

We have to walk to follow

If we are going to follow Jesus, we have to walk. Walking is used in the Bible as a metaphor - to walk with God is to live a life of daily trust and obedience, step by step. It is *'keeping in step with the Holy Spirit'* (Gal.5:25) as we go on this journey of life. We don't follow Jesus by sitting down or standing still when he is walking.

In John 5:1-8, Jesus met a man who had been paralysed for years - and enabled him to walk. We can be paralysed with fear, anxiety, cynicism, familiarity and complacency, self-pity etc. We get stuck. We've stopped moving. In this case, the man was physically paralysed but even here Jesus suggests there is a mindset that he is going to have to break out of as part of his healing. This is perhaps why he asks him the question 'would you like to get well?' Jesus can set us free from mindsets that stop us from walking and following.

The response of the man indicates some of the mindset that we can get into. His immediate response was *'I can't'*. He then expressed his dependence on others - *'I have no one to help me'* - and he was clearly waiting for only a particular supernatural moment - *'when the pool bubbles up.'* And there is a hint even of resentment - *'someone else always gets there ahead of me...'*

We have learned in recent years the importance of being open and transparent about our weaknesses and failures. We have seen the importance of vulnerability. We have also seen the importance of empathy - of not being quick to judge people but trying to understand what it is like to be in their place. Empathy is good. But any good counsellor will tell you that, as well as the need for empathy, you have to help people take responsibility. Discipleship, following Jesus, is not possible if we do not take personal responsibility, make good choices and act on them. There are steps we have to take. Otherwise, we are being powerless and living as a victim. Vulnerability does not have to mean victimhood.

Disciples of Jesus don't get stuck in 'I can't' but say 'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me'. Or maybe, I can't but God can. It is good we are following Jesus together and we need mutual encouragement and support - but we can never use the lack of that at times as a reason not to follow. We have to encourage ourselves in the Lord. There are also special moments of miracle and thank God for them, but the disciple is not waiting for something to happen before he starts to follow. The follower is walking not waiting. And we're not comparing ourselves to others but taking responsibility for ourselves.

And so, one of the words we need to hear from Jesus at times is ***'stand up, pick up your mat and walk.'***

Stand Up

Sometimes we have to break out of an unhelpful mindset and start walking to start following. We've got to 'stand up' on the inside. One good way to stand up is to start thanking God for what we have and for what we can do in his strength. We stand in his strength and make the choice to rejoice!

Pick up your mat.

In other words, hold on to your history. Don't deny it, don't despise it. It is part of your story, but it isn't your identity. That pain, that hurt, that rejection, that disappointment that you've lain down on all this time. Roll it up. And carry it. You don't deny it, but neither are you defined by it.

Walk.

Follow him. Take whatever steps lie before you now. Sometimes it is just enough to put one foot in front of the other. Discipleship is long obedience in the same direction. Just keep taking those steps of faith and obedience every day. Whether you feel his presence or not. Even when you want to give up. Keep walking. There will be times when you walk with a spring in your step and a song in your heart, when you mount up with wings like eagles, and are flying not walking. And there may be other times when you can barely hold yourself upright. There'll be times when you stumble and fall. But keep walking.

Walking will mean doing the same thing each day at time - have those practices, those routines that help you to keep walking: start the day with prayer, read you Bible, have times of waiting quietly before God etc. They are the steps that help you to walk each day.

Walking also means walking things through that need to be walked through, or worked through. You don't just lie down on that offence, or that disappointment, hoping that one day, at someone else's initiative it will disappear! You have to stand up and walk it through. Forgive that person, or ask for forgiveness, have that honest conversation. Don't lie on it. Walk it through.

Disciples are Pilgrims

Disciples walk. Apprentices are pilgrims. If we are going to follow Jesus, we have to have the heart and mind of a pilgrim. Not that of a pool-watcher. As charismatics, we can sometimes have the mindset of waiting for that special moment, the next big meeting, the great time of worship, that ministry. We can be sitting around waiting for the next wave.

Psalm 84 teaches us a better way:

*Blessed are those whose strength is in you,
whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.
As they pass through the Valley of Baka,
they make it a place of springs;
the autumn rains also cover it with pools. (*4:5-6)*

Would you rather be a pool watcher or a pool creator? When we walk as pilgrims, as disciples, we are not focused on our self or on an experience. We are focused on God's presence - this is a song about presence. But Baka is the valley of weeping. It is the wilderness of our broken world where there is much pain and weeping. If we are true followers who have set are heart on following, on walking, on pilgrimage, on the pursuit of his presence, then the Holy Spirit will work through us to be a blessing to this world. And through us he'll create springs and pools. And he'll do it because we are pilgrims. Because we are pursuing him. Because we are followers. Because we have stood up and walked to follow.