



Walking in the Jesus Way

by Brad Jersak

When I was a child, I walked a lot. I walked to school, walked downtown, walked to the beach, walked through forests and across fields—even across a lake when it was frozen. As a small-town Canadian prairie boy, much of my walking led me along paths of mud and ice, or across fields of snow. Deep snow.

Pet peeve: Stuff in my boots—stuff like pebbles or water or snow.

Solution: walking in my father's footsteps. Which suggests a parable.

Whether trekking through mud or snow, I learned that my dad's footprints compacted the trail. If I just traced his steps, I wouldn't sink and best of all, my feet would stay dry. But if I didn't take care, one misstep onto untrodden ground and I would suddenly sink all the way to my hips. I would exhaust myself struggling until dad pulled me out and set my way back onto his path.

Now this is important: When my dad cautioned me to follow his tracks, he was not giving me a law that, if broken, would require punishment. His admonitions were entirely about a caring dad, helping me along. When I strayed and slipped, my dad was not angry; he

never stopped loving me completely. I was still his son.

So it is with God. When Scripture describes *two ways* and *two walks*, God is not setting conditions for his love. Rather, the counsel he gives is an expression of God's love. He wants us to follow his footsteps because he cares and wants to help us "keep our feet dry."

The Bible often contrasts two types of paths or "ways"—*where* we walk. It also distinguishes two "ways" of walking—*how* we walk.

WHERE WE WALK

1. God's way vs false ways: In the Psalms, David prays, "Show me *your ways*, O LORD; teach me *your paths*. Guide me in *your* truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in *you* all day long" (Psalm 25:4-5, my emphasis).

God's way is set against the false ways (Psalm 119:104), the ways of the other gods (Micah 4:5) or doing things our own way (Isaiah 50:10-11, Jeremiah 10:23).

2. The sure way vs the slippery way: We find that by sticking to God's way, our feet will not slip (Psalm 17:5). Even when traversing "the high places," God makes our

footsteps as sure as a mountain goat (Psalm 18:33). God's heart is to lead us through dangerous ground onto level paths (Psalm 27:11).

3. The straight way vs the crooked way: In the New Testament, Peter contrasts following the "straight way" of God with those who wander off onto crooked paths (2 Peter 2:15). The contrast is between faithfulness to God's direction vis-a-vis rebellion and the corruption of "crooks."

4. The narrow way vs the broad way: Sometimes, God's way is pictured as a broad highway, away from the treacherous back roads where muggers and wild beasts lurk (Isaiah 35:8-9). According to Isaiah, the redeemed walk on this "highway of holiness" while "fools" avoid it at their peril.

But Jesus could reverse the analogy, speaking of the "broad road" as the wrong way: "*In everything, then, do to others as you would have them do to you. For this is the essence of the Law and the prophets. Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many enter through it*" (Matthew 7:12-13).



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Some think Jesus is saying that in the end, very few will “be saved and go to heaven.” That’s not what Christ is referring to. Regardless of our faith profession or final destiny, our Lord is describing *the Jesus Way* in this life in terms of the famous “Golden Rule.” He laments that most people (even most Christians) opt out and instead, face the tragic self-destructive results of following the mob (see also Psalm 1:6).

5. The way of life vs the way of death (see Jeremiah 21:8): So, practically speaking, *the Jesus Way* truly leads to life, which includes human flourishing now and eternal life beyond.

Remember my opening analogy: this is not an ultimatum from a volatile God, but the wise counsel of a caring Father. “Look,” he says, “if you walk this way, you won’t sink. But if you walk that way, you could slip and fall to your death! Please, *walk this way*. Follow *my way*. It’s the *way of life!*”

HOW WE WALK

The Bible tells us *where to walk*, but also *how to walk*.

1. Walking in the light vs walking in the dark: First, we are called to “walk in the Light, as he is in the light” (1 John 1:7). The Light, of course, is Christ himself, illuminating the path of life.

The prophets foretell Christ our lamp, lighting up the path for us: “*I will lead the blind by a way they do not know, in paths they do not know I will guide them. I will make darkness into light before them and rugged places into plains*” (Isaiah 42:16, my emphasis).

Yes, Christ is the lamp in whose light we walk, now and for eternity.

“And the city has no need for sun or moon to shine on it, because the glory of God illuminates the city, and the Lamb is its lamp. *By its light the*

nations will walk...” (Revelation 21:23-24, my emphasis).

2. Walking in the Spirit vs walking in the flesh: The apostle Paul speaks to how we walk. He urges us to “walk by the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16, Romans 8:1), to “keep in step with the Spirit” (Galatians 5:25), and contrasts this to “walking in the flesh,” which he associates with the cravings of our old selves.

Following the lead of the Spirit means no longer white-knuckling external laws. How so? God says to Ezekiel, “*I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws*” (Ezekiel 36:26-27, see Jeremiah 31:31-33).

But wait, I thought it wasn’t about obeying commands or keeping laws? That depends. Certainly not if we are asking, “What must I do to be saved?” And surely not if obeying commands is about law-keeping under threat of punishment. Then what does it mean?

3. Walking in the Jesus Way of Love: By the end of the first century, *The Didache*, an early Christian manual, summarized *the Jesus Way* as *walking in love*. It opens this way, recalling the words of Christ:

There are two ways, one of life and one of death, but a great

difference between the two ways. The way of life, then, is this: First, you shall love God who made you; second, love your neighbor as yourself, and do not do to another what you would not want done to you. The teaching is this: Bless those who curse you, pray for your enemies, and fast for those who persecute you. For what reward is there for loving those who love you? Do not the Gentiles do that? But love those who hate you, and you shall not have an enemy.... If someone strikes your right cheek, turn to him the other also, and you shall be perfect. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two. If someone takes your cloak, give him also your coat. If someone takes from you what is yours, ask it not back, for indeed you are not able. Give to everyone who asks you, and ask it not back; for the Father wills that to all should be given of our own blessings (free gifts).

John distilled *the Jesus Way* to this: “*And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love*” (2 John 1:6, my emphasis). Or in Christ’s own words, “*My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you*” (John 15:12).

Sounds impossible—like “take up your cross.” But Jesus meant it—*walking in love* is a real way of life. But it’s a walk empowered by grace—by Christ-in-us, walking his *way of love* through us. □