

1. Taking a Walk

When the cool evening breezes were blowing, the man and his wife heard the LORD God walking about in the garden. So they hid from the LORD God among the trees. Genesis 3:8 NLT

Finally, I had reached the age of twelve—and Dad kept his promise.

The door hinges screamed like an old screen door whose spring needed a dose of oil. Dad peeked his head in to wake me, but he didn't have to call my name. I'd been awake for hours. Dad loved to hunt and eat squirrels and wanted me to, too. And this was the day I'd get my chance to do both.

Humidity hung heavily in the air, yet still offered a crisp of fall. My grandmother had always said squirrels were no good to eat until after the first frost fell. It killed the wolves (bugs), as she called them.

The river by which we'd hunt was a thirty-minute drive. Stately oaks stood like a general watching over his troops. Moss covered their branches like a quilt on a cold winter night. But I couldn't see any of this when we arrived. Daylight was at least an hour away.

We strolled through the woods. Dew decorated the limbs of the small scrub bushes, giving me a brief shower every time Dad let one flap my way. I followed Dad's flashlight beam as it scattered across the forest floor and pranced through the tree tops, looking for nests. He searched for just the right place. After all, it was my first time, and he wanted me to be successful. Finally, he found the right place.

"Sit here and wait," he said as he walked off to find his own tree.

The Genesis verse implies that God also had a habit of walking with Adam and Eve, perhaps daily. He created humanity for fellowship, so this would only be natural. Then sin entered. Satan tempted the couple, and they gave in to the one thing God had told them not to do: eat the forbidden fruit. Sin broke their intimate fellowship and brought pain.

Because God and sin don't mesh, God removed them from the garden and placed angels at its entrance to prevent their return. But he also killed an animal and placed skins over the couple's newly-discovered nakedness.

God wants the same type of relationship with everyone that he had with Adam and Eve. And when we hurt or mess up, knowing God walks with us is comforting. We've all sinned and not confessed. We get too busy in other things—good things—and focus too much on relationships with others. I could go on. You probably could, too.

The good news is that nothing in the past or the present can hinder our walk with God unless we let it. God is in the restoration business—as he proved with the first couple. No matter what we've done or are presently doing, he can cover it so the walks can continue. All we have to do is give it to him.

If something is messing up your walk with God, ask him to remove it.

Father, I want to walk with you daily. Please take away anything that prevents me from doing so.

Journal Time

What hurts have interfered with your walk with God?

What about your walk with God do you enjoy the most?

Each day, think of one thing that would make your walk with God more enjoyable.

2. The Right Path

There is a path before each person that seems right, but it ends in death. Proverbs 14:12 NLT

My grandmother's house rested just off a well-traveled country highway and only a short distance from my aunt's home. A well-worn, winding path—made that way by an almost constant flow of foot traffic—joined the two homes.

I loved staying with my grandparents in their old farmhouse—relaxing on their wrap-around porch, listening to the crickets after the sun settled in for the night. And I also loved visiting my aunt. Her youngest son trumped me by just three months.

Many were the days when I'd trudge from my grandmother's house to my cousin's house so we could invent some game to play. We were country boys living in a period before technology had overrun kids' imaginations.

My feet helped further wear down a path already cut deep by relatives and friends. Every time I walked the path, a smile like a crescent moon creased my face. I thought about the fun I would soon have with my cousin or the good meal I'd eat at my grandmother's house. My cousin was a master of make-believe games, and my grandmother was a chef superb of Lowcountry Carolina meals.

The path between my grandparents' and aunt's house was a good path, but I've taken some paths that weren't—paths that led to bad decisions or unhealthy relationships, paths that took me further than I wanted to go and took me longer to return from than I cared for.

Solomon was right. A path does exist that appears suitable, but it doesn't end where we want it to. Jesus spoke of the same kind of path hundreds of years later. He called them narrow and broad paths and said most people choose the wide path—the one that leads to disappointment and hurt.

The death Solomon speaks about—and the destruction Jesus says the broad path leads to—is spiritual death . . . eternal separation from a loving God who wants all of us to have a relationship with him.

But traveling these paths also leads to death even while we're living. The kind of death that brings hurt like a famine brings hunger. We don't enjoy life as God intends.

Although saying there is only one way to happiness now and heaven later may be politically incorrect, that's the Bible's message. God has created no other path. Sin separates us from him and happiness, but repentance ushers us into peace now and heaven later. Trials will come, but they'll never outweigh God's grace.

Make sure the path you're traveling leads you to God.

Father, thank you for making a path I can walk that leads me to you and to peace amid hurt.

Journal Time

What are some paths you have taken that you regret?

What are some things that would help you make better choices?

Each day, write one good path God directed you down.

3. Living with Change

But when the young man heard this, he went away sad, for he had many possessions. Matthew 19:22 NLT

He awoke as happy as a lark greeting a new sunrise. It was one of our grandson's first day at his new school. He had waited for this day all summer. But as I walked him to his room on the second day, he bellowed, "I want my Meme."

He soon settled down, and I thought we had won our battle with change. Not so. The second day's catastrophe repeated the first day's—but with the screaming a little less dramatic. Still, all I could hear was, "I want my Meme."

By the third day, we were down to a whimper, "I want my Meme." Afterward, he warmed up a little more to his teacher and was a little more excited each day when he came home. He loved painting, singing, drawing, and going outside for recess. By the fifth day, the whimper had disappeared. He walked into his room like a big boy. Change came slowly, but he adapted. After all, change hurts and upends our lives.

Unfortunately, change didn't interest the rich young ruler Jesus encountered. He wanted to know what he had to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus told him to obey the Ten Commandments. When he said he'd done that, Jesus told him to sell his possessions and give them to the poor. That command hit him like a pie in the face. He chose not to change . . . not to hurt . . . and went away sad.

Change is inevitable. It comes whether we want it to or not and often brings hurt we don't want to experience. Some changes we can control, but many we can't. Our grandson had no choice in the school change. He had to go to school. Legally, he could have waited a few more years, but eventually, he would have had to attend.

When we buck life's unavoidable changes, things happen. Misery comes. The thing my grandson would have experienced had he chosen to keep resisting the school thing. We also won't grow. This grandson grew intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually in just a short period when he finally embraced the change. Change does that through its uncomfortableness.

Change teaches flexibility—what life is all about. Life involves numerous relationships, which require flexibility to work and be healthy. No longer does our grandson do his home-with-Meme routine. Instead, he had to adjust to an entire class's routine.

Learn to look at change as God-sent or God-allowed. Either way, he's behind it and will guide you through it. And when you accept it, you'll be a better person.

Father, help me embrace rather than resist the changes you bring into my life so I can grow into the person you want me to be.

Journal Time

Tell about some unpleasant changes you have experienced.

What are some ways you have responded to change?

Daily, list one thing change has taught you.
