

# Walking With God

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A friend of mine related the following story to me. He said that one year he worked as a park ranger at Yellowstone National Park. He said something odd happened that particular year which baffled the park rangers. There were an unusual amount of deaths among the bears and the park rangers could not figure out the reason why these bears were dying. Finally, they discovered the answer to the strange deaths. It seems that the bears had grown so accustomed to the visitors to the park feeding them that they had forgotten how to feed themselves. And a number of the bears had died of starvation. As I thought of that story, my mind went to the church and how church members have grown so accustomed to being fed by others that they, too, get spiritually starved because they don't feed themselves by a daily walk with God. A daily walk with God feeds us with bread from heaven. We are nourished, revitalized and renewed every day through a vital walk with him. God has honored those individuals who have made the sacrifice of having a consistent walk with him. If you study the men and women whom God has mightily used, you will find a common denominator and that is, each one maintained a close walk with God.

There is a story about George Whitfield, the great British evangelist. One evening Whitfield was entertaining some minister friends for dinner. Abruptly he stood and walked to the door, handing the men their overcoats and stating, "Now, see here, gentlemen, we forget ourselves. It is time to retire." One of the ministers complained it was only ten o'clock. To which Whitfield replied he had to be in bed for he had an urgent appointment at four in the morning. One of the ministers inquired, "To whom would you be meeting at such an unusual hour?" To which the great Whitfield replied, "Sirs, I am meeting the King at that hour. The King of kings."

Whitfield's friend, John Wesley, was also an early riser and a man known for his life of holiness. Listen to this entry taken from Wesley's journal, "I, this day, enter on my 85<sup>th</sup> year and what cause have I to praise God? As for a thousand spiritual blessings. So for bodily blessings also. To my having constantly for above 60 years risen at four in the morning, to my constant preaching at five in the morning for above 50 years." You see, Wesley knew the benefits of walking near to God and God honored that.

When I think of walking with God, I am reminded of that antediluvian Enoch and how he walked with God. In Genesis, chapter 5, verse 24 it states, "And Enoch walked with God and he was not for God took him." You see, not only did Enoch enjoy walking with God

but God enjoyed the fellowship of Enoch's company. In fact, God enjoyed walking with Enoch so much, one morning as they were out walking, God took Enoch by the hand and he translated him so their fellowship would not be broken.

How many of us miss out and don't enjoy the spiritual benefits of walking with God? Rather, our walk with him is up and down like an elevator. One day we're on the top floor in the penthouse suite enjoying his sweet fellowship but then we get negligent, cease to maintain that daily walk with him and we end up down in the basement of despair. We must learn the discipline of a daily walk with God. Even Jesus rose early in the morning to spend time alone with the Father.

From the gospel of Mark we read, "And in the morning rising up a great while before day, he went out and departed into a solitary place and there prayed." Jesus spent time alone with the Father and so should we. We must keep a regular time of devotions and prayer for those individuals that have a close walk with God are those rare individuals who know how to pray and gain the ear of the Almighty. Listen, God will always raise up an Elijah whose prayers impact a sleeping nation. The church in each generation has had individuals who live on their knees, whose prayers reach heaven with a holy violence. India had her praying Hyde, China her Hudson Taylor, England her Puritans, Scotland her Covenanters, America her fiery E. M. Bounds. Voices which gained the attention of the throne room, startled angels and shook the gates of hell even making the demons quake and tremble with their desperate prayers.

When I wrote the authorized biography of J. Sidlow Baxter, I was given some of his personal effects by his widow, Iza. One prized possession is a poem of Dr. Baxter's which he typed on a little piece of paper which I have framed in my study. Sidlow Baxter rose at five o'clock every morning of his life to go deeper with God and when he reached the age of 90 he rose at six o'clock every day to meet with his Redeemer.

Listen to this little poem that he wrote and catch the heartbeat of a man who panted after God like the deer panteth for the water brooks. Here are Dr. Baxter's words,

"That I may know him, Ah, I long to know,  
Not just the Christ of far gone years ago.  
Nor even reigning on a heavenly throne,  
Too high in distance to be really known.  
I long to know him closely, this is how,  
Alive and in this ever pressing now.  
A living one within my heart this hour,  
Communicating his all conquering power.  
Who now no longer lives for me apart,  
But shares his resurrection in my heart."

Sidlow Baxter knew the joy of a close walk with God, for to have that kind of walk with God is to live a supernatural life. It's like the Apostle Peter who by faith got out on the water and actually walked on the water for a few steps until the wind arose and he took

his eyes off his Master. But the lesson Peter learned that day was he no longer wanted to live the natural life and stay in the boat where it was safe, he wanted to get out on the water and risk everything for God and live the supernatural life. You see friends, once Peter tasted a little of the supernatural life, the ordinary was no longer appealing to him. And that's how it should be with us. When we step out on faith and see God move and stay in close contact with him through a deep walk then we no longer want to live that mediocre life but a life that can only be explained by what God does through us. Jesus doing the impossible through us. Amen?

Let me share with you a personal story. I was going through a very tough ongoing trial in my life and there seemed no way out of it. I began to go deep with God to find out what he was trying to tell me this particular time in my life. I needed to get serious with him and spend some extra time with him to hear what he was trying to teach me. At this time, I was reading the book by David Wilkerson, "The Cross and the Switchblade." I was impressed by a facet in Wilkerson's life. Early in his ministry he was a country pastor who spent the hours of midnight to two a.m. watching television to unwind and relax. One evening, God challenged Wilkerson to give that time to him. The next day, Wilkerson sold his tv and never again replaced it. From that point forward, he gave God midnight to two a.m. and it was during this time of walking with God that God called David Wilkerson to New York City to minister among the teen gang members, eventually starting Teen Challenge. I realize that God did not reveal this wider ministry opportunity to Wilkerson until he chose to go deeper with God in a vital, daily quiet time.

While I had maintained a regular time for many years with the Lord, but lately my devotional time was missing something. There was no sacrifice attending it. I would get up at different times in the morning, especially when it was more convenient for me, but the God of the Bible delights in sacrifice for he sacrificed his only begotten Son for sinful man. Well, after reading Wilkerson's story I made a covenant with God to rise at 4:30 every morning and give God the first part of each day walking with him. It is amazing how God has honored that time, how God has transformed my own life. I would not be preaching to you today, friends, if I had not been obedient to that deeper walk with him.

Allow me to ask you a question. Picture in your mind that your life is over and you have died and gone to heaven. You are facing Jesus in light of eternity and your earthly time to serve him has ended, would you regret the fact that you did not spend more time walking with him while you were on the earth? Will your heart be filled with remorse that you did not pursue him in an all-out pursuit of him. Friends, we only have one life, only one life and it will soon be past. Only what's done for Christ will last. Are we giving him our all-in-all or are we giving Jesus our leftovers and giving the world our best? I plead with you to examine yourself and see if there is anything hindering a deeper walk with him. I beg you to alter your life in such a way as to live more sacrificially for him, especially in these last days, friends, while you have breath in your body and a life on earth to live for him.

Listen, there are both benefits to walking with God and conditions to walking with God. Allow me to explain. There are many benefits to walking with God. The good news is,

you don't have to be a scholar to walk with God. You don't have to have a Ph.D. to walk with God. You can be an ABC and walk with him. Also, you don't have to be a rich man to walk with God. In fact, all the money in the world won't buy you a walk with God. Donald Trump can't buy a walk with God. It's the poor in spirit who walk with him. And you don't have to be important to walk with God. You don't have to be a somebody to walk with him. In fact, it is often the nobodys of life who walk most closely with him. In past ages, it was the outcasts of the world who had the greatest walk with him. The New Testament Christians were viewed as the enemies of the state. They were the refuse of society in society's eyes. The world has always viewed Christians as oddballs.

Listen to the following story. There was an old man named Hans and he was a farm hand to a wealthy landowner. Old Hans was a faithful employee of this rich man and one day the wealthy landowner was out riding his black stallion and surveying his vast property when he came upon old Hans. Hans was sitting on the ground eating his lunch. "Hans, how are you today," asked the landowner. Hans replied, "Oh, it is you, sir. I'm sorry, I didn't hear you coming, I've grown somewhat deaf lately. I was just sitting here giving thanks to my Lord for the meal which he has given me today." The wealthy landowner glanced down at the meager meal of a hard piece of bread and a piece of friend pork that the old man was eating. The landowner commented, "Hans, is that the kind of food you are thanking God for? I would feel quite deprived if that were all I had for dinner." Old Hans smiled and replied, "God has been good to me. He has kept me employed on your farm these many years. I worked for your father for a long time before you were born."

Just then, Hans stood up and walked over to the man on the black stallion. Hans said, "Sir, may I share my dream with you that I had last night?" "Why, certainly," the rich man replied. "Well, sir, I dreamed about the heavenly gates of glory last night and I heard a voice speak to me in the dream and I feel I should share what the voice said because it may be a warning to you." "What did the voice say?" asked the rich man. Old Hans replied in a serious tone, "The voice said that the richest man in the valley would die tonight. Then I woke up. Sir, those solemn words were spoken so plainly I haven't been able to forget them since. I feel I ought to tell you, perhaps it is a warning." The landowner's face grew pale but he tried to laugh it off. "Nonsense, you may believe in a place called heaven but I do not. And I certainly don't believe in any voice you heard from heaven. Good day, Hans."

With that, the rich man grabbed the reins of his black stallion and rode off in a cloud of dust. Hans shrugged his shoulders and went back to his lunch. But the rich man could not eat his fine dinner that evening. The lobster remained uneaten on his golden plate. Even his glass of champagne seemed bitter to him that night. He could not get those words of old Hans out of his mind, the words "the richest man in the valley shall die tonight." The landowner thought to himself, "Surely, I am the richest man in this entire valley for I own most of it but that old fool, Hans, should've never told me his dream. But I won't let the silly words of an ignorant old man disturb me."

But soon the rich man felt ill, he had trouble breathing and finally in desperation he called for the town doctor. By the time the doctor arrived it was late and as he came up

the steps to his stately home, the rich man seemed to be on the brink of death. But after the doctor thoroughly examined him, he could find nothing wrong with the desperate man. He gave the distressed patient a pill and told him to get some rest.

Suddenly, the doorbell rang. The rich man yelled out in a distressed voice, “Who could be calling at this time of night?” The doctor walked to the door and opened it. And there stood a young farm boy, he was crying. “Sorry to disturb you, sir, but I must tell you that old Hans died suddenly this evening. I thought you’d like to know.”

Yes, friends, the richest man in the valley did die that night, old Hans, who had a walk with God that no amount of money could buy. And to be rich toward God is to be the richest person in this life and the life to come. There are many benefits to walking with God.

Now let me mention the conditions to walking with God for there is no walking with him without meeting these conditions. The first condition is you must be born-again. There is no walking with him unless you are born-again. We cannot walk with him unless we know him experientially. We must have a regenerated heart to hear his heart. We must be born from above and washed in the blood.

Secondly, the next condition to walking with God is we are to follow him. You cannot lead the way and expect God to follow you unless you want to end up in the ditch like I’ve done time and time again in my life. We must look to him and see where he is operating and then join him in that work. To know where God is at work is to join him in that work. But in order to do this, we must be able to do the next thing which is to hear his voice. The Bible tells us to be still and know I am God. We are to be hearers and to listen to his voice.

My wife has a friend who will ask her, “How are you?” and when she answers, “Fine,” the friend will say, “Well, enough talk about you, let’s talk about me.” And sadly that is how many of us approach our devotional time with the Lord, we just talk and talk and talk never allowing him a word in edgewise. You see friends, a walk with God is not a one-sided relationship where we do all the whining and complaining and talking. It’s hearing his voice and being obedient to that voice. We must be doers of the word and get on our heart what’s on his heart and then in obedience carry out that work which he has given us to do in our lifetime, to reach this generation of lost sinners with the gospel of God’s glory.

If you think a walk with God is just taking a few minutes to read your Bible or a page of the Daily Bread and then say a quick prayer and be done, you are short-changing yourself. You are cheating yourself out of the greatest opportunity of your life. You only have one life to live and you must spend it wisely for God and his glory. We must not only be available to him, but we must be obedient to him, and join him in his work and experience the high privilege of carrying it out through our lives by reaching this generation of hell-bound sinners who desperately need to hear the good news of the

gospel of the Son of God. But how can we possibly be on track with him if our life is not in a red-hot relationship with him? Spending time with him and hearing his voice.

Listen friends, a walk with God will cost you. It costs to walk with him. But many don't want to pay that price because it's too demanding and too self-killing. John the Baptist said, "He must increase and I must decrease." But all the popular self-help books on the shelves of our so-called Christian bookstores say that self must increase, self must be empowered, self must be our center but that's not true. The Lord Jesus Christ should be ruling on the throne of our lives, not self. And this generation of self-centered, church-going, hell-bound sinners need to hear about a God who demands repentance and obedience and holiness from his followers. And the only way to have that kind of life is to have and maintain a close walk with God. Study the lives of the men and women in history who have walked with God and you will see the great personal cost on their lives of being living sacrifices for him. Read the life of Reese House who God mightily used in revival and see what a close walk with God that dear man had. But listen to his words about how God dealt with him on a day-by-day basis. This is what he said, "He was not gonna take any superficial surrender. He put his finger on each part of my self life and I had to decide in cold-blood. He could never take the thing away until I gave my consent then the moment I gave it some purging took place and I could never touch that thing again. It was not saying I was purged and the thing still having a hold on me, no, it was a breaking and a Holy Ghost taking control. Day-by-day the dealing went on. He was coming in as God and I had lived as man and what is permissible to an ordinary man he told me will not be permissible to you."

Listen friends, it costs to have a close walk with God because it kills every bit of flesh in us and that is painful. We tend to shy away from the pruning knife but it is the branch that is pruned which bears the greatest cluster of fruit. Listen to the words of Jesus in John 15:2, "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away and every branch that beareth fruit he purgeth it that it may bring forth more fruit." I call John chapter 15 the pruning chapter for to have a close walk with God means to be in a place of surrender to that divine pruning knife which continually cuts away any fleshly things that stands between us and a holy God. Jesus will prune us to use us in a way that brings glory to the Father. But we shrink from that pruning knife.

I remember preaching one evening to a group of pastors and I was preaching from John, chapter 15, on the pruning knife. Well, God began to move in some of those pastor's hearts and I saw conviction come upon their faces and when I was through, an older pastor approached me and he told me tenderly, "Tonight, I'm going home and I'm kneeling by my bedside and I'm gonna ask God to get his pruning knife out on me and my ministry." That man was ready to get serious with God, that man knew it cost something to go deeper with God.

It costs us something to wrestle with him for a lost and perishing world. We cannot hang on to anything that hinders our usefulness to God. We must depend on Jesus and him alone and cease our self-reliance for Jesus said, "Without me you can do nothing." But we try to get along without him and all we do is create a mess of things. When we should

stay connected to the main thing, the true vine, abiding in him. Real intercession costs I something. I remember Leonard Ravenhill saying that he believed that a night of prayer gave him his heart attack, that it was that terrible wrestle with God which damaged his heart. But we don't want to believe that, let alone experience affliction for our intercession.

Listen friends, when we wrestle with God in prayer, in intercession for a nation and the lost, we spend ourselves and when we're through praying we are spent. To have a close walk with God means you feel like a wrung out dishrag when you are through praying because it costs something to wrestle with him. And that kind of prayer life grabs hold of heaven and with violence.

To have a close walk with God is to be Christ-like. One man who walked close to God was Stephen Olford, my homiletical mentor. One day I was meeting with him in his study and when Dr. Olford entered, he looked exhausted and sunk down in his chair. He said to me, "Excuse me, brother, I must regather myself. I must regather myself. I just finished preaching and virtue has left me." When he said that, my mind ran to the Bible story of Jesus in the crowd of people, and they are pressing up against him, and the woman with the issue of blood touches the hem of his garment. And he turns around and says, "Who touched me? I feel virtue has left me." Listen, preacher friend, to be Christ-like means that when we preach, virtue leaves us.

A close walk with God will give you power and an anointed ministry but there is a cost and few are willing to pay it. That is why so few today have power in the pulpit, they are unwilling to pay the price of self-denial and sacrifice. They'd rather work on their golf handicap or sit in front of the tv until their eyes are as big as saucers and their brains are the size of a pea.

If you want to have a close walk with God then you must come to your own personal Jabbok. Jacob heard that his brother, Esau, was approaching with 400 men and this terrified him. He had cheated Esau out of everything worthwhile in life. He had stolen his birthright and his father's blessing, now, here comes Esau seeking vengeance upon him. Jacob has his large family pass over the ford Jabbok so he can be alone and think out his plans of survival. Jacob – the cheat, Jacob – the supplanter is going to try to wiggle and finagle his way out of this mess as he has done in past times, even in dealing with his uncle Laban. Jacob was so crooked he could hide behind a corkscrew but now he is struck with terror that his brother is coming to finally give him what he deserves. And he paces up and down near the ford Jabbok. And an angel jumps on him and wrestles with him. It is God wrestling with Jacob and through that long, tiring ordeal Jacob finally begins to wrestle back with God. He says, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." And he hangs onto the angel until he gets a blessing. God changed Jacob's name that night from Jacob, the supplanter, to Israel, prince with God. But a night of wrestling with God affected him for the rest of his life. Listen to this passage of scripture from Genesis, chapter 32 and how God dealt with Jacob that terrible night. "And Jacob was left alone and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh and the hollow of Jacob's

thigh was out of joint as he wrestled with him. And he said, 'let me go for the day breaketh.' And he said, 'I will not let thee go except thou bless me.' And he said unto him, 'What is thy name?' and he said, 'Jacob.'" And he said, 'Thy name shall be called no more Jacob but Israel for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men and hast prevailed.'"

You see friends, when Jacob finally got to the place in his life where he was sick and tired of being Jacob, it was then and only then that he had a breakthrough with God and experienced change. Notice the text says that God changed Jacob's name and God said that Jacob now had power with God and with men and hast prevailed.

Listen friends, a close walk with God will cost you but it will be the greatest time of your life. Living in the supernatural is the only way to live. How can so many of us live superficial lives when we serve such a supernatural God. Jacob now had power with God and man but it cost him.

Look at verse 31 of chapter 32 of Genesis, it reads, "And as he passed over Peniel, the sun rose upon him and he halted upon his thigh." Jacob's thigh was put out of place in wrestling with God. He wore a mark from that day forth for the rest of his life. The very last scene we have reported of Jacob, he is dying in Egypt and leaning on his staff giving the blessing to his gathered children. He limped on a bad leg until the day he died. Every step he took, every turn he made, made him wince in pain for the rest of his days but he was a man whom God said of, "As a prince has thou power with God and with men and hast prevailed."

Is that the kind of walk with God you desire, friend? Are you willing to pay the price? What cost counts and what counts costs. So few preachers today have power in the pulpit because they don't want the limp associated with a close walk with God, they just don't want to pay the price. How about you? Do you want a supernatural walk with God? Do you want to taste what New Testament Christianity really is like? Then go deeper with him in a vital daily walk with him. And I promise you, friends, you will never regret it. You, too, will have power with God and man.

Let me close with a hymn entitled "Walking with God," written by the great British poet, William Halper. Listen to these wonderful words and be encouraged by them. To begin a closer walk with him so you can enjoy those benefits given to the saints who closely walk with him. Listen,

"Oh for a closer walk with God,  
A calm and heavenly frame,  
A light to shine upon the road,  
That leads me to the Lamb.

Where is the blessedness that I once knew?  
When I first saw the Lord,  
Where is the soul refreshing view,



Of Jesus and his word.

What peaceful hours I once enjoyed,  
How sweet their memories still,  
But they have left an aching void,  
The world can never fill.

Return, O holy dove, return,  
Sweet messenger of rest,  
I hate the sins that made thee mourn,  
And drove thee from my breast.

The dearest idol I have known,  
Whatever that idol be,  
Help me to tear it from thy throne,  
And worship only thee.

So shall my walk be close with God,  
Calm and serene my frame,  
So pure a light shall mark the road,  
That leads me to the Lamb.”

Let us take these words of comfort to heart and ask the Lord to show us anything that stands between us and him and then ask him for the grace to remove it so we may have a closer walk with him.

May God bless you, friends, and grant you grace as you pursue him passionately for the rest of your days. All glory to his holy name.