

“Walk This Way”

I Corinthians 15:1-11; Acts 1:12-14

Series: The Walk – the Life of James Week 2: From Believer to Follower

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Let me tell you about James. Not James the Apostle but James Loder. He was one of my professors at Princeton Seminary. Blessed with a brilliant intellect, Jim Loder studied with the greatest minds of his generation. He could teach a lot about God. Yet Dr. James Loder confessed he really didn't know God.

That all changed on a Saturday in 1970 at 4:30 p.m. Taking his family on a vacation, Dr. Loder stopped his car and camper to help two elderly ladies stranded on the New York Thruway near Kingston. While under the car fixing a flat on their Oldsmobile, there was an ear splitting screech of brakes. A 64 year-old-man fell asleep at the wheel, rammed the Olds from behind and shoved it on top of Jim. It ground his body into the gravel and pushed it until the Olds smashed into the rear of the camper leaving just enough room for Jim's head and shoulders. His right thumb was torn off at the first joint, five ribs were broken, the left lung was bleeding and his skin was scraped from head to foot.

We often hear life is a journey. I hope your journey is not as tragic as Jim Loder's – squeezed between two bumpers with an Oldsmobile on your chest. But how is your walk going? For some of you the road of life is smooth sailing, easy street, maybe even the fast lane. Or you may be on an entirely different trip. Over the last two or three years you may feel like you are being taken for a ride. Demands, duties, or diseases have derailed your path. Maybe the road of your life is routine. Day in and day out you travel the same rutted circle and feel you are getting nowhere. Maybe your road is rocky. Jam-ups bring your life to a stand-still. Detours force you to set aside your dreams. Break-downs leave you stranded on the shoulder. At this moment the road of your life may even be risky. It's getting dark up ahead, even dangerous. You are lost, alone, not sure where the road will end. And for all of us, though we don't like to think about it, there will come a time when the road leads to a dead end.

One of the big burdens on the road of life is the baggage we lug along. It might be a suitcase full of shame, sadness or stress, a wallet crammed with worry or weariness, luggage packed with loneliness, lust, or liquor, a handbag stuffed with hurt or heartache. These bags slow us down, weigh us down, take us down. Yet we can't let them go. I'm flying to The Outreach Foundation Board meeting today. Going through the airport reminds me of a story about a guy named Ted who tried to pick up his luggage at the baggage area of Chicago's O'Hare Airport. As he reached for his bag he became dizzy, lost his balance, and fell onto the stainless steel snake. Flat on his back, he should have let go of his bag and stood up. But at that moment Ted thought several things: "I've wanted to do this for years. I could get arrested. Now is probably not the best time to get off." So, tightly hanging onto his suitcase, he rode the conveyor through the flaps into the darkness until he passed through the flaps again into the light. Waiting on the other side was an official-looking woman who said, "You're not supposed to do that!" To which he replied, "Have you ever tried

this?!” She bellowed, “No!” And he said, “Don't!”¹ You may be lugging a lot of baggage. It's taking you for a ride. You want to drop it. You know you should let go. But you can't.

Brothers and sisters, I have Good News for you. No matter where you are on the road of life you have a traveling Companion named Jesus. Your road can be the way you meet Jesus. Your walk is the path to knowing Jesus. This doesn't only happen at the moment when you first came to believe, but at every step along the way. He shows you how to drop the old and begin a life changing adventure. He wants to fill you with His life. He tells you to walk this way, His way.

When James Loder called for help, his wife Arlene, a slight woman barely five feet put her hands under the bumper and prayed, “In the name of Jesus Christ, in the name of Jesus Christ.” She lost consciousness but when she came to she saw the car lifted off her husband. You'd think pain, shock and anger would be Jim's first reactions. But something totally different happened.

As I roused myself from under the car, a steady surge of life was rushing through me carrying with it two solid assurances. First I knew how deeply I felt love for those around me, especially my family. The second assurance was that this disaster had a purpose. Walking from the car to the embankment, I never felt more conscious of the life that poured through me, nor more aware that this life was not my own. By far, the most significant and memorable effect was not the pain, nor the anger, but the gracious nature of the life I was experiencing.²

On the New York Thruway James Loder came to know Jesus. It was a life changing moment for him...the first of many.

Jesus did the same for His brother James. For decades James thought he knew his brother. Now he truly comes to know Him. Last week we saw how James, the half-brother of Jesus, starts as a skeptic and critic. He pushes Jesus to go to Jerusalem and try to be famous (John 7:1-5). He thinks Jesus is out of His mind. With his brothers, James even tries to forcibly take control of Jesus and drag Him back home to Nazareth (Mark 3:20-21). Now they are on a journey, walking to Jerusalem for Passover. The crowds swell. The mass of pilgrims seems like a movement, some would say an army, with his brother at the head. As they reach the Holy City, Jesus mounts a donkey. It's a fulfillment of prophecy (Zechariah 9:9), a deliberate sign that Jesus is the Messiah. What's in James' mind as he watches this drama unfold? Fear his brother is going too far? Pride for all the praise Jesus receives? Jealous of Jesus' success? Hopeful that Jesus might be the Messiah? Worried about what this could do to their mother? We don't know. Anything is possible. How will it all end?

Far worse than any expect. In one week Jesus is arrested, tried, tortured, crucified and sealed in a tomb. The movement collapses. His disciples disperse. Worst of all, his mother had to watch her Son suffer an excruciating execution, put to death as a rebel, blasphemer and sinner. Believe it or not, it's in this valley of the shadow of death that James becomes a believer.

¹Lee Eclov, Vernon Hills, Illinois.

² James Loder, The Transforming Moment Understanding Convictional Experiences, Harper & Row, New York, c. 1981, p. 1-6.

It begins with **Heartache**. Though it is painful, heartache can also be the first step on the road to knowing Jesus. You know heartache.

- It's the feeling you don't fit in.
- It's discovering what you do all day is draining the life out of you.
- It's sitting up all night wondering where your child is.
- It's being trapped in the prison of your own desires with no way out.
- It's watching someone you love being destroyed by drugs or disease.
- It's the feeling you cannot stand another moment in this marriage.
- It's the sorrow of having to care for a parent who once took care of you.
- It's standing by the grave side and saying, "You weren't supposed to leave me."

Heartache is the time when what was solid is shaken, what was certain is questioned, what was dependable is debatable.

James is dealing with massive heartache. He knew his brother was heading for disaster. Why did he taunt Jesus and tell Him to go to Jerusalem? He knew Jesus was out of His mind. Why didn't he fight harder to stop Him while He was still in Galilee? Now, on Sunday morning, James hears someone has stolen the body. He's trying to hold his family together. Just live a quiet peaceful life. Will this nightmare never end?

What ache afflicts your heart? What's beyond your control? What troubles you by day and keeps you up at night? Who causes you grief or to grieve? What makes you rage or regret?

Heartache leads to **Heartburn**: the search for answers. Chaos drives you to take control. Problems push you to find a solution. Many try to resolve it on their own. Too many attempt to kill the pain with drink, drugs or desire. Yet Heartburn can also be the second step on the road to knowing Jesus. By Heartburn I mean that inexplicable feeling that Someone is with you. You sense that in the midst of your heartache there is a power, a presence that is not only greater than you but higher and wider and deeper than your problem. Jesus walks with you. He knows your inner thoughts, your worst sins, your deepest feelings, your greatest fears and frustrations. Jesus is in front of you, behind you, and beside you. Waking or sleeping, at home or away, He is always there. And when you are on the darkest road of your life, He is especially there. He walks with you, listens to you, speaks to you. That's why your heart burns within.

James is searching for a way out of this disaster. The soldiers are probably rounding up Jesus' conspirators. They are watching every gate. How can he get his mother and family out of Jerusalem? He may even be cursing His brother. Then he hears the strangest news of all.

Jesus appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. I Corinthians 15:3-7

James starts to hear these crazy tales. First the inner circle of disciples say they've seen Jesus. Then a whole mob of five hundred meets Him. Why not James? Does he refuse to believe the news? Is he afraid to encounter his brother? Does he want to run away from all this insanity? Yet his heart is burning with the hope it might all be true.

We can be just like James. We're not aware Jesus is with us. Our eyes and ears and hearts are closed. Maybe we think it's just an illusion. Maybe we want to do it on our own. Maybe we don't want to change. Maybe we are so overwhelmed with our heartache we refuse to listen.

Sisters and brothers, when you feel your heart burn within, the next step you take is decisive. That's when you have to let your **Heartbreak**. We don't know when it happened – days or weeks after Easter. We don't know where it happened –Jerusalem, Galilee or somewhere in between. One thing we do know: James came face-to-face with His brother Jesus. “Then he appeared to James, then all of the apostles” (I Corinthians 15:7). “Greetings brother!” says the Risen Lord. “It's You! You're Alive! You're Alive!” Instantly James' eyes are open. Yet more importantly, his heart is broken open.

This “Aha” moment, this awakening, this transformation happens in different ways for everyone. It's been said there are four different roads. Did you begin your walk with Jesus on:

- The Damascus Road – like Paul, did you have a single, sudden, dramatic experience that led to an immediate turn around (Acts 9)?
- The Jericho Road – like the Good Samaritan, did you experience God while helping someone in need (Luke 10:25-37)?
- The Emmaus Road – like the two men who felt Christ's presence all along but only became aware of Him at certain key moments of discovery (Luke 24:13-35)?
- The Roman Road – did you come to know Jesus through careful diligent study of books, such as Paul's letter to the Romans, which present the Gospel?

There is no single “right” road to walk with Jesus. You may even experience a combination of all four.

There is one more step on the walk to know Jesus: **Heart to Heart** – Sharing with Other What You Know About Jesus. In the Bible, everyone who sees Jesus goes and tells someone. The first ones they tell are other believers. That's what happened to James and his brothers.

Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers. Acts 1:13-14

No one who comes to know Jesus keeps it to him or herself. They depend on community for support, encouragement, care, inspiration. We need one another and we are better together. This is why it is so essential that you get in a Growth Group as we start our fall season. Join together with other believers as we study James' letter and find a faith that works. But don't stop there. Invite someone else to join you – whether to worship, Growth Group or mission project. We are the way Jesus has chosen to help others find the way to Him.

Jesus died so we can live free from the baggage of sin, shame and guilt. Now He lives so we never have to carry that baggage again. Lay down your baggage at the foot of the cross and surrender your heart to Him. Let Him take your heart, bless it and break it. Let Him lead you on the road of life. Walk His Way.

When James Loder arrived at the hospital, the situation was still extremely critical. His skin was turning blue. Arlene called her father, a pastor in Chicago, and his church quickly gathered to pray for Jim. Again the power of God's life rushed into his severely wounded body. The Crucifixes on the wall were comforting – there was Jesus, suffering in pain yet also promising a life greater than death.

When the surgeons arrived they wore the tired, solemn faces of those about to face another grim life-against-death struggle. But Jim, feeling the joyful Presence of God, invited them to join him in a hymn of praise before the surgery. They remained quiet as he sang a few bars of "Fairest Lord Jesus." Soon the mood lightened and the laughter filled the room. As they did their work, Jim's blue skin turned pink and his lung stopped bleeding. Two days later, further treatment was cancelled and the head surgeon said, "A good surgeon knows when to get out of the way and let God do the healing."

Some months later, Jim Loder visited his father-in-law's church which prayed for him. Rising during the service to say a few words of appreciation, he was overcome with tears of gratitude. As a matter of fact, whenever Jim Loder taught or preached from then on, he was always moved by the Presence of God to tears. His lectures were like worship services. His life was not just saved, but changed forever. Jesus became a living Presence in his life. He began to live from one moment to the next in a God-bathed, God-soaked, God-intoxicated world.

In 2001, Dr. James Loder passed away very suddenly of a brain aneurysm. On his gravestone in Princeton, above his name and dates is one simple sentence. "The Lord Jesus Christ Reigns." Let the Lord Jesus Christ reign in you. Walk His Way.