

Walking and Talking with God

Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him.

–Genesis 5:24

What exactly is a walking-and-talking relationship with God, and why should that be our goal? In the simplest terms, it is fellowship with him that lasts all day. It is being mindful that he is with us, that we are never alone, and that any time is a good time to strike up conversation with him. Let me illustrate.

My wife, Kim, and I love to take long walks together. This is our time not just to be together, side by side, but to talk about everything in our lives. As our relationship has grown and matured through the years, so have these cherished times together. As with parents everywhere, while we were raising our four children, life became very busy. We would often save up all our words for the “unopposed time” our long walks allowed. At times it seemed like we were just running through a list of things we had saved up over the course of the week, checking items off our to-do lists. There wasn’t much time for getting beyond the surface issues of raising our kids.

Now that the kids are married and starting their own families, Kim and I often enjoy our talks over morning coffee or dinner, but we still like to take our walks. It’s just that now we’re not as likely to have as much to say. So sometimes our walks are mostly in silence, except to point out something that grabs our attention or to share something that just came to mind. Here’s what I’m getting at: Whether we are walking and talking about the pressing issues of our lives or simply spending time together in silence, we are aware of one another’s presence and absolutely enjoy one another’s company.

This is a picture of a walking-and-talking relationship with God. The conversation may be quite different depending on

what's happening in your life. At times, you may need to go through a "list" of things you need to talk with him about, or he may bring to mind things he wants to talk to you about. Sometimes your prayers will feel relaxed and unhurried. At other times, your prayers may be more urgent and focused. At still other times, you may enjoy sweet fellowship with him in which you quiet your heart and simply listen. He might point out some unique part of his creation, for which you can express joyful appreciation. Above all, God desires that we walk and talk with him all day, every day.

We know that Adam and Eve walked in the Garden with God (Genesis 3:8) and that Noah, despite living in a sin-affected society, "walked faithfully with God" (Genesis 6:9, NIV). The Bible gives us plenty of examples of what this walking-and-talking relationship looks like so we know what we're aiming for.

In the Old Testament, we are introduced to a man named Enoch who had just such a relationship with God. Enoch made a brief appearance in the book of Genesis. We don't learn much about him, but what we do find out is this: "Enoch walked with God after he fathered Methuselah 300 years and had other sons and daughters. Thus all the days of Enoch were 365 years. Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him" (Genesis 5:22–24; Hebrews 11:5; Jude 14–15).

Interestingly, Enoch's name surfaced amid a genealogy. It was at a time when people lived upwards to 800 and 900 years. So Enoch might have been middle-aged, as it were, when "he was not." Yet he was a person—a living, breathing human being, just like us. He is a powerful example to us in how he walked and talked with God: Day after day and year after year, he was faithful to his God, well pleasing to him. A future psalmist would well describe the kind of life Enoch lived this way: "Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in his ways!" (Psalm 128:1). Then . . . one moment he was praying, praising, and pleasing God; the next he was gone. I once heard

someone say that God said, "You know, Enoch, we're closer to my home than yours. Let's just go there!" I want to be walking with God so closely that that's what I hear when the number of my days is up! Eventually the search was called off; Enoch was nowhere to be found.

We see a more fleshed-out example of walking and talking with God in the life of Nehemiah. It was the fifth century bc, at a time when God's people were in captivity—after God's temple had been demolished and his people taken as prisoners into a foreign land, discipline for Israel's disobedience to God. Nehemiah had risen to a high-ranking palace position as cupbearer to King Artaxerxes, the sixth king of the Medio/Persian Empire.

When his brother brought word of the devastation back in their homeland, naturally, Nehemiah took the news hard. Rather than blaming God or doubting his existence, Nehemiah spent days in prayer. He was honest with God about his own sin, confessed the sins of his nation, and appealed to the Lord on behalf of his people (see Nehemiah 1:1–11).

We get the idea this wasn't just a one-time event for Nehemiah, especially as we read about his God-revering character and actions throughout the book of Nehemiah. Prayer came as naturally to Nehemiah as breathing. In good and challenging times, he remained confident that the Lord was real and present—not off "watching from a distance"—and that he cared and would respond to Nehemiah's prayers.

We see a more contemporary example of walking and talking with God in the life a humble seventeenth-century monk named Brother Lawrence. He "practiced the presence of God" as he went about his duties in a Carmelite monastery in Paris.

Brother Lawrence said that "when we are faithful to keep ourselves in His holy Presence and set Him always before us, this not only hinders our offending Him, and doing anything

that may displease Him, at least willfully, but it also begets in us a holy freedom, and if I may so speak, a familiarity with God, wherewith we ask, and that successfully, the graces we stand in need of. In time, by often repeating these acts, they become habitual, and the presence of God is rendered as it were natural to us.”¹

Another more contemporary example is that of Frank C. Laubach, a twentieth-century missionary from Benton, Pennsylvania, who became known as “The Apostle to the Illiterates.” He took walking and talking with God about people in his world literally.

In *Prayer: The Mightiest Force in the World*, he described a number of “prayer experiments” he conducted in an effort to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). One of them is titled “Pray While Taking a Walk,” which he called one of the best ways to pray. It involved a vigorous walk and a talk with God in the rhythm of the steps as he prayed for those he passed: Lord, use my prayer—to help these people I am passing—to look up to Thee—to be hungry for Thy voice—to long to do Thy will—to hear Thee speak—to obey Thy voice—to do Thy will.²

Of course, there will be instances when we have more traditional times of prayer—when we fold our hands and pray at the kitchen table or in our favorite chair; when we hit our knees and cry out to God from our personal “prayer closet.” In the 1600s, English Puritan Richard Baxter challenged people to find the “fittest time for prayer, the fittest place for prayer, and the fittest preparation of heart.”³

Before Jesus taught the Twelve the Lord’s Prayer, he told them to “go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you” (Matthew 6:6). He was not saying this was the only place to pray, but was contrasting this kind of private, intimate prayer with the hypocrites who prayed loud, showy

prayers in public so that others would notice them. We get the idea of the prayer closet from these words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, and it's the central idea in the book and motion picture *War Room*.

In this inspirational story, the main character, Clara, literally turned her closet into a place where she retreated to pray. To an outsider it "appeared to be an empty closet except for the small chair in the corner. There were no clothes or items stored above, no ironing board or umbrellas. Just a pillow, the chair, a Bible, and notes taped on the walls."4 Yet it was there that Clara waged war against the enemy as she interceded for everyone in her world.

Here's the point. God longs for us to be in constant communion with him. He draws us ever closer, inviting us to know him, know his heart, and live lives that honor him. We are so blessed to be invited into a right relationship with him through his Son. Because of this, we can enjoy an abiding life with our Father: "that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3).

You may be thinking, "Sure, a monk living in the seventeenth century can find that kind of communion with God, but what about me? I am not a monk, nor a paid theologian. I'm a regular person with a job, a spouse, kids, groceries to buy, and a leaky faucet to fix." Forgive me if this sounds like you have to "arrive" at a certain point in your spiritual journey to obtain a walking-and-talking, conversational relationship with God.

Personally, I am far from having "arrived." I am so grateful that God's steadfast love and mercies are new every morning (Lamentations 3:22-23). I am inspired by such Bible heroes as Enoch and Nehemiah. Brother Lawrence and Frank Laubach inspire me as well, as does the example of Clara, who is based upon a

real prayer warrior.

Though I haven't arrived and may never this side of heaven, I am heading in the right direction. This is my prayer for you as well. Wherever you are in your relationship with Jesus, why not pause and ask God to help you to be intentional about walking and talking with him? No matter what stage of life you are in, no matter where you are right now or how this book came to your attention, I believe God has a message for you, and that message is I couldn't love you any more than I do right now and I would love to be part of your everyday life.

In all of this, once again, Jesus is our ultimate example. He lived out a walking-and-talking relationship with his Father before his disciples. In the midst of his work declaring the kingdom of God, Jesus still made time to regularly get away with the Father and pray. He prayed during the mundane times, and he prayed while he was working miracles. Certainly the Twelve recognized that Jesus had a superior relationship with his Father. They would eventually ask him to teach them to pray in the same manner (see Luke 11:1–13).

What was so unique about Jesus' prayer life? In *Experiencing Prayer with Jesus*, Henry and Norman Blackaby provided an answer by drawing attention to Hebrews 5:7–9. The author of Hebrews observed: "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him."

The Blackabys, father and son, noted that this passage encapsulates Jesus' prayer life in a powerful statement: "It teaches us the essence of prayer, so we can more fully experience the intimate fellowship with the heavenly Father that Jesus knew."⁵ The Blackabys observed the sincerity of Jesus' prayer life, how he would allow nothing to adversely affect conversational communion with the Father. Then they

extended this challenge: “If Jesus was convinced that His own life and ministry depended upon His prayer life with the Father, we as well must set our hearts to maintain uninterrupted time in prayer with our Lord, for this is the key not only to our ministry but to our very life as God intends it.”⁶

Indeed, this is what we can expect when we enjoy such communion with God: “And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, ‘This is the way, walk in it,’ when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left” (Isaiah 30:21).

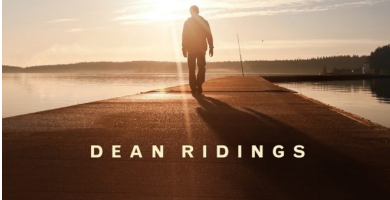
Endnotes

1. Dietrich Bonhoeffer (and various contributors), *Come Boldly: Timeless Daily Encouragements on Prayer* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2013), 23.
2. Frank C. Laubach, *Prayer: The Mightiest Force in the World* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1946), 66–67.
3. Richard Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1992), 72.
4. Chris Fabry (based on the motion picture by Alex Kendrick and Stephen Kendrick), *War Room: Prayer Is a Powerful Weapon* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2015), 89.
5. Henry and Norman Blackaby, *Experiencing Prayer with Jesus: The Power of His Presence and Example* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2006), 17.
6. Blackaby, *Experiencing Prayer with Jesus*, 19.

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