

**12@12**  
**The Value of Walking**  
**October 30, 2014**

Since 12@12 started I have addressed some fairly substantial topics. I have talked about such ideas as the importance of receiving feedback, the value of humility and even love in the workplace. I have discussed the marks of a healthy organization and how we might make the decisions we need to make. Today, however, I am going to talk about something that at least at first will seem a good bit more mundane. I am going to talk to you about walking. Just plain old walking. And I'd like to talk about three different aspects of walking.

Walking and Health

First, I'd like to talk about the simple health benefits of walking. Walking does not necessarily accrue more health benefits than other forms of exercise and in some cases less, but when we consider that it is the one form of exercise that most people are capable of, it becomes an important source of maintaining health. Some of the benefits of walking 30 minutes a day as reported by the American Heart Association are: the reduction of the risk of coronary heart disease (America's number one killer), improvement in blood pressure and blood sugar levels, lowering of the risk of osteoporosis, Type 2 diabetes, and high cholesterol. There is even evidence that walking can reduce the chance of breast and colon cancer.<sup>1</sup> That's all pretty good stuff from something as simple as walking.

Over the years, however, Americans have come to walk less and less. A study of Amish, shows that Amish men walk an average of 18,000 steps a day and Amish women about 14,000 steps per day. Such a study probably gives us our best understanding of how much we used to walk as Americans. Today, however, the average American man or woman only walks about 5,000 to 6,000 steps per day.<sup>2</sup> Obviously that's quite a lot less. In my neighborhood, we do not have individual mailboxes at each house. Every thirty or so houses share a bank of mailboxes. This, of course, calls for people to walk more than just out the front door to get their mail. Now, what surprises me is the percentage of people who do not walk to get their mail. They drive to the mailbox. In fact, I am quite sure that there are more people who drive than walk the 50 -200 yards to get their mail. If you have similar mailboxes in your neighborhood

and you drive to get your email, I am not trying to shame you today, but only point out an instance of how we have eliminated walking from our lives and with it the health benefits. These health benefits don't just impact the mechanics or chemistry of what goes on inside your body, they in many cases impact your willingness to engage in life. I exercise quite regularly. And a large reason I do it is because I don't want to become a prisoner of my own body. I don't want to be someone who makes decisions throughout my day not to do this or that simply because I don't want to get out of my chair. When we don't exercise, when we don't walk, it is so easy to slide into that trap—a trap which keeps us from enjoying and engaging life.

### Walking and Work

Now, that is enough on the health benefits of walking. Let me now talk about the work benefits of walking. And my guess is that what I will share with you in this regard will be considerably more novel. In the workplace, at least two types of thinking are necessary. The first is focused thinking. This is the thinking that is required to write a technical proposal or run certain kinds of calculations. But there is a second kind of thinking that is necessary as well. It is creative thinking. It is the ability to think of solutions, to make connections between data points, or to develop new analogies that better express a concept or idea. I bring up the second type of thinking, because it is aided considerably by walking. Earlier this year, a study completed by researchers at Stanford University indicated that this kind of creativity increases by an average of 60 percent while someone is walking or shortly thereafter. This creativity does not require long walking sessions. The walking sessions in this study only ranged from five to sixteen minutes, and it did not matter if a person walked on a treadmill facing a wall or outside in the open. In either case, creativity went up markedly. The same study showed no improvement in focused thinking; in fact people performed slightly less on focused thinking tasks when walking,<sup>3</sup> but what this says is that when you get stuck on something and need to think creatively you need to get out of your chair and take a short walk.

I am known as the “stealth pastor” here at BridgePoint, at least among the staff. I am called that because I will be in my office one minute and then suddenly I am gone. This has been my habit for years. When I need to think creatively I leave my office and walk down the hall. I cannot tell you how many times I have come up with a solution by the time I get to

other end of the building and walk around a room for a couple of minutes. Once I find the solution, I then come back to my office and work out the details of whatever idea came to my mind by writing a proposal or developing a lesson or whatever the case might be. I never recognized that my habit isn't just idiosyncratic; it is the way our bodies seem to work. When we need to be creative we need to get up and take a walk, and when we need to focus we need to sit still.

And creativity isn't the only benefit to walking at work, workers also report that when they exercise in some manner or another at work, they manage their time more effectively, they are more productive, and they have smoother interactions with their colleagues.<sup>4</sup> In others words, while we often say that work doesn't allow us time to exercise, it might be more true to say that we can't afford not to exercise if we are going to get done what we need to get done at work.

### "Walking" and Life

There is one more aspect of walking that I want to talk about today. And it has not to do with the physical act of walking, but rather the metaphorical act of walking. As you know, I am a pastor at this church, a church whose full name is BridgePoint Bible Church. It would not be a surprise to you then that I study and teach about the Bible on a very regular basis. And in the Bible one finds much about the manner in which a person is to live in a proper way before God and before people. The teaching of the Bible along these lines often uses metaphors in order for us to grasp what is being communicated. For example, it calls Jesus a shepherd and those who follow him his sheep. But when it comes to this whole notion of living right before God and men, one of its most frequent metaphors is that of walking. At times, it describes living right by calling us to "run" or even to "fly." But as I look at the occurrences of the different metaphors, I think I am right in saying that they are all eclipsed in number by the metaphor of walking.

I cannot help but think that the reason the authors of the Bible used this metaphor most frequently is because when it comes to life's bigger picture journey—the journey of meaning and peace and satisfaction and purpose--- it cannot be approached as a sprint or as a seasonal high. It needs to be approached as a steady walk—a day by day process of being about the right thing. I like in particular one verse recorded by a man named Micah and found in the Old Testament. Micah asked this

rhetorical question, “And what does the Lord require of you?” and then he answered the question, by writing, “To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God” (Micah 6:8). I can’t think of much better advice than that. Imagine a world in which people did just that. They acted justly. They handed out mercy. Day in and day out. And they did so because they humbly recognized their place in the world. It seems to me that taking that kind of path is the best walk any of us could go make.

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<sup>1</sup> American Heart Association, “The Benefits of Walking,”

[http://www.startwalkingnow.org/whystart\\_benefits\\_walking.jsp](http://www.startwalkingnow.org/whystart_benefits_walking.jsp)

<sup>2</sup> Tara Parker-Pope, “The Pedometer Test: Americans Take Fewer

Steps,” <http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/10/19/the-pedometer-test-americans-take-fewer-steps/>

<sup>3</sup> May Wong, “Stanford Study Find Walking Improves Creativity,”

<http://news.stanford.edu/news/2014/april/walking-vs-sitting-042414.html>

<sup>4</sup> Ron Friedman, “Regular Exercise Is Part of Your Job,”

<http://blogs.hbr.org/2014/10/regular-exercise-is-part-of-your-job/>