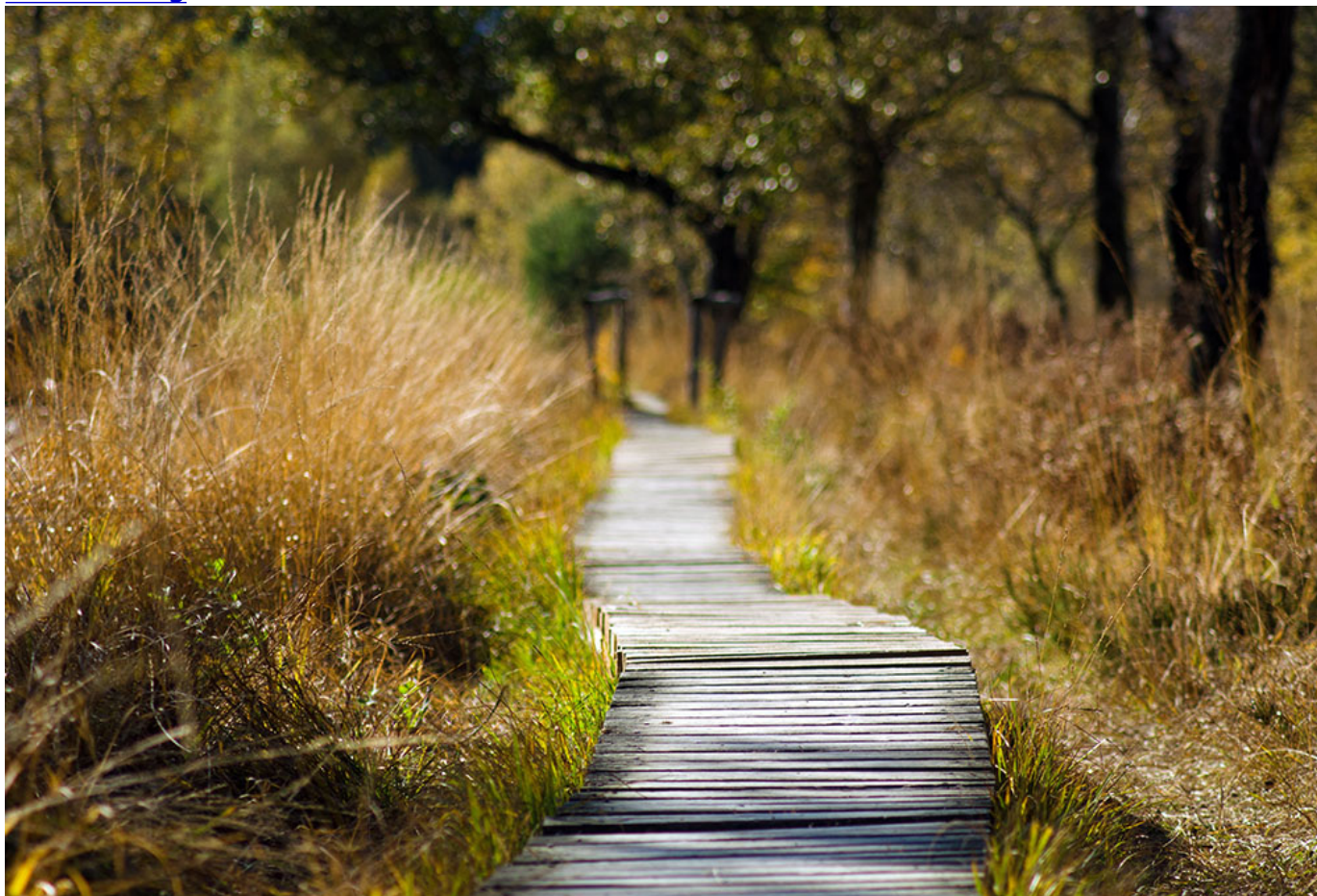


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On my morning walk, I see red-winged blackbirds, tri-petaled trillium and the Notre Dame crew boats threading their way up the St. Joseph River. My favorite podcast streams into my earbuds, but I can still hear the birdsong and cyclists' "On your

left!" as they zip past me on the paved river trail. The sun is shining, the air is cool and my steps are light and quick.

This morning walk, and the thousands preceding it — even in rain, sleet and snow — are the linchpin of my well-being.

It hasn't always been this way. A long-distance runner since childhood, I used to scoff at walking. It didn't seem like enough of a workout; it lacked efficiency; it was boring. Like many people, I took it for granted so much that I ignored its gifts. It was simply a way to get from there to here.

But four years ago, I sustained a running injury, and walking became my only option. Just walking. And gradually, it has come to feel as essential to me as water. Plain and simple.

I love it, depend upon it and am enlivened by it. No matter my mood, a good walk buoys my spirits, lessens my worries and often leads to new ideas for my work and my home life.

I don't need the reams of scientific research to verify that walking is good for me, but it's certainly out there: Walking just 10 minutes a day can lower blood pressure, alleviate anxiety and depression, and unlock the parts of our brain that house creativity and happiness.

As a beneficial practice, it's so obvious that it's forgettable unless we intentionally prioritize it. In fact, The New York Times' consumer health site, [Well](#), did just that, devoting its June newsletters to the joy of walking by selecting a theme for each week, offering specific activity ideas and sharing health expert advice.

As a health practice, walking may be timely and trendy, but some of its revelations are timeless. Some of the most pivotal moments in the Scriptures occur on a walk.

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Walking has spiritual benefits too. Just ask the millions of pilgrims who have traipsed hundreds of miles on the [Camino de Santiago](#), the ancient pilgrimage route across Spain. The Camino has experienced a surge in popularity in recent years, in part

because of the 2010 film "[The Way](#)," created by Emilio Estevez and starring his father, Martin Sheen. In May, Brat Pack actor Andrew McCarthy released his own memoir about walking the pilgrimage with his son: [Walking With Sam: A Father, a Son, and Five Hundred Miles Across Spain](#).

It's safe to say that, whether it's physical exercise or spiritual practice or perhaps a little bit of both, walking is having a moment.

As a health practice, walking may be timely and trendy, but some of its revelations are timeless.

Some of the most pivotal moments in the Scriptures occur on a walk. Jesus walks on the Sea of Galilee, first shocking his disciples and then assuaging their fears, and one of Jesus's early post-resurrection appearances occurs while walking the road to Emmaus.

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And in both the Old and New Testaments, symbolic language contrasts the spiritual paths of walking in darkness versus walking in light. A healthy walk is an occasion for soul seeing.

Some of my walks are solitary, and some are social. I disagree with C.S. Lewis, who wrote, "Walking and talking are two very great pleasures, but it is a mistake to combine them." (Oh, Mr. Lewis, how you missed out!) Some of my most treasured friendships have been cemented by a weekly Sunday morning walk in the neighborhood, with conversations ranging from casual chatter to book recommendations to serious social issues.

"Exploring the world is one the best ways of exploring the mind, and walking travels both terrains," writes Rebecca Solnit in her book [Wanderlust: A History of Walking](#). For me, the opportunity to explore both of these terrains simultaneously has been a tremendous gift and an animating force. Both physical terrains and mental terrains change with the seasons — the seasons of the year and the seasons of life. It's a blessing to experience these changes through walking.

I never would have guessed, when I involuntarily gave up running four years ago, that I would have so much to gain: exercise, mental clarity, creative insight, even a

bit of inner peace.

This summer on the St. Joseph River path, the air will grow still and muggy and the riverbanks will overflow with tangles of overgrown wildflowers. The crew boats will be stored on the boathouse racks until the college students return in the fall. Fishermen and kayakers will ply the river.

As usual, I'll lace up my shoes and go for a walk, maybe glancing a bit wistfully at the runners who speed by, but still thoroughly savoring the joy of a walk.