



Spiritual Walk or Spiritual Journey?

My wife and I have been on some famous trails, the El Camino de Santiago (or Way of St. James in Spain) and the Appalachian Trail. Don't be impressed just yet. I never said we journeyed on those trails. In fact, in both cases we happened to be near a trail head so stepped in to take a picture and just for fun say we were on the trail. Our preference is to take walks in local parks. It is much easier and less time consuming. We will occasionally get ambitious and walk a moderate trail to get to something scenic like an overlook or water fall.

Some Christians talk about their journey with Christ, others talk about walking with Christ. We should be walking with Christ daily. Some days are obviously harder than other; but are we really on a spiritual journey? As I compared taking a journey on one of those famous trails to walking at the local park, I wondered whether my spiritual life on earth is a journey or a walk. Here, I'd like to share my thoughts about being on a journey versus a walk.

Taking a journey

A journey is a long trip, especially to a faraway place; and takes a long time. Each day there is a hike until the end of the journey, when one is finally fulfilled and satisfied. The first thing that must happen is to set a destination, so proper plans can be made. So, those planning a journey on the El Camino de Santiago decide if they are walking the whole trail or not. If they decide the destination is the very end, they know the trip is around 500 miles and a very experienced hiker will take about 30 days to complete the journey. If our first spiritual question is "What is the destination?", most Christians would respond "Heaven". That certainly could take a very long time to get there, and would qualify as a journey.

Journeys require planning. Without proper preparation, walking the full El Camino de Santiago can be disastrous. One would want a training plan to be sure they can physically handle the walk. They need to have the right equipment and sufficient food, water and supplies; but not so much they over burden themselves. There also needs to be a certain mental preparation for the challenges and trials that happen along the way. On our spiritual journey we may also have a training plan, be spiritually fed and work on being mentally prepared for battle against our enemy. For our supplies, we put on the armor of God.

Journeys are often difficult, filled with unknown challenges and dangers. Hot sun, hard rains, winds and damage to paths can beat down the weary traveler. Trials and tribulations for a weary Christian can certainly overcome the joy of the journey.

Finally, part of the experience of the journey is the comfort and companionship of other travelers. Living past glories of the journey, discussing upcoming challenges and sharing supplies to another traveler who did not plan well enough are all part of the experience. Christians, as well, find the testimonies and assistance of more experienced Christians beneficial and part of the journey.

Taking a walk

Walks tend to be shorter; and although some planning is necessary there is certainly not as much planning as taking a journey. Walks usually do not have destinations, but rather a goal of finishing the intended walk. A walk can be just for fun or maybe to see some scenery along the way. There can be some challenges on walks such as fallen branches or a washed away path. Others may be encountered on a walk; but the dialogue is usually a simple "Hello" or "Is the waterfall close?". Walks are easy compared to journeys. Our spiritual life may seem hard and long, thus being a journey and not a walk; but let's consider it further.



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One of the recommendations for travelers before beginning a journey is to think about their goal or destination, and ask why that destination is important. Most Christians would say their destination is Heaven. Obviously, the only other possible eternal destination is not a good one. So, is our goal Heaven only because we want to avoid the alternative? That is hardly a good reason to choose Heaven as a destination. Heaven sounds like a pretty cool place with lots of good things going on, as described in Revelations Chapter 21. But desiring Heaven because it will bring us joy seems pretty selfish and also not a good reason. Heaven might seem like a good place to meet up with loved ones who have gone before us. But Heaven is not just a family reunion. Heaven might not be the destination, Heaven might be the reward.

I was quite intrigued by the very first sentence in the prologue of the Catholic Catechism, “God, infinitely perfect and blessed in himself, in a plan of sheer goodness freely created man to make him share in his own blessed life. For this reason, at every time and in every place, God draws close to man.” Paul says in 2 Corinthians 13:5, “Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you?” So, if our true destination is Christ, then we have already reached our destination. Once we accept Jesus and open our heart to Him, comes in to us and dwells within us. Our destination is attained.

For the Christian who fully allows Jesus to dwell in their heart, the destination is within them and the journey is over. But if that is true, why does faith waiver and times become difficult? It's like a parent taking a child for a walk. My wife and I would often take our children, and grandchildren, for walks in a park. Our experiences with both were similar. We are God's children, and His experience walking with us probably just the same.

The preferable way to walk with a child is to hold their hand. In this manner, they are always close and safe. The child cannot get into any trouble or poison ivy nor get lost. Holding hands is the most enjoyable and least stressful way to walk. In very dangerous circumstances, like crossing a busy street, the parent will not let go of the child's hand. No chances are taken. I believe our Lord feels the same way. He wants us close, but we can let go of His hand and venture on our own. Except, when there is danger to our soul, He will not let go of our hand.

Sometimes, a child wants to stay close but feel independent. They will let go of the parent's hand but walk close by. Although not a bad alternative, once the child lets go of the hand they can begin to stray. Freedom allows temptation to take over.

One such temptation is when there is something of great interest to them but the parent continues walking. The child lags further and further behind. At first, the parent slows down and then stops in their tracks to ensure they keep an eye on the child. If all else fails, the parent will backtrack to urge the child to move forward. Jesus is always calling us forward into a deeper union with him. Our distractions and sins can hold us back. The Apostle Peter walked on the water towards Jesus; but when he got distracted by the troubles around him, he took his eyes off Jesus and began to sink. He called out to Jesus. “Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand and caught him” (Matthew 14:31). Peter stopped sinking once Jesus held his hand.

Sometimes, the child may run ahead; wanting to move at a faster pace or seeing something of interest. I always let my children have their freedom and run ahead, but kept close watch and once they got out of my sight would call them back. As they were leaving my sight, I would command them to stop and wait until I caught up. How often do we become impatient with God's timing and venture out on our own? Jesus allows us the free will to run ahead of him. But if we get out of His sight, he will always call us back. We just have to listen.

The one thing my wife and I never let happen is straying off the path. The moment a foot went off the path we would immediately tell them to get back on the path. There was too much danger off the path: animals, branches



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to fall on, poison ivy and such. They never seemed to remember this rule and about every walk we would have to remind them at least once. We forget, too. We forget the trouble we got ourselves into the last time we strayed from the path Jesus walks. He always calls us back. But if we ignore His word, we can get into all kinds of trouble.

Conclusion

We may often feel like we are on a long spiritual journey. It can be easy to focus on a Heavenly destination that is far off, or the struggles we seem to face daily. But, we are not really going somewhere. Our goal, our destination and only desire is to have Jesus in our hearts and to be united with Him in all that we do. Our destination is not too far away, our destination comes to us. We need not rely on our strengths and abilities to achieve our destination. We simply need to hold His hand each day and walk the path.

Jesus will never abandon us. He will hold our hand and guide us as we walk with Him. He protects us from spiritual harm; calling us back when we fall behind, get too far ahead or stray from the path. When things go wrong, we need not feel alone and abandoned. We need not worry about our journey. We simply need to look around, see how far we have strayed from the hand of Jesus and then return to Him.

Walking experiences with my children and grandchildren have taught me one thing for sure...Children will always get curious and stray away. We are God's children. We likely will always continue to run ahead or fall behind at times. But He knows us and anticipates us. We need not despair when we stray. God loves us, and in His plan of sheer goodness freely created us to share in his own blessed life. He will always draw close and extend His hand to take us back and protect us on our daily walk.