

The Walk to Emmaus

The Road to Spiritual Health

(Written by a Pilgrim from Coastal Georgia Walk to Emmaus #3)

If someone were to ask you to invest three days that would change your life for the better...forever...would you take them up on it? If you could experience a renewal that would form “the greatest weekend of my life”, would you be interested?

Maybe you should take a Walk to Emmaus.

We spend a great deal of time and money working on our physical health, either maintaining it or attempting to regain it. Our spiritual nature, although invisible, is just as much a part of our make up as our physical nature and also needs work to be maintained, or in many cases, to be restored.

The Walk to Emmaus--spiritual exercise for spiritual health.

The first walk to Emmaus took place a couple of thousand years ago. Two “pilgrims” were walking a seven mile stretch of road from Jerusalem to a village called Emmaus when a stranger appeared and inquired as to what they were discussing. They reviewed the events of the past days: a prophet, Jesus of Nazareth, was crucified unjustly by the Roman government and was laid in a tomb three days before. They had thought him to be the redeemer of Israel. However, now that he was dead, all hope was lost. Suddenly they realized they were being visited by the risen Christ. After he was gone they said, “Did not our heart burn within us while He talked to us on the road?”

Ready for some heart burn of your own? Maybe you should take a walk to Emmaus.

That account of the first Walk to Emmaus was recorded by an ancient physician named Luke. (The Gospel of Luke, Chapter 24, verses 13-35.) The story ends with the pilgrims exclaiming, “The Lord is risen indeed...” Their experience led them to move from seeing Jesus as a mere prophet to being the risen Lord. Perhaps you would benefit from such a transforming experience and energized spiritual vision. Maybe you really should take a walk to Emmaus.

A Walk to Emmaus occurs twice each year; once in the fall and once in the spring. A “set of walks” is actually two weeks; men the first week, women the second week. Thirty six “pilgrims” go on each walk. A team of volunteers “work the walk”, many never being seen by the pilgrims. All team members serve in ways that bring flesh and blood to unconditional love...lavish love...unexplainable love. It is Christ showing up through obedient servants and changing lives, many which may at first not even recognize His presence.

This “agape” love, or unconditional, “you first, me second” kind of love, is what makes the Walk to Emmaus so unique. Acts of agape love abound during the days and nights that make up the journey. From people praying one hour each of the 72 hours that make up the Walk to surprises that apparently appear from nowhere, pilgrims feel loving arms around them that can’t be described any way short of the loving arms of Christ hugging them to His chest through the people who are there to so unselfishly serve.

The Walk To Emmaus is a product of The Upper Room, an agency of the United Methodist Church located in Nashville, TN. However, people from many denominations go on each walk. The Walk to Emmaus is ecumenical, or nondenominational. The essentials of the Christian faith are celebrated with an accent on those features that Christians have traditionally held in common. Similar the Cursillo movement within the Roman Catholic and Episcopalian churches which originated in Spain, the Walk to Emmaus is for the intended purpose of “the development of Christian disciples and leaders.” Since the late 1980’s the Walk to Emmaus has been occurring in Southeast Georgia, just one part of a world-wide movement.

The Walk includes fifteen talks spaced throughout the schedule. Each is followed by table discussions to unpack the deeper meaning of the truths within the message. Between messages a number of special events take place, the impact of each increasing as the days progress. These “surprises” have sometimes caused “Emmaus” to be termed a secret society. There is great emphasis placed to the contrary during the experience. The surprises could be likened to Christmas presents, each wrapped in secrecy until the exciting big day. Love wraps the gift. It would be uninspiring to simply have the gift delivered unwrapped or to have someone spoil it by telling you what was inside. The same concept applies to the surprises on the Walk to Emmaus. Love keeps the surprises secret so each pilgrim can unwrap his or her own gift with the excitement of a child on Christmas morning.

The Walk to Emmaus is not just for lay people, or non-clergy. Pastors benefit greatly from the experience, and their enrichment benefits their ministry in both the near term and long term. One such pastor who recently attended a Walk To Emmaus is Brooks Cail, pastor at The First Baptist Church of the Islands. His account of his experience: “For a long time I’ve preached and taught about God’s grace and how much He loves me. I came to a fresh realization that God doesn’t only love me, but He enjoys my relationship with Him and wants me to do the same. I knew that, of course, but during my ‘Walk’ I came to realize this truth in a refreshing and more intense way. It breathed added life into other relationships; most importantly with my wife and family but also with my church family.”

The three days of the “Walk” are followed by each pilgrim’s “Fourth Day”, which is actually the rest of his or her life. The Emmaus Community is just that—a community of people who have been on an incredible journey together. Monthly gatherings provide energizing fellowship through a covered dish dinner, singing, and a Fourth Day Talk

which outlines one pilgrim's experiences since his or her walk. Weekly "Reunion Groups" provide accountability and support as pilgrims continue to seek a more obedient walk with Christ; not on a road to Emmaus, but the road of life.

Future walks are run totally by volunteers who have come through their own Emmaus experience. As many as fifty to sixty workers are needed to carry out all the tasks that make the journey one that each pilgrim will never forget. Through a series of team meetings and an overnight trial run, team members become a close-knit family. In fact, many team members report that the blessing of working on a Walk exceeded the blessings they received on their original Walk.

Someone once asked a former pilgrim what he has received after many years of involvement with the Emmaus movement. The answer, without hesitation, was the incredible blessing of the wonderful group of people he had come to know and love that he would have never met any other way. He said his church is his Christian family, but Emmaus has expanded that family beyond church walls. Sometimes at a gathering one can simply look at the joyful faces and reminisce over the incredible experiences that have been shared with individuals in the crowd. Precious memories, for sure, but just as the past has been a blessing, the future is sure to hold just as much promise.

Are you ready for your own Walk to Emmaus?

New pilgrims are sponsored by someone who has already attended a Walk and has spent time in prayer regarding sponsorship of a specific individual. If you don't know anyone who has attended a walk, go to the Emmaus web site at www.segaeammaus.org. You will find information about upcoming walks, and a "Leadership" menu will give e-mail and phone numbers for members of the Board of Directors. One of them can help you find the information you need. Asking around your church will likely yield someone who has been on a Walk.

Are you ready for a life change? Get started on your Walk to Emmaus.

There's a lyric that is sung, "There's a new day coming, it's coming 'round the bend..." To get around the bend, you have to walk. What you see when you get there cannot be described. Anyone trying to tangibly describe their Walk to Emmaus will find their most stilted words will fall short. You just have to come see for yourself. Once you see for yourself, you'll spend the rest of your life with your eyes on others. You'll love with a new, "agape" love. It's just around the bend.