

# What Does It Mean to “Walk With God”?

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*So what does it mean to walk with God? It means to do what's right, no matter what. It means to be afraid to go against the tide -- but to do it anyway. Rather than having anything to do with obedience or following orders, "walking with God" has to do with finding the strength within yourself to disobey, to keep faith with your own conscience.*

The Torah reading for this Shabbat is the famous story of Noah and the flood. The Torah tells us two facts about Noah: *Noach ish tzaddik*, “Noah was a righteous man.” And *Et ha Elohim hitalekh Noach*, “Noah walked with God.”

What does it mean to walk with God?

Some of us would probably say that “to walk with God” means to follow God’s orders, to obey whatever God tells you to do, even if your conscience is troubled by it. You may be surprised to learn this is not at all how the Torah uses the term.

We learn the true meaning of “walking with God” from Noah’s own example. Living in a corrupt society, Noah did not cave in to the great pressures upon him to become just as corrupt as everyone else. Because Noah dared to be different, God singled him out to save humanity and the world. In the parlance of our own day, Noah is a non-conformist.

So what does it mean to walk with God?

It means to do what’s right, no matter what.

It means to be afraid to go against the tide – but to do it anyway.

Rather than having to do with obedience or following orders, “walking with God” has to do with finding the strength within oneself to disobey, to keep faith with one’s own conscience. You walk with God when you fight for an unpopular cause. You walk with God when you speak truth to power.

Does anyone walk with God today?

Sure. I think we would all agree that Oscar Schindler, Raoul Wallenberg, Martin Luther King, and others like them, certainly walked with God.

Jewish ethics challenges us to live by the same high standard. The Torah teaches: *Tzedek, tzedek tirdof*, “justice, justice, you shall pursue.” If we see an injustice, if we witness someone hurting others, we must not pretend that we didn’t see and we didn’t hear and we didn’t know. We must take action. We must do something to help, for if we do not correct injustice, if we do not right that which is wrong, we become an accomplice to it. The great 20<sup>th</sup> century Jewish theologian, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, used to say that in an unjust society only some are guilty -- but everyone is responsible.

The lure of following the crowd will always be there to tempt us – children and adults alike. At such times we must always remember that God calls to each of us saying, “Will you walk with me instead?”

The world is starving for decent people, for kind people, for courageous people. May we ever be among those who follow in the footsteps of Noah. May we ever be among those who choose to walk with God.