

Taking a Walk

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Will you pray with me? God, open our hearts and minds so that we may hear what you have to say to us this day. Amen.

The Bible is full of stories about walks. Early in the book of Genesis we read about God walking in a garden in the cool of the day. Then there was the difficult walk that Abraham took with his son Isaac as he took him up a mountain to sacrifice him. There was the liberating walk that Moses and the Israelites took from Egypt and the frustrating walk that took them through the desert for 40 years. There was Joshua's triumphant walk around Jericho, the disciples' walk to Emmaus, Paul's walk to Damascus. There was the walk that Jesus took to Golgotha, a walk that was so sad and holy it received its own name, the *via dolorosa*, the way of great sorrow. And we shouldn't forget the walk that Peter took when he got out of the boat. There have been many walks taken in the Bible but today I want to invite us to talk about another type of walk, a prayer walk. Now some of you are wondering "what is a prayer walk?"

Prayer walking is about praying for and caring for those in our sphere of influence. A prayer walk is one in which we walk our neighborhoods and communities to see what is going on, to get clues of where God is already at work and where we can join him in that work. It's about catching a new vision, finding new ways to be in connection with and service to our community. It's about praying onsite with insight. This past week during our prayer journey we talked about intercessory prayer, in other words, praying for others. Each day last week our prayer groups asked God to hear our prayers on behalf of the world he loves.

We can offer our prayers for the world, but they become more specific and maybe more in line with God's will when we see a situation with our own eyes rather than in our mind's eye. For me this is one of the benefits of going on mission trips. We can pray for those who live in poor or oppressed communities but when you actually visit the place and spend time with the people, you are better able to understand the issues they face, how God is at work and how you can join in that work. In other words, when you visualize it, you internalize it. But here's the thing, we cannot visualize our neighbor's and our community's needs if we never get outside of these four walls.

When we pray onsite, it helps us gain a God-sized perspective of people and their individual struggles and situations. As we walk and pray, we will begin to see our neighbors and our community through Jesus' eyes and if we open our hearts and minds, as we visit the places where they live, work and shop, we will better understand the love God has for each person we encounter.

Unfortunately when we walk through our community and as we interact with our neighbors we will likely see things that will make us want to pound a table in frustration. When we walk our neighborhoods and community we may find our souls are in anguish over an issue that needs to be addressed. We may see people and situations that will make us want to cry. We may find ourselves crying for the homeless, the hungry, the oppressed or for those who lack justice, but I have found that when we weep about a situation, we often gain a new vision; a better understanding of what God may be calling us to. This new vision often comes from feeling the pain of what we see rather than what we know **should** be.

On Saturday, May 15th I am inviting you to join me on a prayer walk. We will meet here at the church at 9:00 AM. You will receive some instructions and we will divide up into groups of two or three and we will walk, we will observe and we will pray. You can choose your own route; some may want to walk downtown, some may choose to walk a surrounding neighborhood. At 10:00 we will meet back at the church and briefly discuss the experience, what you saw as needs in our community and who and what you prayed for. Remember, we will not be telling God "this is what we want to do" but rather we will be asking God "what are you doing here and now and how do you want us as church and individuals to connect?"

When we prayer walk, we become motivated and seek to engage with our community and we get to know our neighbors. Often doors will open so that we might have greater access in the community. As we walk we will develop a deeper love for our community and we will find that our hearts become committed to the places and people for which we have prayed. If you can't walk, pray for your neighbors and community from your bed, your couch, your favorite chair or your car.

The world's needs are great and we can't make everything right but we can make a difference by simply loving and praying for our community and our neighbors. God calls us to intercede on behalf of others. I hope that you will join us on the 15th as we seek a new vision, find new ways to be in connection with and service to our community and invite God's blessing and presence into the places where we live, work and play. Amen.