

CHAPTER 1

Walk On Securely

For we walk by faith, not by sight.

—2 Corinthians 5:7

I moved to Southern California when I was a fresh-faced twenty-year-old. I was transferring to a new college, but it may as well have been a transfer to another planet. The West Coast was radically different from my landlocked hometown in the Heartland, and I barely knew a soul there aside from Great-Aunt Patsy. This early January in SoCal was unlike any other I had experienced: The sun was warm. The sky was blue. Jacaranda trees were filled with amethyst blooms. Although it was winter, it smelled of spring, and the world was full of possibility—a mingling of trepidation and hope.

In a new environment, I couldn't help but take in the world with fresh eyes and live differently. When I was outside, I slowed down and stopped to smell the roses (quite literally!). For school, I signed up for classes that I actually wanted to take instead of stressing about requirements. For my body, I walked everywhere. For my heart, I took more time to pray. I had long-term goals before me, and yet I was tranquil.

A decade later, I experienced a January that was the polar opposite. I had moved with my husband to the East Coast, where the weather was cold and dreary, and we were undergoing a rocky transition to parenthood. We were blessed with a beautiful baby girl, but she was suffering from terrible colic. It made us so sad that we couldn't make her feel better when she cried. My husband was a rock of strength and patience through it all, but I felt as if I were on an emotional roller coaster. As I reflected on this changing season in our life, I read from the writings of St. Clare of Assisi, and I was

struck by her mantra of *vade securo*, which means “walk on securely,” or trusting in God’s providence.

Dwelling on this phrase helped me understand why my first SoCal January was so wonderful. It wasn’t the beautiful surroundings; it was the spirit in which I lived—I was walking securely in God’s providence. I needed to reconnect with that spirit and bring it into my new-mom East Coast life.

And yet, I realized that to walk on securely in God’s providence doesn’t mean that we are disconnected from our humanity. It’s not acting as if everything is great when you are going through a tough time, but it’s walking in his grace despite difficulties. In this regard, I found a model in St. Clare as well, particularly in how she reacted to the death of St. Francis of Assisi. She was very heartbroken when he died because not only was she one of his first followers—and the founder of the sister order to the Franciscans, the Poor Clares—but she became one of his dearest friends.

This is the reflection a friend shared with me:

[Clare] cried and kept little remembrances, but she went on. She had the full human response enlarged into the divine response. She didn’t say, “I can’t go on without him,” or “What shall become of us?” She said that, after God, he was their only pillar and support, but now the pillar and support is taken away; we have God alone. And she went on. . . . It seems to me that if we are not capable of the valid human response, we cannot arrive at the divine response. She did not step over this. She knew how to cry, she knew how to laugh, and she knew which response was appropriate. Then it was enlarged into the divine response.¹

This idea of having an appropriate human response transformed into a divine response warmed my heart. I found it so honest and real. It bolstered my courage to push on—to walk on securely. I was able to better acknowledge my current feelings and view them through the lens of God’s providence.

Thinking in terms of transforming a human response into a divine response offered a different perspective as my husband and I went through the time of trial with our baby daughter because it challenged me to trust in God’s providence despite not being able to see the end results. I saw the beauty of waiting on God to bring good out of difficulty, which he inevitably does, even if it is not in the way we would imagine or in our time frame. I saw it as an opportunity to grow closer to him. In the midst of my daughter’s

crying, I too cried out to him. I told him my feelings and fears. I made time to pray the Rosary, which is a beautiful and grounding form of meditation. I found that after I prayed the Rosary things were better. It was as if I was seeing the world through Rosary-colored glasses. Meditating on the life of Christ and the model of faith we have in the Blessed Virgin took me out of myself. Sometimes I would pray for a specific person on each bead, which reminded me that so many people have gone through difficulties, and so many people need prayers—not just me! This way of praying helped me transform my response into a divine response, and it helped me and my husband to put our walking shoes on and embrace the cross that we were being asked to carry.

Now, more than two years later, the colic days are in the rearview mirror, and we are reveling in the joys of parenthood as we watch our little girl grow by the day. I credit getting through that rough patch to my husband's goodwill, visits from my mom and sisters, and St. Clare. Walking on securely offered a perspective that was eluding me. We live in an age where we are encouraged to eliminate problems instead of working through them. Our fast-paced world doesn't make walking seem glamorous. Our lives are fueled by rushing to the next thing: whether it's the hurry of retail stores setting up for Christmas in August, the push to overschedule our lives, the pressure to post something that will get more likes than last time, or the need to respond to every notification from our phone. The list runs on—and runs us ragged.

The practice of walking on securely (albeit imperfectly) has made me recognize my exhaustion and the futility of sprinting from one thing to the next. When I find myself tempted to fly toward what is ahead, the call to *vade securo* brings me back down to earth, and I find myself happier, more secure, and able to treasure the present and precious moments.



Prayer for Gathering

A blessing from St. Clare's second letter to Blessed Agnes of Prague

What you hold may you always hold.

What you do, may you always do and never abandon.

But with swift pace, light step, and unswerving feet,

so that even your steps stir up no dust,

go forward; the spirit of our God has called you. Amen.

Conclude by saying the Our Father.



Prompts for Conversation

- Was there a significant time in your life when you “walked on securely” in God’s providence?
- How have the times when you have “walked on securely” made you feel compared to times when you have not?
- Is there a part of your life that needs to slow to a walk? What would that look like? How can you do it?

Menu: Soup for a Group

Hosting a January Soup Group fits perfectly into the spirit of slowing to a steady and secure walk—with God and with one another. Making time for quality time is no small feat. It requires us to be secure in God's providence and to set aside whatever seemingly important tasks we have, in order to focus on creating a meal for loved ones to gather around and be present to one another. Such an occasion allows us to share our human responses to what life is throwing at us, and then glean wisdom from others as to how our situations fit into the larger divine response. What better way to connect in this way than over a warm cup of soup?

Starter: Sweet Pea Pesto Dip

Main: Italian Soup

Side: Garlic Bread

Dessert: Cannoli Bites

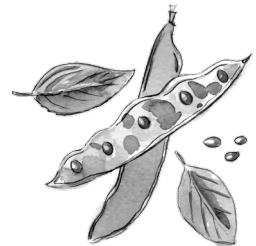
STARTER: SWEET PEA PESTO DIP

Serves 8

I love this dip because it can be made in advance. Serve with tasty crackers or veggies of your choice—carrot sticks or cherry tomatoes speared with long toothpicks make for easy dipping!

Ingredients You'll Need

- 1 bag frozen sweet peas (10 ounces), thawed
- 1 garlic clove, minced or pressed
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice (1 lemon)
- 1 cup fresh basil, lightly packed
- 1/2 cup toasted pine nuts
- 1 teaspoon sea salt



1/4 teaspoon black pepper, freshly ground
2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
Crackers or veggies of choice for dipping

Tools You'll Need

Colander or a large mixing bowl and resealable plastic bag
Food processor or blender
Knife
Cutting board
Garlic press (optional)

How to Make It

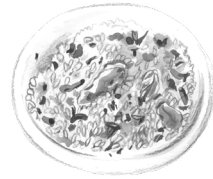
1. Begin thawing the frozen peas. To do this, empty frozen peas into a strainer or colander and run cool water over them until thawed. This should take around 10 minutes. You will know they are thawed when you can take a pea and squish it easily. Another option is to place the peas in a resealable bag and submerge them in a large bowl of cold water until thawed, which will take around 30 minutes.
2. Take a garlic clove and remove the sheath (the papery skin a piece of garlic is wrapped in). You can approach the garlic in a few ways. You could use a garlic press, or you could finely chop it with a knife on a cutting board. If you plan to use a food processor for this recipe, you could place the garlic clove in the food processor and set it to chop until the garlic clove is pulverized into small bits. This should take around 30 seconds.
3. Use the knife and cutting board to cut the lemon in half. Squeeze the lemon halves to get 2 tablespoons of juice. Then add the juice, thawed peas, basil, pine nuts, salt, and pepper into the food processor or blender. Process for around 30–60 seconds.
4. When the ingredients are blended to a smooth consistency, and processor or blender is off, scrape the sides. Start processing again, adding the olive oil in small increments. Most of the time, a food processor or blender will have little holes in the top so you can add the olive oil in a thin stream while running the processor. Blend until the olive oil is fully incorporated and the mixture looks smooth.
5. Taste for seasoning, and if need be, add more salt, pepper, and lemon juice.

Recipe Notes

- **Make ahead:** This sweet pea pesto can be made in advance and refrigerated for up to 3 days. Take out 20 minutes prior to serving in order to reach room temperature for best taste.
- There's no need to buy a fancy food processor—although if you have one, that is great! I am still using an old, two-chop-setting food processor that I have had for about a decade, and it always gets the job done.
- When you buy basil, do not refrigerate it, because that makes it wilt.



MAIN: ITALIAN SOUP



Serves 8

This soup is outta-this-world good. It's great for feeding a crowd for a soup group (which I've done once or twice!). It is also perfect to make on a Sunday night in advance for Monday dinner, and then have it for lunch during the rest of the week. (I had this down to a science when I was single.) This soup is also extra special to me because it was the first meal I ever made my husband when we were dating. Maybe a way to a man's heart is through a good soup!

Ingredients You'll Need

- 1 pound spicy Italian sausage, uncooked
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced or pressed
- 1 (32-ounce) box beef broth
- 1 (15-ounce) can crushed tomatoes, such as Dei Fratelli
- 1 (15-ounce) can diced tomatoes, fire roasted
- 1 (15-ounce) can tomato sauce
- 1 cup dry red wine, such as Cabernet Sauvignon
- 3 carrots, chopped
- 1 tablespoon granulated sugar
- 2 teaspoons Italian seasoning
- 1 (10-ounce) package cheese tortellini (found in the refrigerated section at store)

- 3 small zucchini, chopped
- 1 cup Parmesan cheese, grated or shaved

Tools You'll Need

- Dutch oven or soup pot that will hold at least 5 1/2 quarts
- Heatproof spoon or meat turner
- Plate
- Heat-safe container for grease
- Knife
- Cutting board
- Garlic press (optional)
- Wine corkscrew
- Can opener

How to Make It

1. Turn your stove top on to medium-high. Remove sausage from casing and place into the Dutch oven or the soup pot you plan to use to cook the soup. Break apart the sausage links with a heatproof spoon or meat turner. Add the chopped onion and garlic. Brown the sausage until no pink remains, which will take 8–10 minutes. When finished browning, remove the sausage-onion-garlic mixture to a plate, and drain grease into a heat-safe container to discard later. Always be very careful when doing this, and never pour grease down your sink drain—it will cool, harden, and clog your drain.
2. Once the grease has been drained, toss the sausage mixture back into the Dutch oven or soup pot you were previously using and add the beef broth, crushed tomatoes, fire-roasted diced tomatoes, tomato sauce, wine, carrots, sugar, and Italian seasoning. Bring to a boil, and then turn down to simmer for 30 minutes.
3. At the 30-minute mark, add tortellini and chopped zucchini, and let simmer for another 30 minutes. Ideally you'll add these ingredients 40 minutes before you're ready to serve.
4. When finished, allow the soup to cool for 10 minutes. If you don't want to wait (like me!), you can add 1 to 2 ice cubes to individual serving bowls; otherwise, the soup will be too hot to eat right away!
5. Serve with grated or shaved Parmesan for garnish and garlic bread as the side.

Recipe Notes

- **Make ahead:** The soup can be made the night before. Once soup has been removed from the hot stove top and cooled a bit (around 20 minutes), you can transfer it to a container to store in the fridge. I usually refrigerate it in the Dutch oven I used to make the soup, which cuts down on dishes and also makes for easy reheating. Prior to the meal, place soup on stove top and set to medium heat for 15–20 minutes, stirring occasionally until heated through.
- **Dietary considerations:** To modify for gluten-free guests, try DePuma's tortellini or Udi's Gluten Free Pesto Tortellini. To modify for dairy-free guests, do not serve with tortellini (cheese-free tortellini is next to impossible to find). Serving without tortellini does not change how good this soup is! For the Parmesan, offer a dairy-free Parmesan-style cheese alternative.
- **Buying uncooked sausage** is key to the flavor of this soup. Precooked sausage will not create the same flavor effect.
- **Use grated or shaved Parmesan** depending on what you prefer. Shaved will produce stringy cheese in the hot soup, and grated will melt in.

SIDE: GARLIC BREAD

Serves 8

This garlic bread is a snap to make and rivals that of a restaurant. Brace for compliments.

Ingredients You'll Need

- 1 loaf of French bread
- 1/2 cup salted butter, softened
- 3 garlic cloves, minced or pressed
- 1 teaspoon Italian seasoning
- 1/2 cup Parmesan cheese, grated



Tools You'll Need

Aluminum foil
Baking sheet
Knife
Cutting board
Garlic press (optional)
Small mixing bowl
Silicone spatula

How to Make It

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees Fahrenheit.
2. Place a sheet of aluminum foil on a baking sheet. Set aside.
3. Using a knife and cutting board, slice the French bread loaf in half lengthwise.
4. To make the garlic spread, take a small bowl and combine the butter, garlic, Italian seasoning, and grated Parmesan using a spatula. Stir together vigorously until incorporated and smooth.
5. Spread the mixture onto the sliced loaf of bread.
6. Place bread on the prepared baking sheet and bake for 12 minutes, or until golden. For additional crisp, set oven to broil for 30 seconds at the very end, but watch carefully so as not to burn, because it can happen fast!
7. Remove garlic bread from oven and cut each length of bread into fourths to yield more generous slices (and one should always be generous with garlic bread!).

Recipe Notes

- Make ahead: The garlic spread can be made a day ahead and stored covered at room temperature until you are ready to make the garlic bread.

