

# Footsteps

By Margaret Fishback Powers

One night I dreamed a dream.  
As I was walking along the beach with my Lord.  
Across the dark sky flashed scenes from my life.  
For each scene, I noticed two sets of footprints in the sand,  
One belonging to me and one to my Lord.

After the last scene of my life flashed before me,  
I looked back at the footprints in the sand.  
I noticed that at many times along the path of my life,  
especially at the very lowest and saddest times,  
there was only one set of footprints.

This really troubled me, so I asked the Lord about it.  
"Lord, you said once I decided to follow you,  
You'd walk with me all the way.  
But I noticed that during the saddest and most troublesome times of my life,  
there was only one set of footprints.  
I don't understand why, when I needed You the most, You would leave me."

He whispered, "My precious child, I love you and will never leave you  
Never, ever, during your trials and testings.  
When you saw only one set of footprints,  
It was then that I carried you."

## Putting God First

The First Step in Your Walk with God  
by Pr. Michael Taylor

The first step in having a relationship with God is putting God first, as if this lesson's title wasn't obvious enough. Putting God first is something so foundational that God selected it as the 1<sup>st</sup> of His 10 Commandments:

"You shall have no other gods \_\_\_\_\_ Me." (Exodus 20:3)

As foundational as it is, however, we often struggle with the temptation to put other things alongside, or even ahead of, God. Since the beginning of the conflict between God and Satan, the Devil's goal has been to dethrone God by any means necessary.

"For you have said in your heart:

I will ascend into heaven,

I will exalt my throne \_\_\_\_\_ the stars of God;

I will \_\_\_\_\_ sit on the mount of the congregation

On the farthest sides of the north;

I will ascend above the heights of the clouds,

I will \_\_\_\_\_ the Most High." (Isaiah 14:13-14)

When Jesus said, "But seek \_\_\_\_\_ the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you," He was dealing with our preoccupation with meaningless stuff that we chase with the hope that they'll be the answer to our problems. Unfortunately, I'm just as easily distracted by things that aren't *really* there or that don't *really* matter as my dog is by laser pointer dots. I spend my time, money, energy, and attention on things that have nothing to do with preparing for an eternity with God.

What makes things even worse is that when I do try to intentionally focus on God, the Devil still frequently gets me just as focused on other things besides Him. I go to church, but my attention is drawn to the people there. I read my Bible, but get tripped up on the vocabulary or the history. I try fasting, but all I can think about is how hungry I am. Even when I'm doing a service project, I often find myself like Martha in the story told in Luke 10:38-42. The problem wasn't that Martha was "busy"; her problem is told in v. 40. "But Martha was \_\_\_\_\_ with much serving..." Ministry can be a distraction away from a genuine relationship with God.

Anything that you habitually put ahead of God in your heart runs the risk of becoming an idol. Complete the sentence: "My life isn't complete without \_\_\_\_\_." Anything you put in that blank that *isn't* God might be an idol.

What potential idols do you have in your life? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

This is all true in your devotional life too. We sometimes confuse doing spiritual things with actual spirituality. If we read this passage, pray that prayer, give to this, or do that, then we're automatically holy. Unfortunately, that's one of the Devil's great deceptions. Reading the Bible is not the same as getting to know its Author; remember that Satan knows the Bible too (if you didn't know this, check out the time that Satan tempted Jesus in Matthew 4:1-11, and notice that he knows what is written in the Bible but doesn't know the character of God). Even today, there are atheists and agnostics and Hindus and Buddhists who know the Bible but not the God of the Bible.

This concept is true in every tool in the personal spirituality toolkit. People try to pray without putting God first, and it becomes a pep talk. There are people who voluntarily fast on a regular basis but without putting God first, and it's just a diet. There is a great temptation to worship the tools themselves, believing that the power is in them. At that point, these tools become an idol. For example, the power is not in prayer; it is in God. Prayer is just a tool you can use to connect with God's transforming power. God's Word doesn't have all of the answers; God has all of the answers. The Bible is just a tool you can use to discover God's answers.

For more about this temptation to do spiritual things without putting God first, check out Isaiah 58:1-14. In v. 1-5, God lists His problems with the way people practice a certain spiritual habit.

Which one? \_\_\_\_\_  
What is His problem with it? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Instead of the selfish things that the people had been doing, what does He recommend they do instead (in verses 6-14)? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What promise most stands out to you in that list? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

It's time to put God first, and make sure He stays there.

## Five Ways to Make This Lesson Real

- 1) How far into your day do you go, and what things do you do, before you take the time to say good morning to Jesus? Do you make Him wait until you're done checking your Facebook or the local news? Is it possible that these things might be idols that need to be removed?
- 2) When you're praying, who is the focus of your prayers? Do you talk more about yourself or about God? We'll study this in another lesson, but here's a self-evaluation: if your prayers are mainly about what God has done for you, and what He can do for you, then who is the Master and who is the Servant?
- 3) In 2 Kings 20:12-19, King Hezekiah has men visit him from Babylon to figure out why the sun just moved backwards in v. 1-11 of that same chapter. He shows the men the things he values most: his *stuff*. After they leave, the prophet Isaiah comes to Hezekiah and tells him that those men will come back to take back to Babylon the things that Hezekiah showed them. Instead of highlighting God to his visitors, his tour highlighted *stuff*. Does your living space highlight God to those who visit you, or *stuff*? (Remember that living spaces can also be digital, such as your social media profiles.)
- 4) When was the last time you fasted? In the Isaiah 58 story you read earlier, you saw that fasting can be a powerful tool when used properly (and what happens when it isn't. We'll study this more another time, but fasting isn't just taking a break away from something; it's taking a break *for* God. Start planning now for an area of your life where you need to reprioritize.
- 5) One of Satan's favorite targets is to attack God's character. If he can make us think less of God, then we may think more of other things; we see this best in Genesis 3 when he was able to undermine God in Eve's eyes. On the flip side, the Bible is given to us so that we may understand God and His character better. When we put the focus on getting to know more about who God is, we'll naturally spend more time with Him. What is your favorite thing about God? Pay attention during your readings and put a special mark or highlight whenever you see that trait mentioned.

My favorite thing about God is: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_