

Following in Someone's Footsteps

A business-owner dies. The spouse inherits the business. A parent is ill; the child has power of attorney for property and/or care. Someone dies; someone becomes executor. You have a new job, replacing a much-accomplished person. At some point, each of us follows in someone else's footsteps.

Someone else's footsteps offer us challenges. If the footsteps are large, we can feel or be overwhelmed. If they are small, the challenges can be smaller and trickier to spot. Whatever the case, to follow someone is never easy, and some guidance on how to do it comfortably and effectively can be helpful. A larger-than-life Old Testament story, in 1 Kings, chapters 2 and 3, is both timely and relevant for us.

King David died. His kingdom was strong. Its borders were secure. The economy and social fabric were healthy. But, the people mourned his death, and we can sense this in the way the 1 Kings story is told.

David was succeeded by his son, Solomon. This line of succession was normal in ancient societies. But in this case, there were a couple of wrinkles. David's footsteps were enormous! Solomon was 14 years old.

Evidently from the story's details, Solomon recognized the magnitude of his challenge. He did not have his father's experience or learning. Even if he did, he would need more in order to lift the people from their grief, assure them of his own gifts, and then lead them into the future.

Solomon responded to his challenge by adopting three values to anchor and guide him. First, love God. Second, honor David's statutes. Third, look after his needs. Or, put differently: God, first; others, second; self, third - all in God-centered balance.

To obey God is divinely required. To love God elevates obedience to a level which God longs for! As God intensely loves everyone, God longs to be loved in return. When people do that, God is immensely happy. In this two-way bond of love, blessings flow in abundance. So, when Solomon asked God for wisdom to govern, God eagerly granted it. God also added immeasurable wealth!

Even today, *wise as Solomon* and *rich as Solomon* permeate our lexicon.

Putting David's statutes, second, was eminently wise and practical. Solomon had to maintain stability in the society, economy and international relations which he now governed. Common sense says: don't make changes if you don't have to. If you must, do it gradually and with care. Solomon's use of 'common sense' worked.

Honoring one's own needs is necessary - and also, divinely decreed: *love God; love neighbor; love self*. The degree to which we can love God and anyone else begins with how we love ourselves. Solomon practiced this balance by making sacrifices in public

worship. Thus, he made it clear to his subjects: *I honor God. I serve you, God's people. I am now King, and I have God's full support.*

By putting his love for God, first; his commitment to serving others, second; and looking after his own needs, third, Solomon succeeded in following in his father's footsteps. In time, Solomon's own footprints became so large, we still remember him, today.

So, to follow another person can be challenging. First, we have to pick up where the other person left off. Next, we must deal with grief-driven resentment, anger and lethargy. *So and so is gone, and you are not him/her.* Then, each of us is unique as a person, and in our mix of skills, values, experiences, etc. Applying our uniqueness in such a setting challenges every part of our beings. While everyone wants us to be just like our predecessor, it's not going to happen! To follow someone else is a triple burden. This is why Solomon's values are so helpful. His challenge was enormous! But, his values worked! God, first. Others, second. Self, third.

May Solomon's values be our values. May the fullness of God's Grace bless us in all that we are, everything we follow, and all that we do in response.

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