

“Step 6: The Walk”

November 10, 2024

First Christian Church

Scripture Text: Micah 6: 6-8

Hamilton started our series with a story of he and his wife visiting their daughter in New York. She wanted to take them hiking in the Catskill mountains to one of her favorite spots, -but 10 minutes into the hike Hamilton had to stop and sit down because he couldn't catch his breath. He wasn't having a heart attack. He was just that out of shape. It devastated him that he could not share this favorite hike with his daughter because he just couldn't catch his breath. His lifestyle of business travel, late night meetings and writing, office work, eating at strange hours, no movement, years of slowly letting things slide had caught up with him. He looked okay, but he wasn't. When he got home, he went to see his doctor and that check-up revealed high cholesterol, high triglycerides, and plaque build-up in his arteries. He needed to make some changes. He couldn't just go back to what he was and was not doing. He had to take care of himself physically. It started with a 7-minute workout app on his phone, then it grew to 14 minutes, and it kept growing until the next time he visited his daughter in the Catskill's, she couldn't keep up with him.

That is what this study was about – getting in shape, getting in spiritual shape. Some of us found we were in pretty good spiritual shape. Others realized some changes needed to be made. But what we received are the exercises to start and keep us on the road to spiritual fitness. As individuals and as a congregation, we have the steps we need. Remember them with me.

Our first step was about worship and prayer. Pray 5 times a day – when you first wake up, at 3 meals, and before bed – and worship weekly. We have always prayed as a family before meals, even when we are out, but praying when I am eating by myself had fallen away. I am working on that. For those who are looking for a little bit of help in your prayer life, I have put 2 resources on a resource table in the Fellowship Hall. The prayer card will help give a little structure and consistency to your prayer life, while the prayer outline just helps with a little focus. They are there for you to take home if you like.

Since our first step is all about us talking to God in prayer and worship, it makes sense that our second step is about us listening to God – study. The Bible is our primary source for listening to God. The starting challenge is 5 verses a day which many of us quickly expanded to at least finish the story. If you don't know where to start, please don't pick Numbers or Leviticus. Try Luke then move to one of the letters like Philippians. Again, reading the Bible is key. There are plenty of resources available online which help you read through the whole Bible in one year. If you are ready to learn more about what you are reading, I put a couple books on the resource

table from William Barkley who puts Bible study in a daily devotional format. Look at the books, write down the information you need to order one, but please don't take them because I still use them. I am far from done having listen to God. As well as our personal study time, step 2 includes being part of a small group for study. Sunday School is the easiest way to do that. I would be happy to tell you about our different classes.

Step 3 is about service, and the exercise includes 5 intentional acts of kindness a week plus serving with others. Just open your eyes and you will find opportunities to serve and be kind to others. Earlier this week I was driving home from the office and a small branch had blown into the road. It was not a log that was going to crush my suspension. Just a branch that had the potential of scratching the paint on the car. Luckily there was no car coming the other way, so I could swerve and miss it. But because of this study, I wasn't more than a couple hundred feet in the clear when the voice came into my head and I had to turn around and clear that branch out of the road. A moment of kindness. Just open your eyes. Service starts with your family and those closest to you and expands as opportunities fall in front of you. We serve as individuals and we serve with others in things like community dinner, Habitat for Humanity, coaching, the Youth Outlet Center, in service groups, organizations, and elected offices, as well as other areas like we did on "Service Sunday".

Remember step 4 is about giving. The exercise challenge is to extend 5 acts of generosity toward others each month, and give generously to God through church. Giving starts with our money. The reality is, "where you treasure is, there you heart will be also." We move our heart by moving our treasure. Yet giving is not limited to money, but also time and energy. Notice is says, "extend 5 acts of generosity toward others each month, and give generously to God through church." Those 5 acts of generosity can happen anywhere. Make a server's day with a ridiculous tip. Give an unexpected gift to your spouse. Support an organization that is doing things that are important to you. For me that is Heifer Project, Week of Compassion and United Ministries. We need to exercise our giving muscle.

I like the way the book phrased step 5, "Let others know you are a Christian and invite 5 people to church each year." Let others know you are a Jesus follower. That is how the sharing starts. If you live this amazing life in front of them, and don't let them know the source of your power, you are setting them up for failure. Because on our own, we cannot carry a peace about us. On our own we cannot maintain a servant mentality without wanting something in return. On our own we cannot continue to give of ourselves to others without running out of gas. On our own we cannot delay gratification and rebel against the values of this world. You just can't do it. And if they see you doing it, and you haven't let them know your power and motivation, they will try to be like you in their own strength and they will fail. "Let others know you are a Christian and invite 5 people to church each year."

I did a little math this week. And according to our latest newsletter, our average attendance so far this year is 99 people in worship including our online folks. That means, if we all do our Spiritual workouts, in a year we will have prayed 180,675 prayers and studied 180,675 verses of Scripture. We will have pursued 25,740 acts of kindness along with 5940 acts of generosity plus generous giving to the church. In a year we will have invited 495 people to church. That is going to change things. It is going to change us as individuals, as a church, and as a community.

Personally, I must admit our study of “The Walk” has helped me realize I had become lazy in my relationship with Jesus. I was talking and listening to God through prayer and studying Scripture, but not as regularly as I need to to stay in good spiritual shape. I was kind, but not intentionally looking for opportunities to be kind, and I became upset when my generosity didn’t lead to a big tax deduction, like that is what I was doing it for. I was letting others do all the inviting to church and pretending my job was to do everything in my power to make a good experience once they got here. I still expected God to be there for me, -answer my prayers, empower me with God’s Spirit, forgive me, and save me in the end, but I was not contributing to the relationship. I was kind of letting things slide, and I know what happens to relationships like that. When one person starts freeloading in the relationship, before long, the relationship ends. Jesus ending the relationship is not something I could deal with. There is a cost to being a Jesus follower. Grace is free but the life-giving relationship cost. It costs speaking and listening, serving and giving, looking and sharing. I have to do my part daily, weekly, monthly and yearly.

In your reading and small group time this week, Hamilton will help you see how these 5 essential practices of the Christian life sustained Jesus, even while hanging on the cross. It is powerful and true, but I want to remind you where we began. Hamilton couldn’t catch his breath while hiking with his wife and daughter and needed to get into shape. We exercise because we want to live longer and be able to keep doing what we want to do longer. The same is true of getting in shape spiritually. Jesus could carry who He was all the way to the end because He was in good spiritual shape. I want that too. I want who I am in Jesus to be so deep and so ingrained in me and the practices to be such habits, that when I lose control of my faculties, my habits will take over and I will still be speaking and listening to God, still be kind and generous in a way that other will still see Jesus in me and be drawn to Him.

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