

Following Jesus

By Mary Kane

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Several years ago, when I used to teach first grade, my little students and I had a tradition; whenever we received a big snow we made Jesus Footprints. In order to make Jesus Footprints, my students would line up behind me single file. Next, they had to diligently follow me, stepping exactly in my footsteps. Together we'd tromp a path through the deep snow forming giant letters that spelled out J-E-S-U-S. As our school is close to an airport, we speculated as to whether or not the passengers on the low flying planes would notice our testimony in the snow! We were sure that God loved looking down from heaven to see His Name written in our footprints! Of course we had to finish our writing by framing it with snow angels because angels always attend the Lord! How we laughed together as we wrote Jesus name in the snow.

After we wrote Jesus' name, we always climbed to the top of the playground structure and looked out together to admire our handiwork (maybe that should be footiwork!). Just as the footprints in the snow left a message for the world to see, the footprints of our lives leave a message as well; may our footprints always lead others to follow Jesus.

Please take a moment and ask God to forgive you of any offense that is present in your heart and fill you with His Holy Spirit! Ask Him to open the eyes of your heart as we open His Word together.

Please read Ruth 1-2:3.

How did Naomi come to be in Moab?

There was a famine in Bethlehem, so Elimelech took his family to Moab. People of Jewish descent should never have left the Promised Land. Israel was given to Abraham and his descendents as an inheritance from the Lord. It was the only place on earth where God chose to manifest

His Presence. To leave Israel was to leave the Presence of the Lord. True to the "time of Judges," when everyone did what was right in their own eyes, the family of Elimelech chose to stop following God and followed the inclinations of their own hearts right to Moab.

What happened to the family of Elimelech in Moab (verses 3-5, 21)?

When we choose to follow our own plans, we allow "death" and emptiness to come into our lives.

What significant event finally caused Naomi to move back to Bethlehem (verse 6)?

Naomi had heard in Moab that the Lord had visited His people with bread. I love that the Lord didn't leave Naomi in Moab to suffer the consequences of leaving Israel; He called her to come home.

Verses 6 and 7 are loaded with significant words and phrases that will bring us great reward if we look at them in their original language. Please look at these verses again and consider the following definitions:

Arose: in Hebrew *quwm* which means "to raise up, to stir up, to cause one to be raised up, to empower, to restore someone." God was stirring Naomi's soul, giving her the desire, strength and energy to go back to where she belonged.

Return: in Hebrew *shuwb* which means "to go back to, to turn back to God, to bring back, to be brought back, to be converted, to repent, to be rescued." God turned Naomi's wayward heart back to Him.

Visited: in Hebrew *paqad* which means "to look after another as a shepherd does his flock, to consider, to long for" This word is used at times in the Bible to indicate a miraculous intervention of the Lord. The Lord was definitely working something miraculous for Naomi and Ruth!

Bread: in Hebrew *lehem* the word *Bethlehem* means "house of bread." The city of the house of bread had bread once again!

Went out: in Hebrew _____ which means "to lead out, to be brought out, to go forth towards something." God was leading Ruth and Naomi out of Moab towards His Presence in Israel.

On the way: in Hebrew *derek* which means "road, way, path, manner, habit, course of life." God was about to dramatically change the course of the lives of two widows from Moab.

Now let's go back and insert some of these meanings into the context of Ruth 1:6 and 7.

"Then she [Naomi] was stirred up and empowered by God that she might be rescued out of Moab with her daughters-in-law, for she heard in Moab that God had miraculously cared for His people by giving them bread. Therefore, she was brought out of Moab in order to walk the path that leads toward God so they could live a different manner of life in the land of Judah."

What unexpected event occurs in verse 8?

Suddenly, for reasons unknown to us, Naomi tries to persuade her daughters-in-law to return to Moab. Perhaps Naomi felt the trip to Bethlehem was too dangerous and that Ruth and Orpah would be safer in Moab. Maybe Naomi feared that they all would have to endure discrimination and live as outcasts in the land of Israel for the rest of their lives. Whatever her reasoning, Naomi gives Orpah and Ruth one last chance to return to Moab.

What did Orpah do?

She kissed Naomi goodbye and returned to Moab. Like Naomi, we also will discover, that when we choose to follow God not many will go with us and we will probably lose some friends along the way. Walking with Jesus will take faith and trust, it won't make sense to those around us and quite honestly it will be far easier to stay put where we are and continue life as usual. But, life as usual was not enough for Naomi or Ruth.

What did Ruth do?

Ruth *clung* to Naomi and continued to follow her to Bethlehem. The original word for *clung* used in this verse is *dabaq*. *Dabaq* does not mean to physically hug or embrace as I first expected; it means to make a commitment or covenant with another. This same word is used in Genesis to describe the commitment between a husband or wife, *Dabaq* means to join your soul to the soul of another, to be glued together, "to follow hard." Ruth had determined to follow hard after Naomi...all the way to Bethlehem.

In the verses that follow, Ruth then gave voice to the commitment that she had purposed in her heart.

Please read Ruth 1:16-17 again.

What does Ruth promise Naomi?

1. **"Wherever you go, I go."** *Go*, transliterates as *yalak* which means "to go, walk, come, a way of life, a manner of living." Ruth promised to take up a new way of life, a very different life from the life she lived in Moab. Jesus has also called us to leave the world behind and live a very different life with Him.

2. **"Wherever you lodge, I lodge."** *Lodge* which means "to live, stay or abide." Ruth promised to abide in Israel, in God's Presence. Jesus calls us to abide in His Presence; He tabernacles with us!
3. **"Your people shall be my people."** By definition to accept the people of God was to accept God. When we are born again into the family of God, His people, the church, become our people.
4. **"And your God, my God."** *God*, transliterates as *elohiym* which means in this case the "plural intensive-singular meaning form of the one true God." Notice that Ruth did not say "your gods shall be my gods." I believe that these two verses in scripture are Ruth's salvation moment. She decided that come what may, whatever lay before her in Bethlehem with Jehovah is worth sacrificing everything she had in Moab.

It may seem that Ruth followed Naomi to Bethlehem, but she really followed the call of Jehovah to follow Naomi to Bethlehem. Just as God called Ruth and Naomi to follow Him, He is calling you and me as well.

Where are you right now in your walk with God? Choose one of the options below:

1. **In Moab:** Living a life far from God. If you're a Christian but far from God, He is calling you right now, through this Bible study, to turn and start following Him. Please don't delay! If you've never made a decision to follow Christ, He is calling you right now, through this Bible study, to turn and start following Him. Please don't delay! You can take care of that decision right now! Tell God that you accept the death of His Son Jesus on the cross for your sins and ask Him to come into your heart and make you a new creature in Christ.
2. **On the road:** In transition; you're making changes in your life to follow Jesus. You still have some decisions to make and there will

be rough places in the journey to Bethlehem. Keep walking! The harvest is coming!

3. In Bethlehem: Following God and using your gifts to benefit the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27) and to fulfill the Great Commission. Stay on your knees, keep reading His Word, listen for His continual guidance and be on guard against the enemy.

A crucial concept of this decade is *carbon footprinting*. A *carbon* footprint is the total amount of energy used by a person, organization or country in a given set of circumstances. Our carbon footprints will reveal if we have lived environmentally responsible lives or wasteful selfish lives.

As Christians we need to consider our *spiritual footprints*. Let's take a moment and ask ourselves a few hard questions. I'll be asking myself the same questions. Where will your footprints lead at the end of your life? Will our *spiritual footprints* reveal that we lived spiritually abundant lives for Christ or that we lived selfish wasteful lives for ourselves? Like Ruth, will your footprints end in Bethlehem? If anyone follows your footprints, will they lead to Him? If your children follow your footprints will they find Jesus? Where will your footprints lead at the end of this day?

Where have you walked today? If anyone followed you today, will they have found Jesus?

What can you do to follow Jesus more closely?

To which person's walk do you relate most closely? Choose one of the following:

Walk of Boaz: (the Christ-like redeemer of Ruth and Naomi) Footprints only and always in Bethlehem. Raised in a home of faith, lived according to the truth of God's Word, and constantly walked with Jehovah. Greatly used by God.

Walk of Naomi: Footprints started in Bethlehem. Raised in a home of faith, but turned her back on God and walked to Moab. God called to Naomi in Moab. She repented and returned. Greatly used by God.

Walk of Ruth: Footprints started in Moab. Born on the wrong side of the tracks, raised in a pagan home. Heard the Truth, left Moab and walked straight to the God of Israel. Her name is included in the family line of Jesus. Greatly used by God.

Walk of Orpah: Footprints in Moab. Born on the wrong side of the tracks, raised in a pagan home. Heard the Truth, but turned back to Moab. Did not affect her generation for Christ and disappeared from the pages of scripture. Not used by God.

Did you notice great differences in the lives of these four people? Despite their very different backgrounds and upbringings, God called all of these people to follow Him; the good, the bad and the ugly. All are welcome in the house of God!

Who is the only one who wasn't used by God?

Why not?

Because *she* rejected *Him*.

In closing, no matter where you were born, no matter where you have walked, no matter how you have sinned, no matter how much of your life you have wasted chasing after empty useless things you can still be used greatly by God for His kingdom. God calls and uses everyone who will repent and turn to Him. He is calling now. Follow Him.

"If any man desires to come after Me,

Let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily

And follow Me."

Luke 9:23

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