

Leaving Footprints

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As one gets older, one spends more time thinking about one's life. Perhaps the tendency to review and evaluate one's life is a normal part of aging. I am now officially in my eighth decade! (For those who are not quick at the math, that means I just celebrated my 70th birthday!)

How does one measure life? One way of thinking about life is set forth in Heb. 13:7: "Remember your leaders, those who told you God's Word, look carefully at the results of their conduct and behavior, and imitate their faith." Leaders are described as those who spoke God's Word and lived it out in faith. In this verse, life is summarized in two words—conduct and behavior, that is, lifestyle and actions. Everything we do has results, and the combined results will be the measure of our existence on this planet.

What will be my footprint? Since life can be measured by results, numerous questions come to my mind: To what am I dedicated? Who am I? Who are you? I can think about and evaluate my life, but others will ultimately decide if I have correctly thought about who I am and who I want to be. Here is how I would like to think about my life.

- I am (or I have tried to be) a teacher, preacher, professor, missionary, exegete, servant, author, evangelist, and spiritual leader.
- I am (or have tried to be) a good husband, father, and grandfather.
- I am (or have tried to be) a friend, confidant, mentor, brother in Christ, neighbor, kingdom person, member of God's great assembly of believers. I would add: encourager, lover, spiritual seeker, a lover and pursuer of people.

Merely leaving footprints in the pathways of this world will have little meaning or impact eternally. Where and how we leave footprints matters. The primary way Christians leave footprints is through the things they do and the impact they have on the lives of others. John wrote that when we Christians one day rest from the troubles of this world, our works will continue and remain as an example (Rev. 14:13). Works and example: these are our footprints left for others to follow.

We can leave different kinds of positive footprints. Each kind of footprint has an impact on others.

- Footprints of spirituality, Phil. 3:7-17. These footprints come from evaluating life by a different set of standards—how we spend time, what we find enjoyable, how we think, the place of prayer in our lives.
- Footprints of priorities—the salvation of souls, sharing the Good News, studying the Bible, spiritual health. By our priorities we teach others. Let us teach others the importance of evangelizing; knowing truth, living spiritually vibrant lives. How many people do you love? Do you love them enough to do what is needed for their eternal salvation?
- Footprints of personal service and ministry—sharing, helping, caring. People remember your heart.
- Footprints of example, conduct and behavior, John 13:15, 1 Peter 2:21. Jan and I received an email from a couple we recently met. They wrote, "We want to learn to love like you love."
- Footprints of influence. Leadership is often more indirect than direct, 1 Tim. 4:12; Tit. 2:7.
- Footprints of attitude, footprints of unity. Do I seek to build walls to exclude or do I open doors to include?

Our footprints are measures of the results of our lives. The measure of life is not how many attended, how many were baptized, how many dollars were spent, or any of the other measures that are often used. Jesus' prayer in John 17:11 clarifies the goal: none of those you have given me have perished. The question is, how many persevere? Some churches have numerous baptisms and many people placing membership, but after a time little has changed.

Let each of us resolve to leave the kind of footprints that will matter for eternity!