

NEW HOPE GLOBAL SERMON –STEP BY STEP

One recurrent issue we are all dealing with is the need to walk closely with the Lord step by step. Things keep changing - circumstances, expectations, opportunities and failures. But God is faithful and can guide us step by step through it all.

So I want to open with the song that comes to mind:
“O Lord, you are my God and I will ever praise you. 2x
I will seek you in the morning and I will learn to walk in your ways.
And step by step You’ll lead me and I will follow You all of my days.”
Repeat 2 x (Rich Mullins) □



Step by step.

Sometimes those steps seem incredible small – the Spirit speaking a word about some small task, or some timing issue, or a reminder of a responsibility that has been put off etc. The awareness of “keeping in step with the Spirit” (Gal. 5:25) often is in attentiveness to small God-sightings and Spirit promptings. We need to have our mind keyed to see how God is working and celebrate the surprises and evidences of His daily care.

For example, last Monday morning when my friend Grete was visiting me, she was out on our lanai having time with the Lord and two deer came out of the woods on the other side of our pond. The deer don’t come out regularly, but it was a gift for Grete as it is for me anytime it happens. A small gift, but a thank-you, Lord, moment. Or, having my new prayer partner neighbor call me when she got back from a trip to tell me she was back safely, establishing a connection of care and friendship. Or, having a woman come up to us when we were visiting her church and welcome us and be willing to come with her husband to our house this week for lunch, another small step in our making connections in Orlando.

Can you think of something small that God did or gave or brought to your mind that was an evidence of His love for you? What small step of faith did you take as a result?

Other times those interventions of God are bigger, or seem bigger to us and it encourages us in living out the step we are in immediately. Last week I asked for prayer regarding the possible publication of our book *Thinking Outside the Box*. The potential publisher has advanced us to the second stage in the selection process and I wanted God’s wisdom and clarity for each part of the Proposal Format I need to submit by Nov. 1. One way God has been answering this is to give me specific words or illustrations in the middle of the night to make various chapters in the book stronger and more inviting for the readers. Since God is doing this, of course I get up and write it all down so these pieces of revelation or revision are not lost. And they ARE good! I’m so grateful. But writing and publishing a book is not MacDonaldis fast food. It is a myriad of steps – even at 2 in the morning! Plus, waits in between. And the need for trust when there are steps backward as well as steps forward. Walking with God step by step requires faith that God is in charge of every aspect of our life, and of others’ lives we care about, and of our nations and of the universe! We do have an omnipotent, omniscient, sovereign Lord.

The Bible has a number of references on this step by step idea and I want to have us consider these under the main principle from Gal. 5:25: “Since we live in the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.” NIV. Keep in step with the Spirit. Other translations convey the thought a bit differently:

²⁵ “Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit’s leading in every part of our lives.” (NLT)
= following the Spirit’s leading in every part of our lives.

²⁵ “We must live in the Holy Spirit and follow after him.” (Passion Translation)
= following after the Spirit by moving when and where the Spirit is moving.

²⁵“Since this is the kind of life we have chosen, the life of the Spirit, let us make sure that we do not just hold it as an idea in our heads or a sentiment in our hearts, but work out its implications in every detail of our lives.” (*The Message*).

= step by step is practical obedience. It is not just an idea in our heads or sentiment in our hearts. Our feet are to go where the Spirit leads, as our minds are attuned to the Spirit’s voice.

Here are a few other passages and Bible stories that speak of walking step by step.

- Ps. 37:23-24 “If the Lord delights in a man’s way, he makes his steps firm; though he stumble, he will not fall for the Lord upholds him with his hand.” (That’s a very comforting, empowering promise!)
- Ps. 57:2 “But as for me my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my footing for I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.” (We need to think of what causes our steps to falter.)
- Ps. 40:1-2 “I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry; he lifted me out of the desolate pit, out of the mud and mire. He set my feet on solid ground and steadied me as I walked along.” NLT
= The Lord not only lifts us out of despair but he sets our feet on His path and steadies us as we walk step by step. This is practical living in faith.
- Ps. 119:133 “Direct my footsteps according to your word; let no sin rule over me.” (Ah, biblical protection from knowing His Word.)
- Proverbs 14:15 – “A prudent man gives thought to his steps.” (the need for self-reflection re: our daily choices.)
- Jer. 10:23-24 “I know, O Lord, that a man’s life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps. Correct me, Lord, but only with justice – not in your anger lest you reduce me to nothing.” (recognizing our sinful habits that cause us to take wrong steps.)

The Biblical story that comes to mind on this topic is the Israelite nation just after they escape from Egypt into the wilderness. You remember how the Lord led the Israelites with the pillar of cloud by day and the fire at night? This was for their safety and guidance. So when the pillar of cloud started to move, they knew they had to break camp and move with it. And when it stayed in one place, they stayed in that same place! But, in the Exodus story, God did not lead the people on a direct route to the Red Sea. If they knew anything about the area, they would have expected that direct route. Instead, God led them step by step on a circuitous route because God knew that going through Philistine territory could lead to war and that would make the people turn back to their slavery in Egypt (Exod.13:17). That guidance was in the people’s best interests, even when they didn’t understand it. Yet step by step God brought them around to the Red Sea and then opened up a miraculous route across the sea toward their promised land. A pathway they never imagined was possible.

Obviously, God’s ways are not our ways and His thoughts are not our thoughts. So following God step by step is the only way we can be safe and kept within the protection and purposes of God. As Prov. 3:5-7 says: “Trust GOD from the bottom of your heart; don’t try to figure out everything on your own. Listen for GOD’s voice in everything you do, every where you go; he’s the one who will keep you on track. Don’t assume that you know it all. Run to God! Run from evil!” (*The Message*)

This is the daily walk of obedience. Often it seems slow and arduous as we wait and His promises are not quickly fulfilled. But we are to keep trusting God and being obedient to what is in front of you each day. Then be obedient for the next day and the next. Step by step. He will not fail and His promises will be fulfilled in His time.

So, beloved, some encouragement and caution this week to help us all stay on track with the Lord. How easy it is to worry or forge ahead in our own wisdom or the “wisdom” from the various cultural voices around us. Let’s resist that temptation and instead pray a prayer like this:

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us trust in You with all our hearts. Help us keep listening for your voice in everything we do, everywhere we go. And then help us obey your leading and follow You step by step, content in Your sovereign care. Help us praise you even when you take us through the desert to get us to your appointed destination and place of miracles for us. We choose to walk with You, Lord, step by step.

In that spirit of confidence, let's sing our song of response: God will make a way.

SONG OF RESPONSE: GOD WILL MAKE A WAY

God will make a way where there seems to be no way; He works in ways we cannot see.
He will make a way for me. He will be my guide, hold me closely to His side.
With love and strength for each new day. He will make a way. He will make a way. (repeat full stanza)

Bridge: By the roadway in the wilderness He leads me and rivers in the desert will I see.
Heaven and earth will fade but his word will still remain. He will do something new today.

God will make a way where there seems to be no way; He works in ways we cannot see.
He will make a way for me. He will be my guide, hold me closely to His side.
With love and strength for each new day. He will make a way. He will make a way.
With love and strength for each new day. He will make a way. He will make a way. (words and music: Don Moen)

Amen.

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