

**HAVE A COLLEAGUE** whose way of walking is so distinctive that you could recognise him half a mile away. It is more a kind of rolling bounce than a walk, but in a melancholy, hang-dog kind of way, head lolloping on his shoulders. Some people walk quickly, some slowly; some stand straight, others stoop with rounded shoulders; some point their toes in, others out.

The Bible has much to say about walking, and the concept is well and truly ingrained into our vocabulary of prayer and exhortation: 'help us to walk aright'; 'the road to the kingdom'; 'walk with us every step of the way'. In a bygone age it was also used occasionally in notices of disfellowship—a 'disorderly walk'—although that somewhat painful use of language seems to be less used today. In this and the next PS I want to use four passages from Ephesians 4 and 5 where the metaphor of walking is used to refer to the behaviour and lifestyle of the disciple. If it is true that there are all kinds of physical ways of walking and comportment—as there most certainly are—then what are the spiritual counterparts?

Let's start right at the beginning of Paul's exhortations in Ephesians, which span chapters 4 to 6. It is the opening metaphor Paul uses to talk about the way in which discipleship should be conducted: "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called" (4:1, ESV).

First, note the wonder of being able to walk at all. Paul is a prisoner, shackled in his cell. Physically there is not much walking that he can do. For those of us who are not bound, we must walk while we have opportunity. The ability to walk (as opposed to being imprisoned or being maimed or crippled) is a tremendous one; it means, self-evidently, that we can go to places and do things, a point which can be taken in both a physical and a spiritual sense.

But Paul says we must walk in a manner *worthy* of our calling. In what manner would that be? How would a disciple walk? Would it be in a slovenly way? Would it be with two left feet? Is it with small steps? Large steps? Looking down or up? Head held high? In tense or relaxed manner?

There are probably lessons from all these possibilities. An arrogant walk would scarcely seem appropriate, but, with the strength which God supplies, there ought to be capacity at least for a certain degree of competence in walking. It is a walk with a purpose

and goal, sometimes slow, perhaps, and sometimes quick; but always striving to head towards a very particular goal. Paul, though, goes in a rather different direction from what such thoughts would suggest, and by doing so achieves a surprising effect, once the metaphor is unpacked. Here is the fuller version of the passage: "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (vv. 1-3, ESV).

The image, then, is not of a soldier, for instance, with his regimented, proud, efficient and alert walk. It is more the walk of lovers than soldiers, at least in this passage. Lovers are close to one another, they are intimate, they care about one another, they take time and show concern, they are personally involved, putting each other before anything else. The walk Paul describes is characterised by:

- humility
- gentleness
- patience
- bearing with others
- eagerness to "maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace".

How does one walk in such a way? What would such a walk look like, physically speaking, if one were to imagine a person literally walking in this manner?

There would be no tautness and no haughtiness in such a walk, no mechanistic efficiency or athletic prowess. It is a walk with a bearing of ease and understanding; one which is prepared to slacken the pace for the benefit of others, one which appreciates that it is a walk being walked *in fellowship*, not for one's own glory or ends. It is a communal walk, where the needs of the group come before oneself. It is a walk of peace, a walk which seeks to maintain unity.

The juxtaposition between the way in which we might have expected Paul to define the walk compared with the way he actually defines it is quite notable. A similar theme comes from another passage: "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" (5:1,2, ESV). It is a walk of self-sacrifice, characterised by love. It is a walk of imitation in the very best sense of that word. It is a walk of God- and Christ-likeness.

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