

**STEP UP. STEP OUT.  
WALK THIS WAY**

***Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.***

Dr. Frederick Frankenstein (he pronounces his name *Frahnkensteen* to distance himself from his infamous great-grandfather, the original Dr. Frankenstein) arrives on the train at the Transylvania station. Dr. Frankenstein (played by Gene Wilder) is met by the bug-eyed, hump-backed lab assistant Igor (played by Marty Feldman). As they get ready to leave the train platform, Igor says, “Allow me, master,” looks at the doctor’s two pieces of luggage, then picks up the smaller of the two. He throws his cape over his shoulder, turns to Dr. Frankenstein and says, “Walk this way.” He shuffles and limps down a few steps while using a short cane. Again, he turns to the doctor and says, “This way,” as he hands the doctor the cane. Dr. Frankenstein “walks this way,” just as Igor did, but at the bottom of the steps he has an unbelieving look on his face.

It’s an iconic scene in movie comedies, but it almost didn’t survive the film editing. On the first day of filming, in Marty Feldman’s first big Hollywood movie, he decided to ad lib the “Walk this way” gag just to make everybody laugh. Both Gene Wilder and Marty Feldman begged Mel Brooks to take the scene out of the movie, but Brooks was determined to leave it in. “I think it’s funny,” he said. Looking back on the movie, Marty Feldman said, “It’s a terribly old music hall joke. Audiences laugh at it. Gene and I were both wrong. Mel was right.”<sup>1</sup>

“Walk this way.” That’s today’s New Testament lesson in a nutshell. Instead of Igor urging us on from the Transylvania train station platform, it’s the apostle Paul encouraging us from a letter he wrote to the Christians in Rome about 2000 years ago. As was his habit, Paul was instructing the Romans what it means to live in Christ and, at the same time, exhorting them to live a certain way as followers of Jesus Christ. Two thousand years have come and gone, but the advice is the same for us today: Walk this way.

Here’s how Paul puts it: “For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” (Romans 8:3-4) In the very next verse, Paul unpacks that statement a bit more: “For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.” (Romans 8:5) In those three verses, you can hear how Paul uses “walk” and “live” interchangeably.

It's not a word you hear very often, except maybe at 7:30 p.m. on Jeopardy, but if anyone ever describes you as "peripatetic," don't be offended. They just mean you walk around a lot, or that you think on your feet. The followers of the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle were known as "peripatetics," because it is said he liked to lecture his students as they walked along beside him. The covered walk where Aristotle taught his students while walking about came to be known as the "peripatos," a place for walking.

The name comes from the Greek word, *peripateo*, which is found numerous times in the New Testament. Its basic meaning is "to walk, to go, to move about." But it also has a much deeper meaning, "to live, to conduct oneself." Here are some examples from some New Testament letters. As I read through them, whenever you hear the word "walk" think "live."

- "Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life." (Romans 6:4)
- "If your brother or sister is injured by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love." (Romans 14:15)
- "for we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7)
- "For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we might walk in them." (Ephesians 2:10)
- "I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to walk worthy of the calling to which you have been called . . ." (Ephesians 4:1)
- "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." (Ephesians 5:1-2)
- "For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Walk as children of light – for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true." (Ephesians 5:8-9)
- "Be careful then how you walk, not as unwise people but as wise" (Ephesians 5:15)
- "so that you might walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God." (Colossians 1:10)
- "As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving." (Colossians 2:6-7)
- "urging and encouraging you and pleading that you walk worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory."  
(1 Thessalonians 2:12)

There are plenty more examples of walking in the light and walking in the Lord in 1, 2, 3 John, but we'll hear some of those in the next few weeks.

In December 2016, WalMart executive Neil Pasricha published a follow-up to his New York Times bestseller called *The Book of Awesome*. The title of the new book is *Want Nothing + Do Anything = Have Everything*. He says, “It’s easier to act yourself into a new way of thinking than to think yourself into a new way of acting. Now go forward. Just do it.” Walk this way. It’s easy to say. It’s easy to hear. It’s not so easy to do, is it? If this were a Nike commercial, I could say “Just do it” and sit down. But we all know how hard it is to “just do it,” to “walk this way” in the manner Paul describes and encourages.

That’s why Paul’s letters can typically be divided into two parts – theological and ethical, doctrinal and practical. Paul begins with the good news of what God has already done for us in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Then, and only then, does Paul give advice and encouragement about how to walk in Christ.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul’s ethical and practical advice about life in Christ really begins in chapter 12. But we have a small example of his theology/ethics in the opening verses of chapter 8. First, Paul proclaims the good news of what God has done for us in Jesus – “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh.” Then Paul describes what our life is like because of what God has already done for us in Christ Jesus – “so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” In a sense, Paul’s encouragement is like a 2000 year-old Nike commercial – “This is who you are, God’s redeemed people. This is how you are to live – walk in Christ, walk in love. Just do it!” But we can only *do it*, that is “walk this way” when we walk with Christ.

When we compliment a person’s integrity and consistency, we say, “He really walks the walk, she really walks the talk.” That’s a good descriptor of our Christian lives – whatever we believe and say as followers of Christ, we ought to do in our walk with the Lord.

There is a story about Mahatma Gandhi in his older years. Because he was so famous in India, people would wait for hours to have Gandhi bless them or to ask the wise man a question. As the story goes, “a mother brought her child. She had waited for hours. She asked Gandhi to tell her child to stop eating sweets because they were ruining his teeth. Gandhi asked her to come back in two weeks, and he would do it. Everyone was shocked – he had never done anything like that before.

“Two weeks later, the mother came back and Gandhi wagged his finger at the little boy and said, ‘Stop eating sweets! They ruin your teeth.’ The woman thanked him and then said, ‘If I may ask, my dear Gandhi, why didn’t you just say this two weeks ago?’ Gandhi smiled and answered, ‘Two weeks ago, I was still eating sweets!’”<sup>2</sup>

Walk this way. Walk with the Lord. It’s a way of life, it’s a disposition. It’s a discipline. It’s a statement of faith. It’s stewardship. Eighteen months ago, in preparation for last fall’s sermons, I read a book by Mark Allan Powell called *Giving to*

God. In light of our stewardship theme this fall – Step Up. Step Out. – I found the subtitle particularly appropriate – *Living a Generous Life*. Maybe we could say “walking a generous life”?

Here are some notes I jotted down from the book that fit well with the idea of “walk this way” –

- “Stewardship is an expression of faith that moves from creed to practice, from merely claiming to believe something to living out that belief in real and obvious ways.”
- “There is no disconnect between an Easter faith and practical living, between praising God for giving us victory over death and giving our money away on a regular basis.”
- “Give where you want your heart to be, and let your heart catch up.” [That sounds a lot like acting into a new way of thinking . . .]
- “Stewardship is a matter of faithful living, of recognizing that all we are and all we have belongs to God and is to be given to God as an act of worship, as an expression of faith, and as a spiritual discipline through which we commit our hearts in love and praise.”

When your baby takes his or her first step, you’re excited and proud, even as you realize that life has now changed forever. Your child is getting ready to experience a whole new world – and so are you!

After I had my knee replaced three years ago, I had to undergo extensive physical therapy. One day Jean had me walk up and down the hall with very exaggerated steps. When I asked her the purpose of the exercise, she told me I needed to learn how to walk in a new way. She said, “And it’s not just because of your new knee, but you’ve been compensating for your bad knee for 45 years. You need to learn to walk correctly.”

Confucius said, “A journey of 1,000 miles begins with a single step.” The literal translation is, “A journey of 1,000 miles starts beneath one’s feet.” With a little bit of theological tweaking, that’s a good description of the life of faith – “The journey with Christ begins with a single step of faith.” Paul would talk in terms of walking according to the Spirit that results in a new way of thinking, a new way of walking. The famous preacher Fred Craddock, who was a faithful teacher of preachers, has said, “The longest journey any person ever has to make is the journey from the head to the heart.”

Will we “walk this way”? Sometimes as we go through life, especially when we try to make it on our own, we’ll be like Igor and Dr. Frankenstein – shuffling and limping along, needing a crutch to support us.

But there’s another way to walk through this life. That way of walking can’t be described any better than in the words of today’s final hymn:

*I am weak but thou art strong,  
Jesus, keep me from all wrong.  
I’ll be satisfied as long  
As I walk, let me walk close to thee.*

*Through this world of toils and snares,  
If I falter, Lord, who cares?  
Who with me my burden shares?  
None but thee, my dear Lord, none but thee.*

*When the journey here is o'er,  
Time for me will be no more.  
Guide me to thy distant shore,  
To thy shore, O dear Lord, to thy shore.*

*Just a closer walk with thee,  
Jesus, grant my humble plea!  
Daily walking close to thee,  
Let it be, dear Lord, let it be.*

***Let us pray: Lord God, we pray to walk in the hope that only you can give through our Lord Jesus Christ. Show us your ways, Lord. When our way is unclear, show us how you would walk in these ways. Teach us your ways of grace, mercy, and love. Help us to walk in your way, even in the valley of darkness. Lord, we praise you. Help us to focus on you that we may walk in this way. Amen.***

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Robert Ross, "Marty Feldman: Walk This Way," September 13, 2011 at [www.thebookseller.com](http://www.thebookseller.com).

<sup>2</sup>Sid Kemp, "What's the meaning of 'walk the talk'?" at [www.quora.com](http://www.quora.com).