of that great old hymn, Just As I Am, David was facing fightings within and fears without. I guess to some extent that will be true of all of us this morning.
- So I wonder what keeps you awake amid the dark hours of the night. What robs you of peace during the middle of the day? Whatever it is, David's strategy models for us the right way to walk with the Lord in the midst of such time.
- So what does he do? He places his whole self, all he is, his hopes, his dreams, his fears and problems, everything, body, soul and spirit into God's hands.
- [6 : 26] That's what that simple phrase in verse 1 points to. When David says, Another way might be to think of himself as attaching himself to his guide, tying a rope between them so that nothing will separate them.
- I am going your way and nothing is going to pull us apart. Perhaps one of the only times when we place our whole lives, everything we have into someone else's hands, is that time when we may undergo surgery.
- Because at that point, our life literally is in the hands of the surgeon and the team working with them. We're unconscious, we're incapable of doing anything at all.
- And so our future, our hopes, our fears, our lives are in the hands of the one who holds that scalpel. And as we head down to surgery, we hope we can trust our surgeon.
- We hope they know what they're doing. But David knows that he can trust the Lord, doesn't he? We see that in verse 3. Whether to himself or to others, David declares out that there is no one who hopes in the Lord who will ever be put to shame.

[7 : 47] That is, they will never find that their hope in God has been misplaced. It will never turn out that they have believed a lie, that they have backed the wrong horse. They have put their hands into someone who will not prove faithful.

No, David's strategy for life as a whole and for dealing with his internal and external battles is to place all he has into God's hands. If you've had to work hard to get where you are today, if you've done a lot and achieved a lot, sometimes that idea of handing everything over to God is a hard thing to get our heads around.

Because if we're the kind of person whose first response to a problem is to draw up an action plan and to do something to change things, then we can sometimes think that giving ourselves over to God will mean that, well, we just have to remain inactive.

So if we're sick, well, we will push for medical help. If we're confused, then we'll research the issue. We'll buy a book. We'll speak to someone who knows what they're talking about.

If we find that we have enemies, well, we'll do something about it. Maybe we'll go on a charm offensive. Maybe we'll seek a compromise. Maybe we'll go on the attack and get rid of them first.

[9 : 08] Well, David is not afraid of action. He is not someone to sit on his hands. Far from it. But by and large, his actions are shaped and determined by seeking God's counsel.

It's what it means for him to have placed himself, not to mention his family and his entire nation, into God's care. He's saying, I'm with you.

Where you go, I will go. I wonder if that sounds rather scary. After all, how would David know what God's will would be or what it might entail?

Well, perhaps it sounds rather presumptuous. I mean, why would God have the time and energy to bother with him? Just one man amongst billions. Well, David has no such worries.

He trusts God's goodness and his power entirely. That's why he says, in you, O Lord my God, I put my trust. And that handing himself over, placing himself into the Lord's hands, deciding to walk with him no matter what comes, well, it's shown itself in two ways in this psalm.

[10 : 16] He seeks God's wisdom and he seeks God's forgiveness. David is unsure what to do, so he seeks God's wisdom and guidance. For David, that would primarily have come from God's law, what we call the first five books of the Bible, and God's word through also the prophets of his day, men like Samuel and Nathan, who applied God's written word to new situations.

Interestingly, the times David gets himself into trouble are exactly the times when he fails to inquire of God, either through his weakness or his own deliberate fault, and fails to obey God's commands.

And that will be true for us as well. So are we those who seek God's wisdom and seek to obey his commands? That's always the best course of action, as we sang in our last song.

David cries out to the Lord to teach him and to guide him, but what he isn't after is just a quick memo. Just send me one or two bullet points and I'll work on those. Now, David's request here is that the Lord would walk with him to be his guide in every aspect of his life.

David is saying to the Lord, don't just tell me what to do, help me do it. Don't just point me down the right road, come and walk with me as I travel along it. Psalm 23, you'll know very well, David calls the Lord his shepherds.

[11 : 47] A shepherd who walks with his sheep, who leads them on, not just through those times of quiet waters, but even leading them through those dark valleys as well.

David seeks God's wisdom and guidance. He knows that there are battles out there. But the Lord is with him. He wants his guidance. He wants his presence. He wants a guide to walk with.

And if we're serious about walking with the Lord, then there needs to be our pattern as well. But since David is also aware of the battles in his own heart and his repeated failure to live rightly, he's also quick to confess his sins and to seek God's forgiveness.

And now it's true that as we draw closer to God, our own sinfulness becomes more apparent. And at that point, we have a problem.

What do we do with the failure to live in a way that God would choose? Do we seek to hide it from the God who sees everything? Do we try to excuse it from the God who knows everything?

[12 : 57] Do we ignore it and hope that we can distract God from seeing it as well as if we could ever do any of those things? Well, David doesn't try any of those tricks, does he? He knows what he has done.

He knows where he has gone wrong. And he knows that God knows. So what does he do? Well, he asks for God's forgiveness and mercy. For the sins of his youth, for his rebellious ways, for his wrong attitudes, for his character flaws, for his failure to follow the instructions God has given.

David knows that the only way to deal with his wayward heart is to bring it to the one true doctor of the soul. Sins left unconfessed cement themselves into our lives like barnacles on the seashore.

How much better it is to recall God's mercy and love, to trust ourself to the one who has, through Jesus' death on the cross, already made a way for our sins to be forgiven.

Now, of course, David didn't know that, did he? He saw what was coming in a glimpse. But he had the sign of the sacrificial system in the Old Testament law that pointed forward to the perfect Lamb of God coming.

[14 : 14] We know things much more clearly. And if we are serious about walking with the Lord, then regular, honest repentance needs to become a daily habit.

As David lifts up his soul to God and places himself completely and utterly in his care, he shows by seeking God's wisdom, by being open and honest in his confession, that he wants to walk with the Lord in a closeness, a true friendship, a deep, intimate relationship.

And what is God's response to him? What is God's response to the one who wants to walk with him, who is open about his struggles and repentant over their sin? Well, it's the same as God's response has always been to all those who turn to him.

Because if we draw near to God, he will draw near to us. If we seek his wisdom, he will give it. If we confess our sins, he will forgive us.

If we desire his presence, he will give us his spirit. If we pray to him, he will hear and answer. If we trust him, he will give us peace. If we obey him, we will find his blessing.

[15 : 28] If we are weary, he will lift us up. If we are persecuted, he will strengthen us. And when we die, he will raise us up to that life that will never end. When David places himself and all he has into God's hands, when he says, Lord, I want to walk with you my whole life through, David is not taking a risk here.

There is no better place, no safer place than to be walking with the Lord. And if we're reluctant to do that, then I guess it's because of one of two things.

We either think too little of God or too much about ourselves. Well, I know where my tendency often lies. I wonder about you.

And the antidote for our failure to do that, well, is simply to get to know God better, to draw closer to him, to be more honest about our own failings.

And the attitude of our hearts is the key here. And what we need more than anything else is honesty and true humility before God. You see, it is sinners, those who know that they have done wrong, verse eight, and those who fear him, verse 12, that the Lord instructs.

[16 : 49] Those who come and ask and seek that are satisfied. This is the path to blessing. And this is the truth about how God's covenant works. We don't need to be perfect to walk with the Lord or else none of us would be invited.

But we do need to be humble. We do need to be humble. And if we are, and if we come, and as we listen and obey, then our walk with God will grow closer and warmer and more precious as those days go by.

All of us have a guide in life. Often it's ourselves, our own wisdom. Maybe it's someone in our family that we look up to.

David says to us here, follow the Lord. Walk with him. Well, one final thought as I close. If God really is as good and gracious, as abounding in love and faithfulness, as slow to anger, as patient, kind and all-powerful, as the Bible tells us, and as Jesus shows us, and if he is, and he truly is leading us gently to that place where he is prepared for us, then how can we hesitate to lift ourselves, all we are, into his hands and choose to walk with him on the way he tells us to go?

David knew the truth of that, and he went all in. May we do the same and walk with the Lord our whole lives through.

[18 : 31] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.