

**Treadmills** provide the same exercise for your body as walking or running ....but without your mind having to be engaged in what you are doing.

You can relax your mind..... because you know that your next step is going to be on the exact same surface as the previous one... guaranteed.

You may remember.... (back in the day)..... they first started putting book stands on the front of treadmills..... so you could read a magazine or your favorite novel.... while walking....

**Now**, most high end treadmills come with their own video screen for TV or even DVD viewing.... all while your legs think they are going somewhere.

Treadmills are a great invention for keeping in shape.....without you having to pay attention like you do when walking or running **outdoors**....

But treadmills are a poor model for what your spiritual life should look like.

**Because**... PROGRESS in the faith... requires you to traverse over many pitfalls and hills and valleys....

In REAL Life.... your MIND and your Spirit must take **careful heed** to where your feet are going.....

Otherwise, you will find yourself headed down paths that lead you **AWAY** from God and the goodness of His presence..... and might even result in your destruction.

The God who gave up His only Son as a ransom for your soul..... has better things in store for you than that.....

So He wants to exhort you today.... to...



The world is a dangerous place because it is under a curse.....

Sin is out to DESTROY you.... not **help** you.....

So you must not fall prey to the temptation to live **foot loose and fancy free**.....

Instead....you are to be **cautious** about your life... so that you can walk in your Savior's WISDOM and not in the foolishness from which you came....

Paul says it this way....

**Ephesians 4:17-19**

" Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must **no longer walk** as the Gentiles do, in the **futility** of their minds.

They are **darkened** in their understanding, **alienated from the life of God** because of the **ignorance** that is in them, **due to their hardness of heart**.

They have become **callous** and have given themselves up to **sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.**"

Having laid out the theological tenets of the gospel....(Ch. 1 – 3) and having told us (thus far in ch. 4) how, in the church, we can **grow up together** in the faith...into maturity....

Paul now warns us that this only HAPPENS through you **taking aim** at your lifestyle...so that it will (in some measure) REFLECT.... God's amazing work of grace....

Vaughan – There should be a recognizable **CORRESPONDENCE** between the new creation work INSIDE your soul.... and the Way you Live .....

Your role in that process is to....

**Watch Your Step**

b/c...

1. You Are On Somebody's **Path**

Few things are more beautiful during this time of year than a walk through the woods.... From the mist rising from the earth in the morning....to the stunning array of colors and the fresh smell of leaves that have just fallen....a walk through the woods will refresh your soul....

One of my favorite things to do in the woods (this time of year) is to **look for trails**... Whether it is a buck that has made his own little highway to check his scrapes for does that are ready to mate..... or one made by four wheelers that usually lead to someone's house.....

All paths lead somewhere..... but not all paths lead to God.

As **people**.... while we may make our own trails from time to time..... but we spend a surprising amount of time and energy walking on paths someone else has made.

**Think about** the way you talk.....slang words you use..... the way you try to walk.... or pose for a picture.... you didn't make those up..... realize it or not.... you are following down someone else's path....

- Whose Path are You On?

Paul says....if you have been **ransomed** by God through the **blood** of His Son..... your options have been narrowed down quite a bit....

#### **Ephesians 4:17**

" Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must **no longer** walk as the Gentiles do, in the **futility** of their minds."

Paul makes it clear.... this is not a suggestion.....

And you can not merely relegate it to his human opinion.....

He says... I **INSIST** in the Lord..... you **MUST stop**....

walking (mindlessly) after the Gentiles....

**Gentiles** is originally a word that God used with Israel to refer to all the pagan nations that surrounded the Promised Land....

Pagan because.... they served **false** Gods instead of the One True God of Israel.

But after the birth of the NT church..... Gentiles came to refer all those who were still **OUTSIDE** of Christ....

Those who still followed pagan ways of thinking and living.... rather than walking in the light of the gospel.

No matter what kind of home you grew up in..... or what part of the world you come from.... each of us have grown up in **SOME** measure emulating the ways of an **ungodly** world....

We have inherited from our forefathers **FUTILE** ways of thinking and living....

**ALL** of us.... before God saved us..... USED to walk on **Pagan Paths**...

For some of you.... that might only have been in what you **fantasized** about.....

Because your immediate surroundings restrained you from actually running amuck...

But in your MIND, your thinking and your **FANTASIES**,.... have been just as rancid and ungodly as what we find in the most wicked show on TV.

For others of you.... you may have actually lived out those lies..... and discovered just how empty and painful Satan's promises really are....

No matter where you fall on the spectrum..... the call is the same....

CEASE walking down their trails.....

....

That starts .... in how you THINK.

Specifically, it starts with Who / what you make the **CENTER** of your thinking...

Pauls tells us that Gentiles walk in the **FUTILITY** of their minds....

That does not mean that non-Christians don't think.....

Some of the most brilliant and gifted people in all of history have been unbelievers...

Curtis Vaughan - **"Unregenerate minds are not empty... they are just filled with things that amount to nothing."**

People who do not KNOW Christ..... who are still in bondage to sin.....

Set their minds on earthly things..... they put massive amounts of energy into creating a better life for themselves..... one with more pleasure for them and theirs.....

They think long and hard about how to make themselves rich.....

Or how to make others like them.....

Or how to make their dreams (both big and small) come true.....

Or (if they are benevolent) maybe how to make the world a **better place**.....

Yet, at the end of the day..... much less the end of their lives.... all those thoughts add up to **ZERO**.

The sum total of all their thinking.... and all their energy....ends up with NO value whatsoever in the light of God's WISDOM...

**Isaiah 40:15**

"Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as the dust on the scales;"

That is why Solomon wrote the whole book of Ecclesiastes..... to demonstrate that you can THINK about life from every possible angle.... putting no limits on yourself...and you still come up with the same conclusion....

**All is empty**... all is vain... without GOD being in the center of your thinking....

If you live your life....."under the sun" as Solomon puts it.....

If you live as if there is no heaven... no hell.... ....

Then your lifetime will be one WASTE of all the energy you put into whatever you spent your days doing.....

That is a VIVID description of Life apart from the good news of Jesus Christ.....

In a parallel passage Paul tells us it is because their MINDS and HEARTS are like DARK ROOMS....

**Romans 1:21**

"For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they **became futile in their thinking**, and their foolish hearts were **darkened**."

My grandmother went legally blind when she was in her 80's. But we did not know it for several months because she had lived in the same house so long... that she could cook and clean and do almost everything.... but just following the same old routines and routes through her house that she always had....

Lost people do the same thing..... they may seem like they have it together.... and they will sure try to convince you they do....

But they are walking in DARKNESS and Paul says it is foolish for you who have seen the light to keep following them...

Take an honest look at WHO you are patterning your life after..... WHO are you identifying with....

Whose Path are you On?

If you **say** you believe the gospel.....

But in your daily process of making decisions and responding to life.... you have your mind set on earthly things....

INSTEAD of setting your mind on things above... where Christ is.....

INSTEAD of training your mind.... to THINK God's thoughts after him.....

**You are STILL walking in the path of the Gentiles.....**

The **PATTERNS** of your thinking are of the world.... and not of God.

THAT is not only going in the wrong direction..... it could lead to your destruction unless you REPENT....

– Whose Path are you on?

In light of God's mercy in CALLING you out of darkness.... you must now LIVE in a way that reflects your new RELATIONSHIP with Jesus.....

Your Daily walk must CONFORM to your **new relationship**.....

**Ephesians 4:1**

" I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to **walk in a manner worthy of the calling** to which you have been called,"

It is so easy to be lulled to sleep in our society.... we can lose sight of the path altogether if we are not vigilant...

WATCH YOUR STEP....

Not only can you examine where you are taking your cues from.... Who you are following.... and ask Where are they GOING.....

But you can watch your step by.....

## 2. **Evaluate** All Your Activities in Light of Your New Relationship

It is a huge threshold to cross when someone gets **married**....

Because.... (by design) marriage means you are willing to leave behind much of your **independence** in order that your life might be joined to another in loving commitment and relationship. **If you try to live a single life** while married, the marriage will not prosper and may even fail.

PREVIOUSLY.... before God opened our eyes to understand and obey the gospel.....

We thought mainly of OURSELVES.... all roads (in our thinking) led to what was best for **ME**....

That is characteristic of Gentile thinking.....

People without Christ...are totally **IGNORANT** of the goodness and satisfaction that the LOVE of God in Christ Jesus brings to His people.

They have NO ACCESS to the **life of God** which is revealed to you in the Person of Jesus Christ.....

They have no **taste buds** for heavenly joys.... and the peace of God which encompasses those who obey the gospel.

Paul tells us that is because.....

**Ephesians 4:18**

"They are **darkened** in their understanding, **alienated** from the life of God because of the **ignorance** that is in them, due to their hardness of heart."

If you have been JOINED to Christ in saving relationship through the gospel.....

Then He has opened your eyes to see the LIGHT of His goodness in the face of Christ...

You are without excuse if you are still living as if you are **spiritually SINGLE**....

You are basically saying to the Holy Spirit..... when He prompts you with what is right..... **I don't CARE**.....

Or \_\_\_\_\_ is doing this and their life seems to be going alright.....

If you are in the Body.... the **Bride** of Christ.... and He is your Spiritual HEAD....

then put to death the former things done out of ignorance and begin to ....

EVALUATE each activity of your life.....as to whether or not it pleases JESUS.

God has given us two very precise **indexes**.... with which to evaluate our stewardship of the life He has given us.

1) Finances – what you spend your money on.... paints an unmistakable picture of what is most valuable and important to you....

If you make a pie chart of your expenditures.... it will give you in numerical terms, a statement of your values....

As you look at your finances.... are you thinking like a Gentile.... or a follower of Christ?

2) Calendar - Looking over your monthly calendar.... (esp. the events that are highlighted) and which you make immovable PRIORITIES.... tell the story of your life. It DISPLAYS... on a computer screen... on your handheld.. or on paper.... the hidden motives and intentions of your heart.

God is calling you to be INTENTIONAL about discerning how you should spend your time and money.... in LIGHT of your identity as a servant of the Most High God..... (if in fact you are)....

What makes this so hard is the PASSIONS which wage war in our members ..... which we are used to following hard after....

We WANT what we want... and it is hard to say NO...

As difficult as it is..... to sometimes let go of and say NO to an activity (or an expenditure)... because you do not believe it brings glory to God.....

I have found those times the most LIBERATING in my life.

The MEANS God uses to help us make those decisions....is three fold:

1) Pray

From your heart, seek the FACE of your Father as to what He would have his child do... Most often it is the posture of our hearts that is facing in the wrong direction...

Bathe the whole process in an attitude of "not my will but yours be done"...

2) His Word

**Psalm 119:105**

" Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."

God illumines your PATH.... one step at a time as you seek Him in His Word...

He **wants** it to go WELL with you... (Do you BELIEVE that?)

That is why He has shown His Spirit's light in your eyes... and shows you Himself through His Word.

Often Scripture is VERY clear about whether or not we are stepping out of bounds... in a particular area.....

As you READ and study....

Use cross references.... find narratives that help you see God's truth applied to His people's lives in Scripture... So that you can WATCH YOUR STEP.....(not being lured into turning aside to the right or to the left)... .... but seeking to walk in footsteps of Jesus....so that it can go WELL with you...

If you are STILL unclear and vexed about what God would have you do.....

Maybe it is a **GRAY** area.....

or maybe you have learned not to trust your own discernment because you have tended towards legalism in the past.....

3) Seek Wise Counsel

Not someone who you know is going to tell you what you want to hear....

That is the blind leading the blind...

Seek someone who you know has a heart for God and has walked wisely in their own life....

**Unbelievers** don't do that....

ALL of their decisions are MADE in obscure darkness.....

Years of DISOBEDIENCE to God has left them HARDENED and crusty.....

v. 18b the **ignorance** that is in them, due to their hardness of heart."

"hardness of heart" – word originally meant **petrification** (petrified wood) Medical writers came to use it to describe numbness... callousness...

F. W. Beare – "a **steeling** of the will against every good impulse."

Babies (not born innocent) but they **appear to be** because their hearts and wills are still soft and supple....

They are capable of compassion... of sensitivity.... of being led by others whom they trust...

By **contrast**.... depending on their life experiences.... by their teen years they can be crusty and sarcastic.... intentionally conditioned AGAINST anything good...

**Ephesians 4:19**

"They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity."

CALLOUSED = your conscience becomes so RESISTANT to God's truth.... that it no longer functions at all.

If that is your condition... or someone you love....

It is not because they hung around the wrong people..... it is because their HEARTS are still in the dark about Who God really is....

The NATURAL regression of a calloused heart is to go precisely in the direction where we now see our culture...

**Sensuality** RULES....

Every kind of IMPURITY is not only tolerated.... it is now CELEBRATED....

Kent Hughes - "Our culture is hell-bent in its cavalier, reckless pursuit of sin, and it makes psychopaths its martyrs and drag queens its models."

By denying that any shame exists.... the aggressive gratification of desires (burning lust) offers no apologies to anyone.

We live... ladies and gentlemen... only a few steps from the most wicked cultures described in this Book....

Let us WATCH our STEPS..... that we not be lured down into the sweeping tide of a world who knows not God...

the world from which we all came.

**1 John 1:5-7**

" This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we **walk in darkness**, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if **we walk in the light**, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin."

**Isaiah 2:5**

"O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD."

**Ezekiel 37:24**

"My servant David shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall walk in my rules and **be careful** to obey my statutes."

**Proverbs 12:11**

"Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread, but he **who follows worthless pursuits** lacks sense."

**Psalms 119:37**

"Turn my eyes from looking at **worthless things**; and give me life in your ways."

**Jeremiah 2:5**

"Thus says the LORD: "What wrong did your fathers find in me that they went far from me, and went after worthlessness, and became worthless?"