

WALK FOR JESUS! (3)

Isaiah 40: 27-31—Pastor Richard P. Carlson
Youth Snow Retreat – Uinta Youth Camp, Meeks Cabin 2011

Learning to walk is not easy for children. I remember those days when my wife, Jinny and I watched our children pull themselves up and take tentative steps and then they fell. Andrew's mommy, our second of five daughters, Heather, kept running into the walls in hallways that were 3 feet wide. For each of our children, when the walking stage started, they all had been crawling first. The walking stage is encouragement time. We have a sign in our bathroom at home that reads, "Nothing improves a child's hearing more than praise." It's true. Those days of learning to walk should be days of praising every effort and encouraging every attempt our children make. We didn't get discouraged and give up on any of our seven dschildren as they learned to walk. We knew they would learn. We knew they must learn. We knew they could learn. We helped them learn to walk.

In the minor prophet, Hosea 11: 3, I read of God saying about Israel, or Ephraim, saying "It is I who taught Ephraim to walk. I took them in My arms...I led them with cords of a man, with bonds of love." As we come to this message on walking, know that from the first day we were born again, and if that miracle should happen up here at this snow retreat, the process of walking will start immediately. Our heavenly Father stands before us with outstretched arms. He encourages us toward Him to walk in His holiness. Our Father in heaven is eager to catch us when we stumble. He picks us up when we fall. He is never discouraged, ready to give up on our progress. The more difficult we find the process, the more care and kindness He extends to us. George MacDonald once put it this way: "God will help us when we cannot walk, and He will help us when we find it hard to walk, but He cannot help us if we will not walk." He is right. Even though we fall, we must try again. Our heavenly Father holds us by the hand. I read a poem recently in an article by David Roper. I like it. The words are, "Savior, let me walk beside Thee, Let me feel my hand in Thine; Let me know the joy of walking, In Thy strength and not in mine."

Tonight, I don't want to focus primarily on learning to walk with God, but rather, on continuing to walk with God. I want to say up front, continuing to walk with God may be one of the toughest assignments in our lives. It is hard work. You may have read the "Frog and Toad Together" book by Arnold Lobel. Frog had a garden that Toad admired. Toad wanted one too.

Frog told Toad: "It is very nice, but it was hard work." Toad wanted a garden too, so Frog gave Toad some flower seeds. Toad quickly ran home and planted them. "Now seeds," said Toad, "Start growing." Toad tried very hard to make his garden grow. Toad shouted at the seeds, read them long stories, and sang songs to them—but they didn't grow. "What shall I do?" cried Toad. "Leave them alone," Frog said. "Let the sun shine on them, let the rain fall on them. Soon your seeds will start to grow." Then one day, little green plants appeared. "At last," shouted Toad, "my seeds have stopped being afraid to grow! But you were right, Frog. It was very hard work." Whatever I tell you today about walking for Jesus, take it to the bank as fact. Walking is hard work if we are talking about spiritually walking with the Lord. Walking is not something that "fly by night" Christians ever seem to accomplish. It takes "stick-to-it-ive-ness."

Did you know which trees in the forest live the longest? Did you say olive trees? You were close. The olive trees Jesus knelt under are still standing today. In Jesus' day in Gethsemane, some of those now 3,000 + old trees were already 1,000 years old. But guess again. Did one of you say, "bristlecone pines? You got it right. Bristlecone pines are the world's oldest living trees. Several are estimated to be 3,000 to 4,000 years old. In 1957, scientist Edmund Schulman found one bristlecone pine tree he named "Methuselah." This ancient, gnarled pine is nearly 5,000 years old! It was an old tree when the Egyptians were building the pyramids and when God was delivering the Israelites from bondage in Egypt. Bristlecone pine trees grow on top of the mountains here in the western United States at elevations of 10,000 to 11,000 feet—right up next to the tree line. They've been able to survive some of the harshest living conditions on earth: arctic temperatures, fierce winds, thin air, and little rainfall. Their brutal environment is actually one of the reasons they've survived for thousands of years. Hardship has produced in those trees the extraordinary strength and staying power they've needed to outlive every other tree in the forest.

Why talk about bristlecone pines when our subject this Saturday night is walking for Jesus? One reason is all. I want us to fasten our spiritual seat belts and learn that walking for Jesus is one of the hardest exercises of our lives. Some of you here know how tough it is. Some of you have tried to walk with Jesus and for Jesus, but you didn't hold out. You gave up, and threw in the towel. When we preached about flying like eagles for Jesus, what was the danger? Yes, it was crashing and dying. When we spoke of running, what was the danger? The danger in running is getting tired. What

is the danger in walking for Jesus? Wow! Look at our text. It looks like it might be the toughest exercise so far—maybe tougher even than flying or running. The danger in walking is becoming weary and fainting. The Hebrew word for walk is **yalak**. Do you know what it means? Yes, you are right. It means to walk—to keep putting one foot in front of the other and moving forward. The Hebrew word for faint is more complex. It comes from the root word **ya-aph**. This word **ya-aph** shows up three times in our text. In verse 29, we read that God gives strength to the faint or weary—**ya-aph**. In verse 30, we read that “youths or young people grow weary and faint—**ya-aph**. In verse 31, we read that those who wait for the Lord, and are braided in His will, will walk—**yalak**, and not become weary, or faint--**ya-aph**. The word **ya-aph** means to become fatigued, exhausted, faint, or worn out. Tonight, I want to explain to you three ways we quit **yalaking**, putting one foot in front of the other, walking for Jesus. I also want to explain the cure so we walk with Jesus all the way Home to Glory. What are the pitfalls of spiritually walking for Jesus and what is the cure?

WALKING FOR JESUS IS TOUGH WHEN THE INITIAL EXCITEMENT OF BECOMING A CHRISTIAN WEARS OFF. (I.)

When God sent His comfort to Zion, (Isaiah 40) in the year 712 BC, the first response must have been overwhelming excitement that made them soar on eagle’s wings. Already Israel, the 10 northern tribes and part of Judah had been taken into captivity by the King of Assyria in 721 BC, nine years earlier. News in Isaiah 40: 1,2 came with Isaiah’s prophecy, “Comfort, O comfort My people, speak kindly to Jerusalem that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity has been removed for she has received double discipline for all her sins.” That’s shouting ground for Israel. But to find out these words are Messianic, meaning that they would not be fulfilled immediately until God’s Son, the Lord Jesus Christ came, well that dampened the spirits down to a run—not soaring, but running toward hopes for Messiah to come. Finally, as the years went by, Israel was down from flying to running and then to a long hard walk. They learned to plod for God. No matter which gear we are in, fast, overdrive, second gear, or low gear, God wants us to fly on, run on, and walk on for Him. New Christians seem to do well at first, until the newness wears off. Then, watch out. Many new believers fade away. They die off as far as following Jesus. At no time does Jesus want us to say, “Well, I’ve had it with this Jesus’ stuff. I’m turning around.” Second thoughts about following Jesus ruin our Christian life, and they will ruin our whole life.

Did you know that you can't plow a straight row if you look back? The next time you walk on a sandy beach, try it. Test the rule. Start walking and keep looking back. Watch what happens. Your tracks won't be straight. Jesus said in Luke 9: 62, "No one, after putting his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." What Jesus means is that if we are to be His disciples, we must make a complete break with all our worldly loyalties that hinder our relationship with Him. Looking back indicates to God our lack of commitment to Him. This is true in marriage. If you are married, you'd better never look back and wish you were married to someone else. It's the fatal attraction. If you follow it very far, it will rob you of the love of your life. It's the old sin of the children of Israel after God delivered them from Egypt. They kept looking back and longing for the fish, the cucumbers, the leeks, the garlic, the melons, and the onions. (Numbers 11: 5,6). When we cling to our old sins and worldly pleasures, we are not putting one foot in front of the other. We are sliding backwards, not walking for Jesus. Are you walking away from God? Have you failed to break with the sins of your past? Walking for Jesus means becoming a man or a woman for God, giving up childish things, (I Cor. 13: 11) A disciple cannot look back. He must walk straight ahead til' Jesus comes, or takes him Home to Him. 2ndly,

WALKING FOR JESUS IS BONDAGE AND SLAVERY IF YOU AREN'T IN LOVING SUBMISSION TO JESUS. (II.) What is freedom for a committed believer is bondage for a professing believer who would rather be doing anything else but live for the Lord. I am sure we all know what it means to be trapped in the bondage of thinking God doesn't know what is best for us. We've all been there. We want out of the will of God. When God leads us to follow Him, even people who love us may question God's leading and God's call. They may feverishly or demandingly or angrily try to stop us from following Jesus. They may try to talk us out of God's call. It all seems to be meant well, but it's the sad bondage of loving our own understanding as superior to God's understanding. It is the slavery of stubbornness and rebellion which are idolatrous. It is the slavery of being braided to worldly wisdom more than submitting to God's understanding.

Notice our text in Isaiah 40: 28. We read about God, "His understanding is inscrutable." What on earth does that mean? The Hebrew word is **cheqer**. Cheqer means divinely examined, deliberated by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with His unsearchable wisdom and unfathomable ways past finding out. (Romans 11: 33) Have you ever checked out the will of God and concluded it is bondage/slavery? Who wants to memorize scripture and hide

God's Word in their heart every February and March as we do in our church? It's a question of surrender to the Lord. Who wants to admit anyone could possibly know more about us or those we love than we do? Carmelinda, nobody knows Pastor Will better than you do, do they? God does. Do you ever argue with God's will in your husband's life or Pastor Will, do you ever argue with God's will for your wife, Carmelinda? When we fight God's plan, it is a confusing time. It is wheel spinning time. It is no more walking for Jesus, but walking away from Him. We all know how to say "No!" to God in our spirit. We say it like this, "Mom or Dad, you may think you are following God in what you've asked me to do, but I know better. That sounds spunky like freedom, but it is bondage. Such a limited understanding is slavery. Do you want to walk in liberty—freedom for Jesus? Then start treasuring the Word of God, the promptings of the Lord, and listen to His voice. Psalm 119 has 176 verses telling us to treasure the Word of God. Waiting on the Lord is being braided to His will. His call sets us free. Psalm 119: 45 declares, "And I will walk at liberty, for I seek Thy precepts." The third pitfall of walking for Jesus is:

WALKING FOR JESUS IS IMPOSSIBLE WHEN YOUR SPIRITUAL GAS TANK IS EMPTY. (III.) That's why we have youth Snow Retreats.

All of us get low on fuel spiritually. Verse 30 tells us that "even young people grow weary and faint. And even vigorous young men stumble badly." Have any of you ever run out of gas? All you can do now is walk. If you are on the way to Denver, your physical stamina will run out just like you ran out of gas. Listen to me. I warn you all. Watch your spiritual gas gauge. Don't neglect filling up each day with reading the Word of God and praying. Upon waking up, that's my first stop. I stop at the throne of God with my wife, Jinny. I say to God, "Fill 'er up!" What do you think God means when He says, in verse 31, "Yet those who wait for the Lord will renew their strength or gain new strength?" The Hebrew word for renew or gain is **chalaph**. Chalaph means to sprout again or spring up. Snow Retreats are great for a spiritual tune-up. The only way we will walk for Jesus or walk with Jesus is by spending time in His Word daily and praying. It goes back to waiting on the Lord, staying braided to Him. God is calling us to sprout up again for Jesus. Are we willing to start a new daily habit of filling up with Jesus every morning? Are we willing to take time to pray every morning and night, and in between? Walking the line for Jesus suggests we love Him. It's like the old Johnny Cash song, "Because your mine, I walk the line." Do you? Can you say about Jesus, "I am His and He is mine. And because You're mine, I walk the line for You, Jesus." Bow your heads and hearts.