

Introduction

“Take a step of faith in Christ.” —Father Derek Pringle, Emmanuel Episcopal Church

I am an average person. I am average weight, average height, average looks, average intelligence, average Christian, average person. I like to think I am normal, with normal issues as the average person, with the average struggles and the average thoughts, beliefs, doubts, concerns, wants, and needs. I believe that the average person finds it hard to find time for prayers, healthy eating, exercise, time with family, demands of job, and everything else that we “should” be doing. I believe that Christ-centered living can get us there. A Christ-centered life provides us with forgiveness when we slip up, or when we need extra help, or when we need a friend on the walk of life. Christ helps us transcend the average and ordinary, to reach the extraordinary. Since Christ lives in all of us, average is a misleading description. I believe that all of us have opportunities to improve our health and transform ourselves through Christ to the amazing and extraordinary. Christ Walk is a program towards a healthy, Christ-centered life. We use the grace of God and the strength of Jesus to improve our health: mind, body, and spirit.

Christ Walk began in 2006 at Emmanuel Episcopal Church in Hampton, Virginia. I remember walking into the priest’s office just as bold as you please and telling him that I was going to run a walking program during the six weeks of Lent for the parishioners. Father Derek was either bowled over or incredibly trusting as he gave me the go-ahead to implement my program. That began an odyssey of implementing Christ Walk for multiple churches. I will always be incredibly thankful to Emmanuel for the gift of testing the Christ Walk Program with me. I pray that they received as much out of Christ Walk as I received in sharing it.

A registered nurse by training, I am married to an Army officer; my professional life has taken twists and turns depending upon where my husband has been stationed. While stationed in Germany I was unable to find a job as a nurse so ended up landing a position as a health promotion coordinator for the 1st Infantry Division and Würzburg Medical Com-

mand. It was a life-changing and career-changing experience for me as I found that helping people become healthier was the calling in life that I always wanted. When we moved back to the States following our tour in Germany, I was seven months pregnant and had given up my dream job. I was not sure what I was going to do, but felt this strong calling to develop a walking program for my church. I had done something similar with the 1st Infantry Division by developing the “Walk to Iraq and Back” program for deployed spouses. The “Walk to Iraq and Back” program was a yearlong walking initiative designed for spouses of soldiers deployed to Iraq to walk the miles to Iraq and back over the course of deployment. From that experience, I knew the routes in the Bible would make for an incredible fitness experience. Thus “Christ Walk” grew out of my experience with health promotion programming, but centered on walking with Christ every day. I believe we need to exercise in mind, body, and spirit in order to make a body strong and whole.

The Bible has a great deal of inspiration for living healthy in mind, body, and spirit. As a result, you will find quotations from the Bible at the beginning of every chapter of this book. While I generally do not like “cherry picking” biblical verses outside of the context of the story, I have found that these phrases have been guideposts to ensure that Christ Walk stays centered on God. You may have other verses that call you to a healthy life, but I hope and pray that these verses will lift you up on your own Christ Walk journey.

I am an Episcopalian, although I feel quite comfortable in a variety of churches and have heard God’s Word in many denominations outside of my own. Christ Walk is not intended to be just for Episcopalians; however, there will be references to the church year and church traditions that will be familiar to those from a liturgical tradition. Christ Walk was originally designed for the forty days of Lent, a time when many take on a spiritual discipline. However, Christ Walk can be used in any 40-day period.

Forty days is a powerful period of time in the Bible, and Lent is often used as a time of prayer, fasting, denial, and personal goals as we prepare ourselves for the forgiveness God gives us in Jesus’ resurrection. Forty days can be transformational. While you can do Christ Walk at any forty-day period during the year, I find it an especially powerful tool during Lent. My Christ Walk challenge reminds me to always be cognizant of walking with Christ every day of my life.

I have also designed this book to be written in for you to track the progress on your journey and express your thoughts about your mind, body, and spirit. Research shows that people who journal about their health

and their progress towards their goals are more likely to stick to their plans. People who track their goals are more likely to be successful in their endeavors. Christ Walk is not just for reading. Christ Walk is for living.

In each chapter (day) you will find a space to record your physical accomplishments with the exercise you have completed, the thoughts that you have discovered, and the spiritual insights you have experienced as a part of your Christ Walk journey. Christ Walk is designed to be shared, recorded, used, and reused as every day of walking with Christ is a new experience and new revelation into a healthier life.

I am passionate about God's presence in all of our lives, including my own. I was born in 1975 in Asheville, North Carolina, the daughter of an Episcopal priest who served as a Navy chaplain. I have a double-bogey against me: a preacher's kid (PK) and a Navy brat! But I think I turned out all right. My parents brought my brother and me up in the church. I have always believed in God, but my belief was more of the status quo rather than an active experience of my daily life.

During my teens, there were two major events that resulted in a powerful connection with God and the birth of my spirituality as I know it today. My father began suffering from mental illness, and he deteriorated over the next ten to fifteen years until he ended up having a stroke at the age of fifty-six. During that same period, I unexpectedly lost my hearing to an autoimmune disease. The doctors were not sure what was causing my hearing loss and associated symptoms, putting me on many experimental therapies in order to stem the hearing loss. Despite these efforts, I lost the remainder of my hearing at the age of fifteen and went through a six-month period completely deaf. I remember very vividly being in church one Sunday as we all stood to say the Nicene Creed. I could not hear anything. I sat down suddenly, extremely angry, frustrated, sad, and fed up that I could not hear the words of the service. I remember thinking, "Why bother?" and "What's the point if I cannot hear and participate?" Then I remember very clearly the voice of the Lord saying, "It does not matter, you don't have to *hear* to *experience*." And a light went on for me. I do not have to hear, I do not have to do this by rote, but I do have to experience God's love and share God's love with all that I am, however I am. We are all different, with our own losses and own pains, and we can ALWAYS experience God's love and share God's love with others, because he is the living God here on earth. What matters is how we love and how we use our bodies and lives towards God's love.

That is my spiritual strength. God gave me a message that has endured through various ups and downs and tragedies; we all have a place in doing

God's work in the world no matter how we are built or with what faulty equipment we are endowed. I know without a doubt that God is here amongst us and shares in our everyday lives. When I have the most internal conflict over my life, it is invariably because I am paying too much attention to the self, rather than what God is telling me. We are not put on this earth to focus on the SELF, rather what the self can do for *God*.

My mental strength is my ability to reason, to always search for knowledge and growth. I probably find this my easiest place of growth because I love to learn and read. However, for you it may be your challenge, and during Christ Walk you may set a learning goal as a part of your journey. Your ability to learn never ends. In fact, I think sometimes our ability to learn improves as we age when we put our minds to it.

I have never felt strong physically. My body always feels like it is against me. I am not a very athletic person, nor a very competitive person. I have asthma and allergies, gastrointestinal problems, hearing loss, and one leg that is a bit shorter than the other. I often feel that when I set a physical goal (I have now run three half marathons and a ten-miler, none of which seemed easy) that something invariably happens with my body to keep me from being successful (or what I have defined as successful in my own mind). One of the great lessons in life that I continue to learn is that success in my mind may not be the same as success in God's mind. I have learned that my physical strength is to never give up. Each day is an opportunity for me to strengthen my body in some way.

With Christ Walk, my goal for you is to set mind, body, and spirit goals that will help you focus on God. Take care of the temple (the body) that God has given us for the Christ spark in us all. We are all different. We are all different shapes and sizes and all different levels of health, wellness, and physical capability, but we all have a bit of Christ within us. Therefore we should take care of the temple that God has given us. A healthy body can do more for others and share the Christ love within us in whatever capacity we are called to serve.

Finally, these are my thoughts, feelings, beliefs and experiences. I will use a lot of "I" statements, since my experiences have shaped my theological beliefs on the topic of health and wellness. If these thoughts and feelings and beliefs do not resonate with your own experience, that is okay. All of our experiences collectively are shaping the Christian community's testament to God in the world. It is all good when it is done for the love of Christ. I hope that these meditations help you along on your journey. I hope you feel free to make it your own so that it works within your own set of thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and experiences. It is all good in the Spirit of God.

So, through strong minds, strong bodies, and strong spirits, we can walk with Christ all the days of our lives. Join me over the next forty days on your personal Christ Walk experience and see yourself transformed.

My physical goal for Christ Walk the next forty days is:

My spiritual goal for Christ Walk the next forty days is:

My mental goal for Christ Walk the next forty days is:
