



COLLEGE HEIGHTS
BAPTIST CHURCH

Walk in



The Spirit

September 6 - October 17

CHBC Daily Scripture Readings

WEEK 1: WALK IN THE TRUTH

Monday, September 6 - 2 John

At College Heights, we ACT. You have heard me say something like this for two years now. We put it on the back of T-shirts and put it on bulletin boards. However, I have never done a good job of explaining what ACT means. Sure, we have three interlocking circles showing different tasks for each of A - Apply Yourself, C - Create Community, and T - Tell Others, but it has been very generic.

The readings which start today and the sermons which start this coming Sunday will remedy the generic nature of ACT. ACT means to Walk in the Spirit. Walking means moving forward, making progress, journeying onward. But what does that mean for you and me as our church is in Northwest Cleburne in the Fall of 2021? What does this mean for College Heights Baptist Church as we seek to minister to our community, our county, our country, and our world? This is where we get down to the brass tax, the nitty-gritty of living out our faith.

Second, John helps us to begin to answer these questions. Notice what this short letter says about walking. In verse 4, the writer of 2 John is overjoyed to know that some in the church are walking in the truth. Some of your translations of the Bible may say “living” or “following.” The literal translation is walking but the connotation is that the way to live is to live in the truth. No matter how the word is translated, the same message comes across: the church is to act in the truth, *just as we have been commanded by the Father*.

The message in 2 John 4 is not just to be honest. It is so much more. It is to walk with God. Verse 6 says that we are to walk according to his commandments. That this walk shows love to one another and to God. Obeying God’s commandments, walking in His truth is the command. The last half of John 8:32 has become part of general culture over the centuries. In courtrooms and in life, the message we hear is “the truth shall set you free.” It’s a great sentiment to think that just tell the truth and everything will be alright. Honesty is the best policy, but that’s not the message in John 8:32. Stop

here and read John 8:31-32. Did you see it? The truth is not just honesty. The truth is the teachings of Jesus!

Now we take that message back to 2 John. We walk according to the commandments of God. We walk in the truth, which is the teaching of Jesus. How does Jesus sum up the Law and the Prophets? Love God and love people. This is the beginning point of walking in the Spirit. Can you say that you love God and love people? To love someone means to spend time with them. At the end of 2 John, the writer has so much to say but will wait to see them face to face. He so desires to deepen the relationship between him and the church. The deepening of a relationship only happens when quality time is spent with one another. To love one another means to spend time with one another. How much time do you spend with God? How much time do you spend with people? The time you spend with a person indicates how much you love them. Walk in the truth, which is the teachings of Jesus, which tells us to love God and love people.

Tuesday, September 7 - Philippians 2:1-4

Imagine waking up on a cool Autumn morning with a thick fog hovering over the land. You step outside to feel the mist on your skin, breathing in what seems to be a mixture of water and air. You take a few steps among the misty fog, feeling the dew on your shoes. A person who might be 100 feet away from you could barely see you. If they were watching, all they would see is a silhouette through the fog. They would be unable to see characteristics of you to know who you were, but you are just a person. All they know is that you are walking with fog all around you.

This is the picture I want you to consider when we say the phrase “walking in the Spirit.” You are walking in a fog, in a mist that you feel on your skin and in your lungs. Think of the Spirit as a fog around you. When others look in your direction, they don’t see you, you aren’t noticeable, but all they know is a person is walking in the Spirit. In order to be seen like that, it takes us having the characteristics of God. It takes us walking in the Spirit.

Philippians 2:1-4 is one selection of verses which exemplify how we live in the Spirit. We all become those silhouettes in the fog. We do not force the sunshine/spotlight onto what we want, but we allow the fog to be the thing focused on. When we try to make things about us, put the spotlight/sunlight upon us, what happens to the fog? It burns up. When we are selfish, we are not walking in the Spirit. Many times when we read this passage, we consider what we as individuals need to do. We realize the command to be humble, to put others ahead of ourselves and we commit to doing that. That's wonderful! That's putting God's words to us in action! But have you ever thought of the bigger picture?

What if every person put other people ahead of themselves? What if everyone was humble? What if no one looked after their own interests? We would be walking in the Spirit. We would be putting the focus on the fog around us, knowing that we had brothers and sisters in Christ beside us, but we'd have the characteristics of the fog. This is the picture of walking in the Spirit. This is denying yourself and taking up your cross daily. It is no longer you who lives, but it is Christ who lives within you. Embrace the fog. Walk in the Spirit.

Wednesday, September 8 - 1 Timothy 2:8-3:16

What qualities does a pastor need to have to lead a church? What actions does a deacon need to hold to and stay away from? What about women? Are they allowed to preach, teach, or be a deacon? And then, what about 2:15? Do women have to have children to have salvation? All of these questions should lead to great discussion tonight.

While we have these types of discussions, no matter the topic let us not lose sight of verses 15-16. The church is the household of God. We are family members and family members don't always agree about everything. At the same time, all who are in the household submit to the proper authority of the house. In the church, that is God. His truth and his teachings are the load-bearing wall of this church. Without God's teachings, the church comes crumbling down. Verse 16 is a beautiful hymn likely sung

in the early church. It testifies to who God is. It testifies to why we can trust in the events of Jesus' life. While we study all of the questions of how to do church, let us never forget the reason we are the church.

Thursday, September 9 - 3 John 1:1-8

I have no greater joy than this, to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

Earlier this summer, I went to pick up Hannah and Micah from day care. It was a Monday afternoon in July. The pickup procedures at daycare are for me to wait in the lobby while Hannah and Micah are called to come there. This usually means I spend a few minutes waiting every day. On this particular Monday, one of the directors of the daycare wanted to tell me how impressed she was with Hannah. Another child had her first day at daycare that day and Hannah helped her throughout the day, showing her where things were, playing with her, introducing her to others. The daycare director just wanted me to know how helpful she had been. You can imagine that I beamed with pride.

When we hear or see our children doing good deeds and making good decisions, we feel overwhelmed with joy, do we not? The writer of 3 John felt the same way about his Christian friends doing the same. He was overwhelmed because his church family was walking in the truth.

I was overjoyed when I learned of Hannah's hospitality on that Monday afternoon. I was also overjoyed hearing of the hospitality and Spirit-filled work of my church family. About the same time this summer, we went to a friend's house to go swimming. These friends go to a different church but brought their children to our VBS this year. As the kids were playing and the adults were watching, the father commented on how appreciative he was that our church did VBS. His church did not have VBS, and he appreciated the sacrifice every one at CHBC made to make VBS a success. "I have no greater joy than this, to hear my children are walking in the truth.

Let us be overjoyed with one another when we are walking in the truth together. Let us be encouraged with one another when we are living as God requires. Let us

have hope as a family of God with one another when we are following the commands of the gospel to love God and love our neighbors. Let us support one another so that we can be co-workers with the truth.

Friday, September 10 - 3 John 1:9-15

Diotrephes is not someone who is walking in the truth. It seems the writer of 3 John has sent a previous letter to the church Diotrephes is the leader of and Diotrephes has neglected to share that information with the church nor has he himself acted upon that information. The writer of 3 John had written, it seems, that the church needed to be hospitable to traveling teachers, but Diotrephes did not want to do that. The way I would describe Diotrephes is a rogue, heretical, lying, selfish, authoritarian pastor. Because of this, the writer of 3 John writes this letter to Gaius so that the church can learn of what they are to do with traveling teachers and what Diotrephes is refusing to do.

Let us not be like Diotrephes. Let us not walk in lies and falsehoods. Let us not walk in our own teaching and what we think. Let us not live only loving those who love us. Let us walk in truth. Let us walk with the teaching of Jesus and his commandments. Let us live our lives loving all people. Let us not imitate what is evil but imitate what is good. How can you imitate good today? How can you put others first? May your life be a blessing to those around you today.

Saturday, September 11 - Jude

What's worse than one Diotrephes (see yesterday's DSR) in a church? How about a group of people who have weaseled their way into church leadership roles and are now leading the church astray? That's the reason for the letter of Jude. While some of the information found in the letter seems strange to us as readers, the purpose is very straightforward. There are people among you who are ungodly or, to use the phrase we've been using all week, do not walk in the truth.

Jude does not mince words. These intruders are ungodly, immoral, worldly, defilers, lust-driven, grumblers, and bombastic. They cause division, spoil fellowship and Lord's Supper meals, and lack the Holy Spirit. Jude writes to the church to warn them of these imposters of the faith. Jude encourages the faithful of the church to not give in to these faithless heathens. Do not take the bait they are setting out to sow discord among the brethren. Ignore them. Instead, build your faith, pray in the Holy Spirit, stay in the love of God, and look forward to better days of eternity ahead.

Not in our church in particular, but in the universal, global church at large, there are leaders who are selfish like Diotrefes, and stealthily malfeasant within the church. They are wolves in sheep's clothing, waiting to devour for their own benefit. Avoid such relationships. Instead, remain focused on the God in heaven above and know there are better days ahead.

Sunday, September 12 - Psalm 107:1-3

We come from all over to praise God. East to west, north to south, let all the people of the Lord worship Him today!

WEEK 2: DO NOT WALK AS THE WORLD WALKS

Monday, September 13 - Ephesians 4:17-24

If you do something enough, you stop realizing that you are even doing it. Back when the pandemic started was the first time I ever thought about how much I touch my face and rub my eyes. It was incredibly revealing how often I do something like this without even noticing! Several times a day, maybe several times an hour, I'd attempt to scratch my eyes, then quickly realize I'm not supposed to do that! It was a habit I had and I had no idea that I was touching my face that much.

Similarly, also when the pandemic started, I never realized the amount of minor movements I made while preaching. When we were recording church on Saturday and broadcasting on Sunday morning was the first time I regularly watched myself preach. I

was amazed at my mannerisms which I had no idea I was doing. It was very helpful to become aware of these potential distractions.

The church at Ephesus needed to be exhorted to not walk as the Gentile walked. The Gentiles were so far away from God, that they did not even recognize when they sinned. They were not remorseful after committing an act contrary to the will of God, but kept on doing whatever they felt like doing. The Ephesians needed a stern reminder that they were supposed to be different. They were not supposed to have a hardness of heart toward sin, but they are to be clothed with a new self. They are to be in the likeness of God in righteousness and holiness. They are to walk as Christ walked, not as the world walks.

This week we will be reminded that our walk with Christ means we do not walk as the world walks; that we walk in the light, not in darkness. That we see sin as sin and do feel remorse when we stray from the will of God. Let us not grow comfortable with our sin or the sin of the people and society around us. Let us remember that we have died to our old self and have been raised to walk in newness of life. Do not walk as the world walks today. Do not be comfortable with sin. Ask God for a fresh pair of glasses to see the sin in your own life and around you and put away the old self.

Tuesday, September 14 - Galatians 5:16-21

In 1964, the Supreme Court heard a case regarding censorship of obscene videos. The question before the court was if a particular video was obscene and therefore could be censored or was it not considered obscene and therefore protected under the First Amendment. During this trial, Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart famously theorized that obscenity could never be accurately and intelligibly defined but “I know it when I see it.” For our purposes, we might be able to say that sin cannot be completely and intelligibly defined but “we know it when we see it.”

But wait... Yesterday, we discussed being so comfortable with sin that we don't recognize when it is around us. Today, we read a passage which seems to contradict

this idea, particularly in verse 19: “the works of the flesh are obvious.” So which is it? Are they always obvious or can we be so comfortable with sin, it is no longer obvious?

From an outside perspective, it is always obvious what is the work of the Spirit and the work of the flesh. The desires of the Spirit and the desires of the flesh are always apparent. However, in the heat of the moment, we may not realize the sin in our heart. Let’s consider anger in verse 20. If you are a person prone to anger, you may not realize when you are getting angry and lashing out in anger. But from an outside perspective, someone else will recognize it. The works of the flesh are obvious. We know it when we see it.

Listing all of the ways the world walks which is contrary to God is impossible. Paul even finished this list of vices with “things like these.” If it is an action which pulls you away from the will of God in your life, then it is sin. If it is hindering your walk with God, then it is sin. If it takes the place of God, it is sin. The sin of this life is obvious; sometimes, it just takes someone else’s perspective.

Wednesday, September 15 - 1 Timothy 4:1-16

Our reading for tonight contrasts the behavior to avoid and the behavior to embrace. It expresses the thoughts to reject and the thoughts to accept. What is the goal of Paul when writing these words to Timothy? By doing these things, he will save himself and his audience. I think we pretty easily understand the opportunity his audience will have. If Timothy focuses on proclamation of Jesus through preaching, teaching, and reading Scripture, of course the audience will have the opportunity to accept salvation. But Timothy? Isn’t he already a Christian?

Let us remember what Philippians 3:12-13 says: “...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” In the same way, we are to work out our own salvation, Timothy is to behave, think, and act appropriately as he works out his salvation. He is to preach, teach, and read Scripture as he works out his salvation. You have been

saved, you are being saved, and you will be saved. This is the work and plan of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Thursday, September 16 - Revelation 21:1-8

Once again, much like we read on Tuesday, we have a list of vices in verse 8 and a warning that those who do such things will not be part of the Kingdom of God. It is a fairly common listing of sins connected to other vice lists in the New Testament as well as the Ten Commandments. This passage tells us of the New Heaven and New Earth which can be our home as long as we remain in God and away from these sins.

These eight verses are our passage today because of the last vice listed: liars. I imagine that we recognize the other vices on the list as major concerns. Murder, sexual immorality, not believing in God, having no faith, conjuring spirits, and idolatry are all horrific actions to take. According to the Bible, lying is alongside those transgressions. The liars will not inherit the Kingdom of God, but instead they will suffer the second death.

The world walks as if lying is part of life. Truth is relative, the world says. Choose the facts which help support your pre-formed opinion, the world encourages. And at some point, at one time or another, you and I have given in to the world and lied. Whether it was to make ourselves look better than we are or to further a point we were trying to make, we have all lied. In the eyes of God, those lies that we tell equate to everything else on this list. All sin separates us from God and keeps us out of the Kingdom of God.

However, God made a way for us to be part of the new Kingdom. God made a way for us to be his children. God gave of himself, took the burden of the punishment for our sin, so that when God sees us, we are not murderers, idolaters, and liars. When we have accepted the sacrificial gift of Jesus taking our punishment, then we are conquerors, and God is our Father and we are His children.

Who can you share this message of God's love with today? Who needs to hear that they do not need to be defined by their mistakes, but they can be defined by their

status as a child of God? Who needs to be saved from eternal death? Reach out to that person today and share with them how to walk as Jesus walked.

Friday, September 17 - Matthew 25:31-46; Matthew 7:21-23

Does this mean that some Christians are going to Hell? It's a question that all of us think about at one time or another, if we are honest. We read a passage Matthew 25:31-46 or Matthew 7:21-23 and think "are there people in pews who are not going to Heaven?" What do we make of these teachings of Jesus?

For one, Matthew 25:31-46 should spur us to action. Jesus is giving us the answer key to the test in these verses. He's telling us how we are going to be graded on the final exam. When all the peoples of the world must give an account and we are separated, let us strive to be sheep. This passage tells us how to do that and it is by serving the needy as if we are serving Jesus. When it comes to Matthew 7:21-23, there is talk, there is action, but there is no belief. Belief is something that no one can discern except you and the Lord. Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God who died on the cross and rose again on the third day? Do you believe that Jesus had the power to take away the punishment for sin? OR are you just going to church because that's what your family expects? Are you serving at the church because you are a nice person? Belief in the soul is primary which necessarily leads to proclamation from the mouth and works from the hands.

Are Christians going to Hell? There are people in this world today who think they are Christians and going to Heaven who are not. But true Christians are secure in the hands of God. Those who believe in their soul, confess with their mouth, and work with their hands are the true children of God and should never doubt their eternal security. These true Christians are the righteous which enter into eternal life.

Saturday, September 18 - Philippians 3:17-4:1

I have many pet peeves. LeeAnn could give you the long lists. One of the biggest pet peeves is poor planning. I am a detailed planner. Every Sunday, I plan out my daily

schedule for the entire week. Many of you think I do a lot. You know how I do it? I use a planner. When we get ready to go on vacation, I have a very detailed plan to make sure we get to the airport at the right time. We don't leave the house "about 3 am" (for a 6 am flight); we wake up at 2:25, get the kids up at 2:45, put shoes on at 2:55, and pull out of the driveway no later than 3:05 in order to park the car at 4:20 am, take the shuttle to arrive at airport at 4:30, which gets us through security by 5 am, which gives us 30 minutes to get breakfast before boarding at 5:30. Like I said, I am detailed and people who have no plan drive me crazy.

People who do not trust in Jesus in their savior have no future plan. They seize the day and go with the flow. Paul does not mince words at the end of Philippians 3. The people whose god is their bellies, their desires, their whims, their appetites, will have an end in destruction. When one sets their minds on the things of earth, they have not properly planned for their eternal future.

For those who have put their trust in God and follow Jesus, our focus is on heaven. That does not mean we live life with our head in the clouds. What it means is we know there is a future past this present life. We are planning our lives not just for 100 years, but for eternity. We are not living for today, but for all of our tomorrows. Because of this, my church family, stand firm in the Lord. Stick to the plan and you will achieve the goal of a heavenly body in the end.

Sunday, September 19 - Psalm 108:1-6

WEEK 3: DON'T STOP WALKING

Monday, September 20 - Psalm 23

As many of you know, I have been running regularly for exercise over the past year. Throughout the year, I have had several experiences that make great stories. I've been chased by dogs, almost run into mailboxes, almost stepped on a snake, and ran into more spider webs than I can count. One time back in the spring, it was the first day I had run in the afternoon when it was above 80 degrees. That day I was running four

miles. During the first two miles, there was no problem, but then in the third mile, I hit the proverbial brick wall. I could not run at the pace I wanted because it was just too hot. But here's the thing: I was on my four mile loop! I couldn't just stop or I would have been just sitting on the side of the road. I had to keep going, so I did.

Psalm 23:4 tells us that there will be days when we are walking the Christian life, but we will "hit that wall." We will walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Praise be to God that He is with us during those moments and that can give us peace. But notice something else. Just like when I was on my run and the run got difficult I couldn't stop. In the Christian life, when you find yourself in the dark valley, **DON'T STOP WALKING.**

This is the message for this week. Even when the days are hard and the results are not what we desire, don't stop walking with the Lord. Do not stop walking in the Spirit. Good days are ahead, goodness and mercy is upon you and the Lord is protecting you. But you cannot stop walking when the days are hard. Keep going. Martin Luther King, Jr. said it best when delivering an address to a group of college students in 1967: "If you can't fly, then run. If you can't run, then walk. If you can't walk, then crawl, but by all means, keep moving." While he was talking about the Civil Rights Movement, we can apply this to our walk with God as well.

Stopping when it got too hot to run was not an option for me, and stopping when the walk with God gets too difficult is not an option for you either. But do not fear or be dismayed, the Lord God is with you even in the darkest valley.

Tuesday, September 21 - Ezekiel 37:1-14

Growing up, my favorite ride at Disney World was Pirates of the Caribbean. As such, I was extremely excited to go see the 2003 movie based on the attraction. At the beginning of the movie, it is what I expected it to be. The plot of the movie has pirates fighting against townspeople and pirates fighting against other pirates. Then something unexpected happens. The pirates take some townspeople prisoner on their boat. One of the townspeople breaks free from her chains to go up on the deck to try to escape.

When she gets to the deck, she is in store for a shock as is the audience watching the movie. The pirates are skeleton ghosts cursed for stealing treasure. When in moonlight, they show who they really are and it is ghastly. The audience realizes they are not just watching a pirate movie, but they are watching a ghost story.

Ezekiel 37 is like a horror, zombie movie. Dry bones rising to become human again? I'm not watching that movie if it's not based on my favorite attraction at Disney World. Getting past the scare factor of Ezekiel 37, the message is beautiful though. Despite everything that Israel has done, God is still with them. Israel has a future because of God's steadfast love. Thank goodness God is in the resurrection business, amen?!

If you have had a hard day, week, month, year, decade, or life, do not give up walking because God has not given up on you. Maybe you feel like you are only bones. You feel like you don't have anything left and can't go another step. You have been hurt and broken for so long. Don't give up moving forward. God has not given up on you so do not give up on what God has planned for you. You may feel like you are dry bones, but God can put His breath inside of you and give you life. Don't stop walking.

Wednesday, September 22 - 1 Timothy 5:1-6:2; Titus 2

While we will get to the rest of Titus in a few weeks, we include this passage today because of its similarities to 1 Timothy 5:1-6:2. The message to Timothy and Titus from Paul is to treat the church as a family as it is God's household. The crux of 1 Timothy, the main message is how to behave as the household of God (1 Tim. 3:15). So Paul instructs his students how to treat the men and women of different ages in the family of God. He instructs Titus on how to teach the men and women of different ages how to act.

I want you to read these chapters a few times today. Make notes on the ways we are to treat one another. Consider how our church is doing. What are we doing well

and what do we need to do better with? Let's discuss how we take care and treat one another tonight.

Thursday, September 23 - 1 Corinthians 15:50-58

The perishable does not inherit the imperishable. Last year, when we were on vacation one night, Micah spiked a fever. The gift shop at the hotel had closed for the night so we couldn't get children's Advil from there, so we searched for the closest 24 hour pharmacy. My father-in-law left the hotel room in search of the store. On the way, he spoke with a hotel employee asking for directions, and they were very kind to reopen the gift shop for us to get the medicine there. This is when the real fun begins. Micah gets extremely cranky when he's sleepy and can't sleep. He is not in his right mind. So when my father-in-law returns with the medicine, Micah decides he doesn't want to drink it. Finally, we get him to drink some of the medicine but he refuses to drink the rest. We spent 45 minutes that night trying to get him to drink all of his medicine. (After that, he fell asleep, stayed asleep the whole night, and remembered none of this the next day. He had all of this energy but the parents and grandparents did not!)

We have to drink all of the medicine. We must put on all of the imperishability in order to inherit what is imperishable. We cannot stop when the days are hard and the road is long. The perishable does not inherit the imperishable. Yes, the journey can be rocky; it's not always smooth. God promises to be with us, but He doesn't promise life will be easy. But we can be comforted to keep walking because when we reach what looks like the end of the line, death is not there. There is only a change in the twinkling of a moment. Death will be swallowed up in victory. Death does not worry us. We have eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore, keep walking; keep working. Don't stop and know your work is not in vain.

Friday, September 24 - 2 Thessalonians 3:10-13

“Do not grow weary in doing what is right.” I must admit to you that I grew weary in doing what was right when I was in Spanish 4 as a junior in high school. By this level of Spanish, the teacher rarely spoke in English. We had reading homework every night with a quiz over what we read the next day. Of course, the reading and the questions were all in Spanish. At the beginning of the semester, I did what was right. I spent two hours a night reading and translating the story to prepare for class. When taking the quiz the next day, I would regularly miss a question or two getting anywhere between a 70 and 85 for my grade.

I was in 4th period Spanish, while some of my friends were in 2nd period Spanish. If I remember correctly, we all had 3rd period History together. Some of my 4th period classmates were getting the answers to the quizzes from those who had already taken the quiz. I got tired of doing the work and making worse grades, so I must admit, I joined in the cheating. I grew weary and started doing what was wrong. That’s the end of the story. We never got caught; I never learned my lesson; I got the grades I needed to have a good grade point average.

Do not grow weary in doing what is right. Some of the people in Thessalonica were getting lazy. They were not working and were taking advantage of Christian hospitality and giving. They were surviving; some might say they were thriving because they had a lot of time to be busybodies and social butterflies. It is possible that these individuals assumed Jesus was coming back immediately. They thought “why should I work if it does not matter?” Whatever the case, they were becoming a burden to those who were working. Paul chastises them to get back to work.

Then he encourages those who have never stopped walking. He tells them, “look, I know you are working hard and other people are not. I know that you are providing for those ‘lazybodies’ because of your compassion and love. You are doing the right thing. Do not stop.”

Maybe you have grown weary of doing what is right. You see others not working for the Kingdom of God and you wish you could live like they do. Do not grow weary;

do not give up doing the work of the Lord. Keep walking in the Spirit. Even if the work is more time-consuming and the immediate results seem small, keep walking as the Lord directs you and it will be worth it in the end.

Saturday, September 25 - Daniel 3:16-25

Did you think we could have a series about walking in the Spirit and not include this passage?!? When we choose to keep the faith, when we choose to keep walking, the Spirit of God always walks with us. As we have said repeatedly this week, God doesn't promise we will avoid the fire, but He does promise to walk with us through the fire.

So that you are not falsely confident, I do find it important to point out Daniel 3:18. "But if not..." is such an important moment in the story. The three friends are confident that God can save them; they are not sure, though, if He will save them. We read story after story after story in the Bible of God delivering his people; we read countless events of someone's faith in God saving them. We read these certain stories so much that we think something is wrong with our faith if we are not delivered like these ones.

Our call is to trust in the Lord no matter what. We believe that God can deliver us, but that does not necessarily mean He will. He will always walk with us, but He may not rescue us. Stephen was stoned; Paul was shipwrecked three times; Jesus was crucified. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are saved from the fire; Daniel from the lions; and Israel from Egypt, but that does not guarantee our earthly salvation from the chaos of the world.

What am I trying to say? Trust in the Lord that He is walking with you, in good times and bad. Trust in the Lord that He is all-powerful and one who keeps His word. Even when the flames are all around, there's another in the fire walking with you. He may not rescue you from the fire in the way you'd like, but keep walking because he's walking beside you.

Sunday, September 26 - Psalm 109:30-31

WEEK 4: WALKING ON SOLID GROUND

Monday, September 27 - Colossians 2:6-7

My dad was caught completely off guard. We were at church on Sunday morning while I was in high school. There was a couple who had started attending our church, and dad decided to go talk with the husband. His wife had attended church more frequently before this particular Sunday and she was the director of the connected daycare to the church. My dad planned to go speak with the husband to invite him to Sunday School the next week and to just say he was glad that the man was here. As my dad followed through on his plan, the man responded with a firm “no.” He would not attend Sunday School or any Bible Study. When my dad asked why, the man responded “because I don’t see the point. After you are saved, church is just entertainment.” My dad was shocked and couldn’t think of any else to say in this conversation. Sadly, this man never changed his tune and was an infrequent attender of the church.

I don’t have to tell you that this man’s philosophy on church was 100% incorrect. Church is not just entertainment after you are saved. Colossians 2:6-7 will be our focus this week. Since Jesus is your Lord, you are to continue to walk in Him (most translations have translated verse 6 as “live your lives in Him” but literally the Greek says “walk in Him”). As we talk about walking in the Spirit and this week, walking on solid ground, we must remember that coming to conversion is not the finish line of the race but it is only the beginning. Walking in the Spirit is a lifelong commitment; not only a commitment until conversion to get “your ticket to heaven.”

How can we walk well? Walking well starts with having solid ground under your feet. We have all felt the difference between walking on sand at the beach versus walking on a sidewalk or road. The faster you go, the harder it is to keep up on the sand. If we are trying to walk and run in the Christian faith, but we have not put ourselves on the firm foundation of being spiritually connected in Christ, then we are

running on sand. What we need to do is walk and run on the firm footing of the paved road which God has given us. We need to be rooted and built up in Him, it tells us in verse 7. It is necessary for us to walk in the Spirit throughout this life. It is easier to walk on solid ground. Church is not entertainment. It is being rooted and built in Him, walking in Him to become more like Him in our daily life.

Tuesday, September 28 - Ezekiel 19:10-14

This lamentation in Ezekiel is what happens when a person (or a people) is not rooted in God. This passage is lamenting the plucking up of the King of Israel, representing the plucking of the entire nation. The stem was growing, it was beautiful, higher and fairer than all the other plants around, and then it became unrooted. We all know what happens to a plant which is cut off from its roots, what happens when it is cut off from its nutrients. The plant shrivels up and dies.

Coming back to our passage from yesterday, this is what our life is like when we do not walk rooted in God. As individuals, we may start off strong. We are growing, we are producing fruit, and then we start to wither. This is not a call to action or a call to walk more diligently and farther. No, this is a call to deepen our roots. When the sun gets hot and the drought extends, the plants with the deepest roots are the ones which survive. The health and fruit on the surface of the plant is because of the roots below the surface. In order to walk farther in the Spirit, we must grow deeper in our relationship with God. It is out of the roots of worship, prayer, and study which the fruit of evangelism and service grow. Let us not be a “strong stem which withers, but let us be “a stem which towers aloft among the thick boughs.”

Wednesday, September 29 - 1 Timothy 6:3-21

We read to the conclusion of 1 Timothy tonight looking at final words of affirmation which Paul gives Timothy. Found in the center of this section in verses 8-10, I think we find an eternal truth which can make all of us happier in life. Be content with what you have and do not love money. The desire to be rich can make a person mad

and ruin their family and life. If you have food for dinner and clothes on your back, be thankful for how the Lord has taken care of you. Do not covet and yearn for more than you need. Can you be content with what the Lord has given you or do you think you need more? Do you trust God or not? Let's discuss these verses and more tonight.

Thursday, September 30 - Hebrews 10:19-25

When you read Colossians 2:7, you notice three ways in which we can successfully walk in Him. The first, being rooted and built up in Him, was our main topic on Monday and Tuesday. Today and tomorrow, we move to the second way which is "established in the faith."

Coming to our passage today, do you notice the subject of most of the sentences? "Us." Let us approach, let us hold fast, let us consider... The direction which is given in Hebrews 10:19-25 is directed at the group, not individuals. There is encouragement to continue to meet together. I believe there is a connection between these words to "us" and being "established in the faith" in Colossians 2:7.

What does Paul mean by "the faith" in Colossians? It seems likely that the faith was shorthand for faith in Christ Jesus. This is obviously a connection point for all Christians. While we may all have individual roots and connections to the wine, we share an establishment in the faith. We share a connection to the nutrients, to the vine. To use a different plant metaphor, as Jesus does in John 15, He is the vine and we are the branches. We are each a branch connected to the same vine.

This brings us back to Hebrews. Let us help one another be rooted by together establishing ourselves in the faith. Let us walk in the Spirit together. Let us grow together. Let us not neglect meeting together. Let us be the church, established under the name of Jesus Christ.

Friday, October 1 - 2 Timothy 4:9-10

Established in the faith means to be joined together with other Christians. This was my conclusion I shared with you yesterday. Being rooted and built is for the

individual and being established is for the group. If there was anyone who was prepared to walk the Christian life on his own, it was Paul. After all, he spent his entire childhood and young adult life preparing to be a Pharisee and teacher of the law. He knew the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) and he even says that he was blameless under the Law. He could walk the walk and he could talk the talk. When he meets Jesus on the road to Damascus, he has a transformative experience where he recognizes that Jesus is the Messiah of which the Scriptures prophesy. All of the energy he put into the Law is now put into Christ. After he has help from Ananias and after he is mentored by Barnabus, he could have walked the Christian walk alone. And yet, what does he desire in these two verses? The community of faith. People have abandoned him; only Luke is with him. He wants the fellowship of fellow Christians. He craves the community with others who are faithful. If Paul cannot walk the Christian walk on his own, why do we think we can?

While it is true that you can be a Christian without going to church, this is not the proper way to be established in the faith. When you do not worship and fellowship with other believers, you are not being established in the faith. Being a Christian and not being part of a church family is like being a fish in a fish bowl. Great, you're alive with eternal life but for what purpose? Life as a fish is better when you can swim in the ocean with others like you. You can be rooted and not established, but correctly walking in Jesus is being rooted individually and established together.

Saturday, October 2 - 2 Samuel 7:18-29

The three ways to successfully walk in Jesus is to be rooted and built in Him, to be established in the faith, and to be abounding in thanksgiving. Being rooted is about the individual, being established is about the church, and abounding in thanksgiving is about the world. Why is having abundant thanksgiving about the world? The individual is being rooted; the church is being established, and the world is thankful. The world is thankful for the one singular God who is over all. God is working out His plans for this world through His people. This premise is part of David's prayer right after God

promises to make his lineage a forever monarchy of Israel. God is working his plans for the world through David and his family. Jesus will come from this family so we and the world can be thankful for what God has done through David and Israel.

David was abounding in thanksgiving for this gift which God gave him. How can you walk in Christ by being thankful? What are you thankful for this year? What prayers of thanksgiving can you voice to God? What prayers of thanksgiving can we, as a church, voice to God? Spend time in reflection today as you consider all the ways you and we can be abounding in thanksgiving as we walk in Christ.

Sunday, October 3 - Psalm 110:1-4

WEEK 5: LEARNING HOW TO WALK

Monday, October 4 - Hebrews 13:1-19

Today, as I write this, it is August 17th, and my kids start school tomorrow. As they begin this year's journey with a new teacher and new classmates, they are in a completely new social group. Yes, maybe they know some of the kids but not all. This group of students and this teacher have never been together before and after this year, they will not be together again. Because this is the beginning of this group, they will create a social contract in their class. The students and teacher will decide together what is appropriate and what is not appropriate for this group. They will agree to uphold the rules of the class with one another. This social contract will govern how the class relates to one another throughout the year.

When I read Hebrews 13:1-19, I read a social contract for Christians. Throughout these verses, there are several instructions on how to live the Christian life or as we have been saying "how to walk." We will get into several of these instructions which have not already been discussed in the coming days. Today, let us focus on the introductory sentence in verse 1: "let brotherly love continue." When it comes to walking with Jesus and walking "with the rest of the class (Christians), brotherly love or mutual love is what governs all of the actions we take.

In the letter to the church at Ephesus in Revelation 2:1-7, the warning to the people is that they have lost the love which they are to show one another. They are doing all of the right works but their spirit is not the Spirit. This is why, when it comes to walking with Christ, it is the Spirit inside of us which is most important. It is from the Spirit that our outward actions flow. All of the actions which will be discussed throughout this week are important expressions of our Christian faith, but we must nurture that faith which is inside of us. We must love God and love one another. Without love, we are just a clanging cymbal or noisy gong as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13. To serve others in the way God desires, we must love them as well. Let brotherly love continue!

Tuesday, October 5 - Genesis 18:1-8

“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.” - Hebrews 13:2

The Golden Rule as Jesus describes in the Sermon on the Mount is “do to others as you want them to do for you.” In the ancient world, this practice bore out when visitors would be passing through your lands. There was an expectation of hospitality for one another because if you were making a journey, you would want the same thing. The earth is less populated during those days, the miles harder to cross. If you are journeying in the desert, you need a hospitable person to offer you food, water, and lodging. It was a matter of life or death!

Hospitality was expected when three men appeared on Abraham’s land. Abraham, being a righteous man, knew the proper respect to show these men. As Abraham and Sarah prepared for their unexpected guests, there is no way they could have anticipated who these men really are. It is after our prescribed reading for today that the men turn out to be messengers/angels from God delivering the promise that Abraham and Sarah will have a child. Abraham and Sarah are probably what the author of Hebrews has in mind, when he (possibly she, as some think) writes Hebrews 13:2.

What is hospitality? Hospitality is not merely hosting a dinner party in your home. Hospitality is inviting someone into your home, even when the home is not “guest ready.” Hospitality does not expect anything in return. There is no “I host this time and you host next time” mentality. Hospitality is serving another person without any expectation of receiving something back. Hospitality is welcoming someone into your life, whether you have everything together or (like most of us) do not.

Hospitality is also being welcoming to God. After all, we entertain angels without knowing it, right? Hospitality is welcoming God into your life, being truthful about your failures, agreeing with God about sin and its impact on your life. Hospitality is not about being guilty of your sin though. Hospitality as it relates to God is also agreeing with God how He sees you: as one of His children. Being hospitable to God and yourself means freeing yourself of your past transgressions because God has forgiven you of them. Welcome God into every part of your life. Be hospitable to Him. Be hospitable to others as well, bearing yourself to the service of the other person.

Wednesday, October 6 - 2 Timothy 1:1-2:2

We begin 2 Timothy tonight which continues Paul’s writing to Timothy. The focus of the two letters are different. In 1 Timothy, much of the focus was on coaching Timothy on how to develop the congregation. Second Timothy turns to personal growth in Timothy to lead him to being a more mature spiritual leader. After some introductory remarks, 2 Timothy 1:8 begins the body of the letter which can be organized into steps to renew God’s gift within a person. Steps 1 and 2 are found in our verses tonight and we will discuss these in great detail tonight. Step 1 is bear witness to Christ (1:8); step 2 is to follow Christ’s example (1:13). How can you live out these steps today?

In those introductory remarks, Paul mentions the memory of Timothy’s mother and grandmother, Eunice and Lois. Who was instrumental in leading you to Christ? Remember that person fondly today, thanking the Lord for their commitment to sharing Christ with you.

Thursday, October 7 - Revelation 3:14-22

Oh, Laodicea... They are compared to lukewarm water. Not good to drink and not good to cook with. Good for nothing. Yikes. While not as harsh as the criticism to Sardis (see 3:1), the Laodiceans are criticized for their emphasis on self-reliance. This is why they are compared to the lukewarm water which notoriously ran through their city. They are rich so they think they are blessed. They have prospered so they think God is with them. The words of God to the church say this is not the case: they are “wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.” God is knocking at the door and they refuse to let him in. They must repent of their sinful self-reliance.

Hebrews 13:5 tells readers to be content with what you have and keep your lives free from the love of money. It is interesting, is it not, that the Laodiceans are financially rich but Spiritually poor? Hebrews 13:5 does not command riches or poverty, but it does command contentment. Contentment means trusting in God and that is a Spiritually rich person. It is hard for a rich man to enter heaven, Jesus says. Is this because God is prejudiced against the rich? Of course not. It's because the rich are used to having things done their way. The rich are prideful in their money. The rich are not comfortable relying on someone else. (All of this is stereotypical, of course.)

To walk in the Spirit, we cannot be lovers of money. We cannot serve two masters. What is your relationship with money? Are you a lover of money or a lover of God? Are you rich thinking you are blessed? Or are you rich realizing God has given you those riches in order to serve the Kingdom. Please hear me. You are financially rich. On a global scale, if you own your home, you are in the top 1% of wealth. Even if you don't own your home, but have at least \$4,000 in assets (car, savings, insurance, etc.) you are in the top half of wealth in the world. It is not wrong to have money. It is wrong to love money. It is wrong to care more about your bank account than your neighbor who is hungry. Do not be self-reliant and a lover of money. Be God-reliant and a lover of people. When a neighbor is in need, give them what they need and trust that God will supply what you need when the time comes.

Friday, October 8 - 1 Corinthians 5:9-13

I am grieved when non-Christians commit immorality; I am angry when Christians commit immorality. Paul offers a similar distinction in our verses today. He clarifies that the church cannot really do anything about being associated with the immoral outside of the church. That's just who they are and what the world is. But when a Christian is the one who is morally bankrupt, then the church should spring to action. "Drive out the wicked from among you" is what Paul says quoting Deuteronomy 17:7. In the context of Deuteronomy 17, these words are expressed when a person receives a death penalty for worshipping other gods. This connection intrigues me. Could we have a connection between immorality and idolatry? I think we do. When we as Christians disobey God's Law, we think we know better than God. When a Christian shows blatant disregard for God's commands, he has created an idol out of sin and ultimately he has made himself into his god.

Back in our focal passage for the week in Hebrews 13, verse 4 clearly emphasizes the need to remain pure in marriage. Part of what walking in the Spirit means is to rid yourself of all sexual immorality. If you are married, you are only sexual with your spouse and if you are single, you refrain from sex. I am grieved when non-Christians commit immorality; I am angry when Christians commit immorality.

How do Christians live in the way God requires in a hyper-sexualized world? We remember that we are not part of this world and gratification in this life is not the goal. Humans are more than our bodies and desires; we have a soul, and as Christians, the Spirit lives inside us. Our goal as Christians is to walk in the Spirit, not walk in the flesh. Contemplate this as you go about your day. How can I walk to gratify the Spirit instead of walking to gratify the flesh?

Saturday, October 9 - 1 Corinthians 4:14-21

I am regularly cognizant that my kids are watching me. Sometimes this can be lots of fun. I've taken Micah and Hannah to a few baseball games now. Being able to encourage them to cheer and clap when I do is some of the most fun I ever have.

Sometimes my kids watching me can be terrifying. I need to set a good example when it comes to being upset or being anxious. I need to live out in my actions what I tell them in my words. Being an example for someone to follow is hard!

What Paul says in 1 Corinthians 4:14-21 is that he is the Corinthians' father. He is the one they are to follow. Imitate me, he says. Do what I do and do what I have told you to do. This is very similar to what the author of Hebrews says in 13:17: obey your leaders and submit to them. The assumption is that these leaders are following God, much like Paul is. When you have godly leaders, follow them, submit to them, as they make decisions as God leads them. I don't think it is any accident that the next command in Hebrews 13:18 is "pray for us." The author of Hebrews recognizes that the leaders need prayer so that they make the decisions God wants and are examples for the people to follow.

Would you pray for me and the other leaders of College Heights today? Would you pray that we act honorably in all things? Would you commit yourself to obeying your leaders? Let us walk together to be the people of God which God desires.

Sunday, October 10 - Psalm 111

WEEK 6: WALK BY FAITH

Monday, October 11 - 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:5

"Getting old is not for the weak." I'll never forget this phrase my grandmother relayed to me several years ago. There is so much truth compacted in this short phrase. So much theology bundled up in this quick quip. Getting old is not for the weak.

Science tells us that peak physical performance occurs within our 20s. Peak athleticism occurs about the age 24. After that, our outer shell begins to decay, slowly at first, but then as we age it becomes apparent that we are not as strong or quick as we used to be. Getting old is not for the weak.

What can we do when our stride isn't as long nor fast as it used to be? What can we do when we can't work as long in the hot sun? What can we do when our arms can't pick up this or that and our back aches at the slightest motion? We remember the promises of God that these afflictions are only temporary and a new body awaits us. We remember that this body is like a tent, but we await a heavenly building which is permanent. This body is meant to wither away, but we are promised an eternal body which lasts forever.

So we do not lose heart, Paul says. "Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day." Getting old is not for the weak, but age and physical ability is not the complete picture of life. There is an inner Spirit which continues to influence your life and helps you grow day by day. Your peak Spiritual condition, hopefully, does not occur in your 20s, 30s, or even 60s. Hopefully, your Spiritual condition grows and is continuing to grow until the moment you change addresses from your tent on earth to your permanent home in heaven. Getting old is not for the weak, so continue to build Spiritual strength.

Tuesday, October 12 - 2 Corinthians 5:6-10

Do you remember the old Looney Tunes cartoons with the Roadrunner and Wile E. Coyote? In the cartoon, Wile E. Coyote continues to attempt to capture the Roadrunner. In every cartoon, he uses different schemes and explosives to get the elusive roadrunner but to no avail. In my memory, Wile E. Coyote never captures Roadrunner. In several episodes, as the two are running around the desert, the roadrunner will lead the Wile E. Coyote to the edge of a cliff where Roadrunner will stop but the coyote will continue off the cliff. In classic cartoon fashion, Wile E. Coyote runs for several steps as if floating on air until he realizes where he is. At the moment that he realizes he is not on solid ground, he falls.

You might be able to make the analogy that when the coyote walked by faith assuming there was ground underneath him he was safe, but when he saw what was below him he fell. This type of occurrence is what happened to Peter when walking to

Jesus on water, was it not? When Peter kept his eyes on Jesus, he was able to walk on the water. When Peter looked down, he sank.

Continuing the lesson from yesterday, 2 Corinthians 5:6-10 encourages us to remain confident in Christ even when our earthly bodies are in decay. There is encouragement to walk by faith, not by sight. Do not see the earthly rigors of life as some do, evidence that we do not have a future of hope. Keep your eyes on Jesus.

Yes, life in heaven is better than life on earth. Yes, when facing the daily struggles of earthly life, it is easy to wish away this life for our eternity in heaven. The wishing away of this life is not pleasing to God. Whether we are in heaven or on earth, our aim must be to please the Lord. I don't want to face the judgment seat of Christ when my life is over and He asks me why I wasted the last decades of my life just waiting to be in heaven. That is not in my plans.

The band Mission City Worship has a newer song called "Even If." Mission City Worship is a worship band based out of Florida that ; leads music weekly at their church Mission City Church in Largo, FL. They have a line in their song ``Even If" which says, "If I'm still breathing, you're still working. And if I'm still here, I know you have a purpose." If you and I are still breathing, God has a purpose for our lives. God has a plan for our souls to continue to grow in faith through the Spirit. So even when the road looks difficult, let us walk by faith, and not by sight.

Wednesday, October 13 - 2 Timothy 2:3-26

It has gone out of favor with Generation X and Millennials but the generations before had the special dishes, usually china, that were used for special occasions. I remember my grandmother's china, which was pulled out for Thanksgiving and Christmas. I always got nervous on those occasions because I knew the plate which had my turkey and mashed potatoes was more special than the normal stuff we would use when we ate with them after church on Sunday or whenever we were invited. The special dishes were more highly regarded than the regular dishes, never put into the

dishwasher but carefully hand-washed and then put back into the china cabinet for display until the next rare special event.

The instructions given to Timothy in our passage today lead to the emphasis that by following the will of God and suffering for God, we are like the special utensils, useful to God and of special meaning. For this reason we shun youthful pleasures and pursue righteousness. We do not get entangled with civilian affairs as we are in the Lord's army. We are not quarrelsome but kind and patient. We strive to be God's special dishes, his prize possessions, put on display for all to see.

Thursday, October 14 - Job 30:16-23

Have you ever watched a dog chew on a bone? When I was growing up, we had a black labrador retriever who loved to chew on bones. We would give a new bone to chew on, whether it was from a dinner or from the package and she would immediately start to gnaw on it. After a little while, she'd want to take the bone outside because she would then bury it. A few hours or sometimes a few days later, we'd see her outside with the bone dug up so she could chew on it again. We always joked that the dirt gave it flavor. She would go back to that bone to gnaw on it for days until she chewed it all up.

I want you to chew on this passage from Job today. The conditions in Job's life have taken a physical and emotional toll on him. The verse of lament seen here is one that hurts to read. You hear and almost feel Job's heartache. As we talk about walking in faith and not by sight this week, I want you to chew on these words from Job. Even in difficulty such as Job faced, how can we have the strength to walk by faith? As the outer shell is withering away, how can we continue to allow the Spirit inside of us to grow? Read this passage now, bury it in your mind, come back to it later, continuing gnawing on this bone until it has been digested in your soul.

Friday, October 15 - 1 Corinthians 15:35-49

“Bodies are not buried. They are planted.” I had a former pastor who would continually use this phrase during any funeral or when discussing funerals. The phrase was not original to him but he picked it up at a funeral he was at some years ago. The premise of the phrase is that burial is not final. When something or someone is buried, there is no expectation of them coming to life again. But that’s not our expectation, is it? But when a seed is “buried in the ground” more commonly known as “planting,” there is an expectation of future life. In that future life, the seed will not reappear as a seed, but it will be transformed into a new plant.

When our bodies decay to the point we take our last breath, we are not buried in the ground, but we are planted. The seed put into the ground is what is raised in power and glory. Our physical body gives way to the Spirit-ual body. We must walk by faith and not by sight to see this. If a person’s casket was exhumed after death, the outer shell of a body would still be there. Our eyes would see nothing different than a human who died. But it is in faith, we trust that the soul of that man or woman is living on in heaven. The seed has been planted and new life has bloomed. Bodies are not buried; they are planted. Praise God for the opportunity to have a heavenly body which will never grow weary. Praise God for our future body which will not grow tired but is always ready to worship the Lord. Praise God for an eternal body which will never waste away.

Saturday, October 16 - Mark 9:2-8

I came across a letter to Billy Graham on his website asking this question: How will I recognize my wife in heaven if we receive new bodies? Billy Graham referenced this passage of the Transfiguration in his answer. In these verses, we get a glimpse of what our heavenly bodies will be like. They will be different but recognizable. The disciples still knew that it was Jesus before them, even if his appearance changed. I use this to help me understand what awaits all of us in our heavenly bodies.

We can walk by faith because we have a glimpse of what is coming. We see it in the glow of Jesus, Moses, and Elijah in Mark, we see it also in Moses' life when he encounters God on the mountain during the Exodus. There is a resemblance to who we are today but better. The earthly seed will be planted and the heavenly stalk will grow. This is the future which awaits the children of God. Let us walk by faith, trusting in this glorious future.

Oh, and Billy Graham did hypothesize that you will recognize your spouse in heaven because why would God withhold this blessing from your life?

Sunday, October 17 - Psalm 112