

# PrayerWalk

Becoming a Woman of Prayer, Strength & Discipline



Janet Holm McHenry

Excerpted from PrayerWalk by Janet Holm McHenry Copyright © 2011. Excerpted by permission of WaterBrook Press, a division of Random House, Inc. All rights reserved. No part of this excerpt may be reproduced or reprinted without permission in writing from the publisher.

# PrayerWalk

Becoming a Woman of Prayer, Strength & Discipline

Janet Holm McHenry



WATERBROOK  
P R E S S

PRAYERWALK  
PUBLISHED BY WATERBROOK PRESS  
12265 Oracle Boulevard, Suite 200  
Colorado Springs, Colorado 80921

Some of the stories in this book are composites of several different situations; details and names have been changed to protect identities.

Unless otherwise noted, scriptures are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®. NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked (msg) are taken from The Message. Copyright © by Eugene H. Peterson 1993, 1994, 1995. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group.

ISBN 978-1-57856-376-0

Copyright © 2001 by Janet Holm McHenry  
Thirty-Day PrayerWalk Challenge and the Epilogue copyright © 2011 by Janet Holm McHenry

Published in association with the literary agency of Janet Kobobel Grant, Books & Such,  
4788 Carissa Avenue, Santa Rosa, CA 95404.

The author invites you to write her in care of WaterBrook Press.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Published in the United States by WaterBrook Multnomah, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Random House Inc., New York.

Cover design and photography by Mark D. Ford

WATERBROOK and its deer colophon are registered trademarks of Random House Inc.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data  
McHenry, Janet Holm.

Prayerwalk : becoming a woman of prayer, strength, and discipline / Janet Holm McHenry.  
— 1<sup>st</sup> ed.

p. cm.

ISBN 1-57856-376-3

1. Christian women—Religious life. 2. Prayer—Christianity. 3. Walking—Religious aspects—Christianity. I. Title

BV4527 .M393 2001

00-043868

Printed in the United States of America  
2011

19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10

#### SPECIAL SALES

Most WaterBrook Multnomah books are available at special quantity discounts when purchased in bulk by corporations, organizations, and special-interest groups. Custom imprinting or excerpting can also be done to fit special needs. For information, please e-mail [SpecialMarkets@WaterBrookMultnomah.com](mailto:SpecialMarkets@WaterBrookMultnomah.com) or call 1-800-603-7051.

“To the only wise God be glory forever  
through Jesus Christ! Amen.”

Romans 16:27

---

Also to my earthly father, Robert Arthur Holm, 1923–1999,  
who loved to walk with me.

“I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which  
God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 3:14

# Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i> .....	xi
<i>Introduction</i> .....	1

## **PART 1**

### **BECOMING A WOMAN OF STRENGTH AND DISCIPLINE**

1. If I Can Do It, You Can Do It .....	5
2. Spiritual Endorphins .....	13
3. Making Time .....	25
4. Why Walk? .....	41
5. Reducing Aches and Pains .....	53
6. PrayerWalk Partners .....	69

## **PART 2**

### **BECOMING A WOMAN OF PRAYER**

7. Prayer Tips from My Personal Trainer .....	83
8. “Great Is Thy Faithfulness” .....	97
9. Take a Walk with Me .....	109
10. Eyes Wide Open .....	125
11. A Sacrifice of Tears .....	143
12. Faces of Answered Prayer .....	155

<i>Epilogue: Looking Back, Moving Forward</i> .....	169
<i>Study Guide</i> .....	177
<i>Resources on Walking</i> .....	193
<i>Thirty-Day PrayWalk Challenge</i> .....	195
<i>Appendix: How to Organize a Community PrayerWalk Event</i> .....	219
<i>Notes</i> .....	225

## Acknowledgments

Many people have encouraged and supported me in countless ways from the conception of *PrayerWalk* until its birth. I am so grateful. Many thanks go to:

My husband, Craig, who has always encouraged me to do all God has called me to do—even prayerwalking at 5:00 A.M.!

Our children—Rebekah, Justin, Joshua, and Bethany—who are all on their own walks with God.

My Prayer Partners and One Heart sisters in Christ—forty-some strong—as well as my church family, who prayed me through this book word by word.

My agent and friend, Janet Kobobel Grant, who gave me sweet encouragement at just the right times.

My editor, Liz Heaney, who provided invaluable, wise direction, and all the WaterBrook folks, who saw the vision for *PrayerWalk* and how it could change lives.

*Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep  
in step with the Spirit.*

GALATIANS 5:25

## Introduction

“You know I’m an ordinary Christian woman, God. But I’d like to become more disciplined, to have a consistent daily prayer time. I’d like to lose some weight and to be a little more fit. And...and...oh, this sounds crazy after everything I’ve just said, but I’d like to be content with my life.”

This was my prayer two years ago. All of those requests and more have been realized in my life, all because of one thing: prayer-walking. Virtually overnight I changed from a woman who couldn’t get out of bed to—Okay, I’m going to be brutally honest with you, dear reader. I am *still* an ordinary Christian woman. I probably look like the person in your high school class who was voted Most Likely to Become Your Kids’ English Teacher, thirty years later. That’s because that’s exactly who I am! Let’s just say you won’t find my face and body on the cover of an exercise video. But God has truly changed me, and I am convinced it’s because I now spend an hour or more five days a week praying as I walk. I call it prayerwalking—spending time with God in adoration and intercession as I walk the streets and highways of my community.

Stop right now! I know what you’re thinking: *I don’t have a free hour for prayer and exercise.* Hey, I don’t either. It’s true. If you were to examine my life, you’d see I don’t have the time. I work full-time—teaching English, no less, which most secondary teachers agree is the most demanding position because of the mountains of writing assignments to grade. Craig and I have four children, with



one still young enough to need Mommy's nearly constant attention. All have been active in sports, lessons, and other activities. I have a part-time business as a writer, I teach Sunday school, and I have very little housekeeping help. But I am *making* time for prayerwalking—an hour or more daily—because God has used it to transform me. I wrote this book to tell you, from my heart, how and why I started prayerwalking and the reasons I believe that if you make time for prayerwalking, God will change you as well.

Besides reading my personal story, you'll learn how you can pray more like Christ—our Personal Trainer in prayerwalking—and how prayerwalking can energize your prayer life. Prayerwalking has changed how I view my time and priorities, and I'll help you find time in your life for this new discipline. I'll also show you why walking while you pray is a good idea, and I'll provide a wealth of walking tips that can help prevent soreness before you head off on your own.

Join me as I share my story.

Part 1

# Becoming a Woman of Strength and Discipline

# If I Can Do It, You Can Do It

Oh, that *d* word: *discipline*. I've never liked it, personally. We have met on occasion—with diets, short runs on exercise programs, and a prayer journal attempt or two. But life interfered with our acquaintance, and routines always fell by the wayside. Discipline implied torture, restriction, sameness. I mean, remember piano scales? Up and down, up and down. You never got anywhere, it appeared to me. Discipline simply stifled my spontaneity. Why, if I were committed to various routines of discipline, I couldn't visit a friend or take my daughter shopping or watch the ducks flying the wrong way.

## I Was a Mess

Just two years ago I was falling apart. I bit my fingernails to their nubs with worry about finances (we had two kids in college). My weight was taxing my back, and my knees were giving way as I walked down stairs. I was force-feeding my soul with a few daily devotionals, but my prayer life was about zilch. Each night I gulped down a couple of St. John's Wort tablets to combat depression. I ate

too much, I was tired all the time, and I felt as if I were a few days behind on every list of my life—from my load of essays at school to my laundry at home. I was an undisciplined mess.

I knew what I needed. I needed to exercise to get my strength back again. Could I exercise in the morning? I didn't really have time—I usually shut off the alarm around six each morning, exhausted, and turned over for an extra half-hour of rest, then rushed through my morning routine and headed to school an hour later. How could I give up even more sleep for exercise? With kids' sports schedules and lessons, faculty meetings, and few consistent baby-sitters, regular exercise after I taught school all day was impossible. There had been spells in my life when I was more active—aerobics and weightlifting classes, swimming laps at the pool. But classes always end, and our community pool is only open during the summer months. Besides, I didn't want to leave my kids once I was home from work.

I also needed to pray—at length—to give over the worries of my life to God. A book I read many years ago that still pierces me is *Could You Not Tarry One Hour?* by Larry Lea. Tarry an *hour*? It seemed like a Grand Canyon leap of time in my going-going-gone schedule. However, seeking God, interceding for others, and staying in his presence were becoming the deepest desires of my heart. I truly wanted to strengthen my relationship with the Lord of the universe by spending more alone time with him—without the phone ringing, without the kids interrupting, without the washing machine calling my name.

I've read over thirty books on prayer. Every single one recom-

mends praying in the early morning hours. I had tried that over the years—getting up earlier than the family and creating my own prayer closet of sorts. Minutes into the routine, my head was usually flopping. You have probably guessed that I'm not a morning person. Actually, I'm not a night person either. I tell my high school students that most days I have one good hour—lunch hour (which is really only forty minutes for me)—and that afterward I'm ready for a nap. It's true!

However, I did stick to an early morning routine once. I thought of praying while I exercised, and for several months I propped my Bible on my NordicTrack and prayed through the Bible in the wee hours. That actually worked until my knees began to trouble me. Then the routine and I went our separate ways. My NordicTrack is now a great clothesline and keeps watch (wash?) in my office over my usually messy desk.

## Two in One

I needed a workable plan, a resolution. I believe in New Year's resolutions, but my new year starts in September, when I return to teaching. All summer long I sleep a little later and mosey through my household chores and writing tasks. It's a leisurely pace. When school starts, I begin living by ringing bells again, so it makes sense to make my resolutions then.

When Labor Day passed that year, I felt pulled to become the woman of discipline I had never been. My past history could not have been a solid résumé for my success: Every day of my life

seemingly had begun a new diet or a new exercise routine or a new prayer practice. Somehow my resolve that Sunday night in September felt different. I would do it this time. I would get up an hour earlier and tarry with God. Well, maybe *tarry* was not quite the right word because I had decided to spend my hour prayer-walking. I would walk for an hour, praying at the same time—meeting two sincere desires of my heart with one activity.

I loved the idea of doing two things at once. As a working mom, I always make multitasking a personal objective. Every morning I read the newspaper literally upside down as I lean over and blow dry my hair. I open my mail on the way home from the post office. I grade papers while listening to my daughter read at night. Although I may not be a model of organization, I love efficiency! Prayerwalking seemed a perfect solution to the two largest missing links in my life.

I had never before considered walking alone in the dark, early morning hours. The problem isn't that it's unsafe. In our town of just over a thousand people in a mountain valley in California, many not only leave their homes unlocked but keep their car keys in their ignitions. No, I'd not considered walking on Main Street because it didn't have sidewalks and because huge logging trucks sweep through on their way to the lumber mill. However, a few days before I made my resolution, brand-new sidewalks sculpted of brick and cement and brand-new lighting made our few blocks of downtown look like a fairy tale town. Elsewhere people walk in their local mall before opening hours. We have no mall in our town, but I decided that our half-dozen blocks of twinkly-lit Main Street would be my mall—my prayerwalking course.

## Beating “The List”

At 5:20 the next morning I woke up moments before the alarm, turned it off, and rolled over. The List began speaking to me. “You’re too tired; give yourself a few more minutes in bed.” “It’s probably too cold; why don’t you walk this afternoon when the sun is out?” “Remember all those dogs? They’re waiting for you!” “Bogeymen hide in the bushes!” “Your knee hurts; you’d better wait until you’re in better shape.” The List battered me for a few minutes until I remembered: I had not only made a physical-fitness resolution; I had also made a spiritual-fitness resolution.

Right then I realized that discipline involved another *d* word: *decision*. I could decide to be disciplined. I soon discovered that the decision to become disciplined had to be made daily (yet another *d* word.). Every single day I prayerwalked would be another decision, another step, toward discipline. That first day was no easier, no harder than any other. It was just a decision: Would I be a disciplined woman, for my own benefit, for the benefit of my family, and for the glory of God? I could not fix the physical and emotional pains of my life, but I could decide to meet God each morning while I walked.

After all, he wanted to be my Personal Trainer for becoming a woman of prayer, strength, and discipline. Some people have walking buddies. Others, like Oprah, pay someone to cheer them through a workout. I knew that in this new calling, prayerwalking, the Lord would be waiting at 5:30 on the front steps of my house, ready to hear my praise and petitions and to guide my steps—not only for the next hour but for the whole day ahead. How could I

stay in bed when God was waiting for me? I got up! The first victory was won!

During my first months of prayerwalking I was too afraid I'd wimp out and jump back into bed if I undressed, so I pulled on lined nylon pants and a heavy sweatshirt right over my pajamas. As it grew colder, I added a coat, a double-layered knit hat, a woolen scarf, and gloves. Frost is our mountain manna about nine months of the year, and I've never liked being cold. I look pretty funny when I walk, but it's no fashion show at that hour, and I stay warm. Yes, it took a friend of mine several months to realize it was *I* walking early in the morning—he thought I was a guy with all the heavy clothes on.

I started out slowly. Although my enthusiasm was high, I knew that if I overdid my first days, I could risk injury and discouragement. I strolled down Main Street, then picked up the pace a bit. That first day I walked a mile and a half in a half-hour. I increased the distance over the next weeks until I was consistently walking three miles in an hour. (Now I walk five miles in less than an hour and a half—fives times a week.)

## Changed!

I had thought that I'd be alone with God that early morning hour. At first I devoted the entire hour to prayers for my husband, Craig, and for our four children, Rebekah and Justin, both away at college, and Joshua and Bethany, who are still at home. But one morning a couple of weeks into my prayerwalking changed all that. As I approached Toddler Towers, our local day-care center, two cars



drove up from opposite directions and parked, almost in sync. In one I recognized my friend Cheryl, ready to open the home-away-from-home for a couple dozen little ones. Emerging from the other, a young father swept up his curly-haired little girl, still in jammies and holding her blankie, and handed his sleepy package to Cheryl. I was okay until the bundle said, “Bye, Daddy. Love you.” When I heard those words, the immenseness of my prayer job hit me. My prayerwalk was not just for my family and myself, but also for the many others I would encounter on Main Street. I began to cry—*bawl* is a better word. I cried and prayed for all the little children and their mommies and daddies, as well as the day-care workers who would mother and teach the children that day.

On subsequent days my Personal Trainer opened my eyes to other needs along my path, and I added new prayers. As I passed my church, just a half-block off Main Street, I prayed for our board members, who were desperately seeking direction. I prayed for the other two churches in town, which had their own struggles. I prayed for the owners of the businesses I passed each day, the principals and teachers at our three schools, the commuters leaving early for hour-away Reno, and the men heading for the day shift at the lumber mill. I added the city council members and the county supervisors and other government workers. Soon I discovered a sober truth: I didn’t have enough time to pray for all the needs.

The experience was not only sobering but had another effect.

One morning about two months after I began prayerwalking, my younger son, Joshua, then thirteen, came into the kitchen and said, “What are you doing, Mom?”

I looked down at the counter and back at him. Maybe he didn't have his contacts in. "Making peanut butter sandwiches?"

"No, Mom," he said accusingly, "you were *singing*." He walked away, shaking his head.

He was right. I *was* singing. I, the one whose usual morning words were only *Get up...I said get up...Get up or you'll be late*—and other variations on the same theme—was singing. God had been filling my soul while I prayerwalked, and I couldn't hold it in anymore. It occurred to me that my entire countenance—in fact, my entire outlook on life—had changed. Prayerwalking an hour each weekday had transformed my life—in just a couple of short months.

On an ordinary morning I made the decision to prayerwalk. On an ordinary morning you could do the same and thus change your life in similarly dramatic ways. Walk with me. Walk with me over city streets, small town paths, and country roads. Let me show you how one daily decision can make a difference for our world. Walk with me through joys and sorrows, through hopes and fears, through laughter and tears. Let me show you how talking with God each day will be better than extra sleep. Decide to seek a healthier lifestyle, and let me prove that "discipline" can actually feel good. Join me and our Personal Trainer...and prayerwalk your way to physical and spiritual strength.

## Spiritual Endorphins

For most of my Christian life I thought there was something deeply wrong with me. I was raised in a Christian, churchgoing home and made a commitment to follow God when I was in college. Even so, I have lived almost all of my adult life under a cloud of depression. I never understood lines from the Bible such as “the joy of the LORD is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10) because I had never experienced joy. I had had fleeting moments of fun, happiness, or satisfaction, but I was not filled with joy.

I was a critical person. That made me a good editor—nitpicking all the grammatical errors when I worked for a newspaper. That also makes me a good English teacher—helping students go from writing a disorganized mess to something that makes sense. But my critical nature made me negative with my children, critical of their grades and their sports achievements. I always felt they could have tried harder. I nearly lost the love of my two oldest children, Rebekah and Justin, because of my critical eye and demanding nature. I was even more critical of myself. My best efforts at mothering and teaching lived under my own fault-finding scrutiny. I was a pusher, not a pray-er; I would force issues rather than wait for

God to resolve them. I know now this was due to my need to control; when you pray, you give over control to God and trust him for the results.

When Craig and I built our home, I wanted to fill it with pretty things. When the house was filled, I was ready to build a bigger and better home so I'd have space to get all the other things I decided I needed. I was never satisfied.

When I was pregnant with Joshua, our third child, I remember feeling particularly lonely. I longed for a phone call from a friend, but it seemed I had to initiate all contact with others. When I brought this up to a friend and asked her why she hadn't called, she told me, "Well, I guess I have been avoiding you because you're just kind of depressing to be with." Ouch!

It was true. Sometimes sadness would simply envelop me for no reason. I cried in closets. I drove away to nowhere in tears. I sat on my bathroom floor in the middle of the night, trying to rock away a very real hurt in my chest.

As a teacher I have referred for counseling countless students who have displayed symptoms such as mine, but I never sought help for myself. I should have, but I didn't. I was afraid that others would think I wasn't capable of teaching my friends' children or of leading activities at church. Perhaps publications wouldn't want to print my byline because they would see me as "unfit."

It's hard to write this, but I can't tell you how many times over the years I have wished that I were dead. I should have bought stock in a tissue company years ago for all the boxes I have emptied wiping away my tears. Despite my despair, I knew I would never put an end to my life. I have personally lived through the suicide of

six people—one of my best high school friends, a friend from a church couples' group, two fathers of my students, two youth in our church who were children of our friends. I would not do that to my family. But the pain of living was sometimes overwhelming.

## The Cloud Vanishes

The miracle of my life is that three months after I began prayer-walking, my depression was gone, and it has not returned. I recounted in the first chapter about the moment I realized that—when my son found me singing, in the *morning* for goodness' sake. Although I am still groggy when I awaken, I get up now with a sense of expectancy. *What will you do today, Lord?* I wonder. *What crazy thing will some student say? What delightful drawing or observation will Bethany bring home from school? How will I live out my faith in my public school in such a way that my life makes a difference to someone?*

I notice things, too, now—details I missed before: the patterned pinpricks of light in the dark sky above our mountains, the color changes of the sky in the morning (I love how the black changes to blue so gradually), the way autumn smells sweet like something fermenting. And sounds! Our town's aspens resemble a baby rattle in a soft wind. Have you ever noticed how water doesn't slide silently over rocks but rushes and slurps? I love walking on the bridge over the creek and hearing the water greet me each morning. At rare times the creek freezes over, but there's still a muffled whisper calling me from underneath the ice as I pass by. It's such a beautiful world.

Prayerwalking has changed my outlook on life. In years past, my husband, Craig, was the positive one of the two of us. When life threw mud, he'd make mud pies. I'd whine and complain and hold grudges, never getting over the mess. It's different now. Instead of obsessing, I tell myself, "Get over it!" Instead of despairing when I am shown the back side of the tapestry of life, I now trust that eventually I will see the beautiful side that God has woven.

When my students found out I was writing a book, they wanted to know the title. I told them about *PrayerWalk*, and after they worked through their shock that their middle-aged English teacher was writing a book related to exercise, they also wanted to know why I prayerwalked. I told them, "Hey, it's cheap therapy." You might laugh too, but think about it—it is!

Not only was I freed from depression, I was freed from fear as well.

## Good-bye, Fear

When I started prayerwalking, my oldest two kids were both planted across the state in college. Rebekah was a sophomore at Biola University in LaMirada, which is smack in the middle of the Los Angeles area's mass of asphalt. Justin was starting at Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo, which ordinarily is a lovely community but at that time was plagued by several unsolved murders of young people. Much of my intercession time as I began prayerwalking revolved around their safety.

I suppose all mothers worry some. Perhaps it's in our genetic

makeup. But my fears were beyond normal. When Craig and I would drive over winding roads, I was sure we'd plummet down mountainsides. I pictured bridges collapsing as we crossed. In the early years of our marriage, we lived in northeastern Kansas. For every bend of the road I had mapped out a refuge in case a tornado swept over that area of the Flint Hills. That may not seem too weird, but until recently I did the same here in our mountain valley, and there's no way a tornado would form here.

Prayerwalking challenged my fears. First, I was choosing to walk in the dark. Second, I don't like strange dogs. I've been attacked three times and bitten twice in our town. Third, we live in a rural area where wildlife often decides to penetrate our residential borders. Bears, mountain lions, coyotes, rattlesnakes, and other critters are spotted frequently here. (Remind me to tell you about the mountain lion near miss.) Oh, yes, skunks are around our house all the time.

For months I had to pray against the spirit of fear. When my heart would pound not from exercise but from fear, I would speak aloud something like this: "Fear, I speak to you in the name and in the authority of Jesus Christ. I am a child of the Most High God. In the name of Christ, who has conquered death, I tell you to leave me alone and to go to the place reserved for you." I would then immediately ask the Holy Spirit to fill me and protect me. In every single instance I experienced immediate peace and continued my prayerwalk.

Eventually, after about six months, I realized I was not experiencing fear in my life anymore. It was right after my dad died. In fact, losing my dad was one of my greatest fears. I couldn't imagine

life without him. Who would give me daddy hugs and say, “I love you, darling”? Who would I be without a father?

Less than five months after Dad’s diagnosis of Lou Gehrig’s disease, I took some of my gifted and talented students to the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in Ashland, more than five hours away. I came home the next day to a message to rush to Sacramento, three hours away. The doctors didn’t expect Dad to make it through the night. When I arrived, my brother Matt greeted me with outstretched arms. “He’s with God! He’s with God!” Though I know those words were meant to comfort me, suddenly I was faced with one of my greatest fears. My father was no longer with us—he was with God. My dad was gone.

The days that followed are a blur. Writing obituary after obituary for newspapers all over the country. Eating other people’s food. Writing a testimonial for the service. Walking into a very pink funeral home. Looking at grass-covered plots and wondering how the earth could ever be big enough for my wonderful dad. Buying funeral clothes. That was particularly strange—when someone dies, you buy new clothes?

After many of the details were in place, I had to go home before the memorial service to care for my own family for a couple of days. I arrived just in time to see Joshua’s basketball tournament game. I walked into the gym, met my friends with that we-know look on their faces, and found a seat in the midst of all of them. Although the game was fast-paced and exciting, it didn’t for one moment remove the sense of overwhelming grief that fell over me. Once when I stood to cheer for my son, my legs gave way. I was so weakened by the events of the previous days I literally could not



stand up. In that crowded room of cheering fans, I sat quietly and sobbed.

Two days later I returned to my mom's. When you're the oldest in the family, the others often look to you for guidance and support, but all I wanted to do was sleep. One morning about a week after Dad's death I realized that I hadn't prayerwalked in over a week. I decided I would that morning before I did anything else. Minutes later I was strolling down the country lane, reiterating my fears about losing Dad in sobbing pleas to my heavenly Father. Each new block, each new step, God reminded me that my ultimate protection, comfort, and identity all rest in him alone.

*I am your refuge and strength.*

*My compassions never fail—they are new every morning.*

*I have chosen you and you are my child.<sup>1</sup>*

I had always known that I was chosen by my heavenly Father, but for the first time in my life I needed to experience him as my father. As I prayerwalked, I began to understand that God the Father, the Great Creator and Sustainer of the whole universe, was also Abba, my daddy, who would be the one to protect me, to comfort me, to love me. Realizing this in no way discounted the love or value of my earthly father, Robert Holm. In fact, he was a wonderful earthly model of God's love. As I thought about it, I knew that my dad would urge me to accept his Creator's love and care for me, just as God mercifully loved and cared for my dad in his last days and hours.

God's peace flooded over me as I prayerwalked that morning. The grief was not gone; in fact I would struggle with it for a long time. But God's strength had supplanted my weakness. I was free

from another dark cloud. Fear no longer has a grip on my soul. I don't know how to explain it except to say, "To God be the glory." He met me at the corner of one of my greatest fears, walked me through it, and saw me to the other side of it. Since that time I have not experienced paralyzing or obsessive fear. I am no longer afraid of the dark. I greet dogs when I meet them in the morning. I do not look out for bogeymen on every corner. The irrational fears are gone.

## Fear Versus Caution

However, when I've prayed against fear and something still nags, *This isn't right*, I've learned to pay attention. Ours is a dangerous, wicked world. My community is a sleepy mountain town that might seem distant from big-city problems, but evil influences still creep in. Drugs bring down our youth. Alcohol destroys families. An independent spirit that may have originated in Gold Rush days still has an influence on those who would rather do their own pioneering thing than seek God's direction.

So I try to discern between fear and caution: God's caution doesn't go away. I've found that God will still tug on me, make me wonder, make me extra alert. I believe God can give us caution or even physical resistance when the path ahead is not safe. In Acts 16:6 the Spirit prevented Paul from traveling to Asia. I think God does similar things today.

Let me illustrate this principle with that mountain lion story I referred to earlier. One morning several months ago, as I opened the

door, I grumbled. It was snowing, and I would be delayed for a couple of minutes while I changed into my snow boots. I also grabbed my umbrella. Outside, I playfully kicked through the fluffy inch that lay on the sidewalks. A hundred feet down the highway from my house I stopped, frozen. A large set of animal prints spread out in front of me, crossing the highway just past the minimart. They were elongated, not round like a dog's or a cat's or even a bear's. They were also smeared and inconsistent in pattern. I'd never seen anything like them. *A mountain lion's?* I placed my mittened hand over one of the prints; the track was several inches longer still.

Fear struck. Run! *No, you don't run from a mountain lion.* The animal had just been there—the tracks were still fresh in the snow. If I hadn't stopped to change into my boots, I probably would have seen it. *It must be hungry to come right into town...looking for easy prey. A cat, a dog...me?* I looked around and prayed against fear. My body immediately stopped shaking, and I even laughed at myself. I took a deep breath and continued on. Yes, the fear fled, but I must have looked a sight. Just for good measure, I decided to swing my open umbrella and sing "Amazing Grace." Really loudly. It had occurred to me that perhaps when God sent the angel to protect Daniel from the lions in the den, the lions' mouths were shut because the angel who kept Daniel company was singing stunningly beautiful music. All I know is that I didn't run into a mountain lion that morning. Perhaps he was running from my less-than-amazing music. Or perhaps he was afraid of a creature with a swinging appendage that looked very similar to a large, black umbrella.

## A High That Lasts All Day Long

Experts would probably attribute the lifting of my depression and irrational fears solely to endorphins. Endorphins are small protein molecules, produced by our own bodies, that serve as neurotransmitters. During exercise they are released in large doses into the brain. *Endorphins* is short for endogenous morphines because they have a morphinelike effect, which means they can actually relieve physical pain. Endorphins also apparently control the body's response to stress, regulate intestinal contractions, and elevate mood. This natural opiate is what causes the "exercise high" that many people experience.

Throughout my life I have had periods in which I have exercised regularly. When I was in my twenties, I ran several times a week. When I was in my thirties, I swam laps. In my early forties I discovered the high school weightroom. I experienced the exercise high, but I still suffered from depression during those times. It was my ever-present companion, waiting for me when I fell off the endorphin mountain.

Believe me, prayerwalking gives me a different kind of high. I'm newly enthused about my job teaching high school English instead of ready to quit. The words "Mom, I got a speeding ticket" do not make me go ballistic. I challenge myself to come up with a joke rather than a sarcastic comment when gossip and negativity are permeating discussion. I simply have a confidence that God will work all things for good in my life. Certainly this is a turn-around from despair.

You see, my morning prayerwalk has centered my thinking for

the day on what God would have me do. I think God sends spiritual endorphins to my needy soul. I have dumped my emotional junk and the day's agenda on him, so I don't have to worry about the piles of ungraded essays or the latest unhappy parent of a student. I don't have to worry if we'll have enough money for the kids' tuition this semester or why my old van is making that new noise. I have forwarded my e-mail list of worries and fears to God and can delete the whole mess from my in-box. My Personal Trainer has become my companion, not only while coaching me as I prayer-walk but also throughout the rest of my day. What a difference!