



## COME, WALK ALONGSIDE US ON THE JOURNEY

**D**ust whirled up at each step as the two men trudged heavily along the path. The sun was making its descent, and they still had a long way to go. They barely noticed. Their minds were full of what they had experienced during the last few days. Occasionally, one would say, "And could you believe what you heard this morning?" And then the other, after several more steps, "I just don't understand. What was any of this about?"

They had just lost a great friend, perhaps the greatest friend they had ever had. He had seemed so full of promise and possibility. Each had imagined himself going through the rest of his life with this man by his side. A future they thought comfortably in their possession had suddenly evaporated when their friend died. No, when he was killed. Cruelly, publicly. Treated as a joke! It was humiliating, confusing, unbelievable.

Yes, "unbelievable" was the word. Because just that morning, one of their friends who had gone to the gravesite to mourn came running back to the larger group to tell them the body was gone! No one could believe it. Others ran to see for themselves. Many others stayed behind speculating: grave robbers? a political ploy? What could any of this mean?

So distracted were they by their thoughts that it took a moment for them to notice that another person was walking alongside them on their journey. They did not recognize him or know who he was.



**H**ow often in our lives do we stumble along confused, scared, worried, unsure of anything – even our next step – never realizing that we do not walk alone. That in step with us, walking alongside, is our Saviour and our Lord. As he did on the road to Emmaus that Cleopas and his friend traveled, Jesus asks us, "Why are you so sad? What has happened?"

The real question Jesus asks us is, "Do you not know that I am here?" If we do, how then can the circumstances of life so overwhelm us? We are not alone; we never will be again.

Once we understand that Jesus is our constant companion, there awakens in us a peace and assurance we have never experienced. Cleopas and his friend say that Jesus' explanation of the scriptures "burned within their hearts," as though falling newly upon their ears and spirits. Being in the presence of Jesus, the Risen Lord, transforms us, and in our response of gratitude, we become servants willing to give ourselves away in God's service.

This is how we love one another. In gratitude to God, we long to reach out and bring another into this holy fellowship. This love is expressed in the pews of our churches, but also in the alleys behind our churches; in our fellowship halls but also in the urban soup kitchens that feed the hungry.

The one who walks beside us on this journey of life may not be one we recognize or know. He or she may be very different from us. Ragged and dirty, of a different colored skin or different culture, female or male, adult or child, physically weak, mentally unstable, scared, hurt, lost. But look into the eyes of this one in our midst. Look deeply enough, and you may see yourself. Look more deeply, and you will see Christ.

## INTRODUCTION TO WALKING ALONGSIDE

*"It's such a caring congregation."*

*"They're so ready to help one another in times of need."*

*"I've never felt so welcomed and cared for."*

These are the comments all church leaders hope to hear from new members or visitors, and certainly this kind of care for one another is a primary component of what church means to most people.

As Christians we are familiar with the Greatest Commandment found in Matthew 22:37 to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." Too many of us spend a lifetime focusing on this commandment but forgetting that Jesus had more to say: "And the second [commandment] is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matt. 22:39; NIV).

Often understaffed and overwhelmed by the needs of our current members, most churches do well just to make the hospital visits and the casseroles for those whom we know. Our "neighbors," though, are all around us, not just in our pews.

The Walking Alongside curriculum is designed to help you individually and as a church think about these questions:

- Who is my neighbor?
- What is my responsibility toward my neighbor?
- What is my church's responsibility?
- How have others responded and what does that teach us?
- What do scriptures tell me about my neighbor and what my response should be?
- How does that affect me? What can I do?
- What can my church do?

One thing is clear throughout these studies: Caring for community is not optional. It is part of God's plan for how we serve and provide in community, but also for how we become more Christlike. Being obedient to the second commandment helps us mature in the first. We care for others out of gratitude and love for the Creator of us all – and in so doing, we all travel a bit farther along the path toward our Lord and Savior.

Join us on the journey.



*Do all the good you can,  
in all the means you can,  
in all the ways you can,  
in all the places you can,  
at all the times you can,  
to all the people you can,  
as long as you ever can.*

*– John Wesley*





## WALKING ALONGSIDE RESOURCES

No one begins a journey without packing the supplies and equipment that will be needed for the path before them. The Walking Alongside curriculum is part of a “backpack” of resources available to congregations as they seek to begin, strengthen and sustain community ministries. A list of these resources can be found at [www.baylor.edu/social\\_work/ccm](http://www.baylor.edu/social_work/ccm).

This study guide provides the following materials for Sunday School classes, small groups, church staff development, youth retreats, or individual instruction:

- “Legacies of Care” – a six-part study of systems of care in ancient and contemporary history and how these practices influence our choices today.
- Leader’s instructions (this page)
- Reproducible Teaching Leaflets

Other study series in the Walking Alongside curriculum include:

- Biblical Foundations for Caring
- Understanding Poverty

Plus SUSTAIN!, a separate unit to help congregations assess, design, implement and evaluate community ministries.

### LEADER’S INSTRUCTIONS

The lessons are self-explanatory – easy to use for the beginner or long-time teacher. Several reproducible Teaching Leaflets are included and are referenced in the studies. These provide additional history and context for teacher preparation, class distribution or individual study.

A variety of Bible translations are cited to offer additional depth to the study. Prayers are provided, but we encourage leaders to let the Spirit guide them in these prayer times.

» In each lesson, you will find arrows to guide you to specific opportunities to reflect individually or engage as a group on materials presented. These include weekly “challenges” for participants that include options to appeal to different learning styles.



Footprints will highlight quotations from ancient and contemporary theologians to remind us that others have taken this journey and offer us much wisdom.

Lessons include a “Context for today,” which we believe will help individuals engage personally as they “walk a mile in the shoes of another.”

To further inform your study and to build upon it, additional resources, links to existing community ministry projects, other teaching materials, congregational and community assessment tools, and much more is available at the Walking Alongside Web site at [www.baylor.edu/social\\_work/ccm](http://www.baylor.edu/social_work/ccm).