

## Lesson Seven

**Sacrifice - Be willing to do what no one else wants to do, difficulty lasts for a season but**

**His blessings linger**

For the majority of my berry picking adventures, I have been alone. My husband participated in the process once early on, but honestly I prefer the solitude. Even though the task is difficult, I am comforted by the knowledge that I have provided a service to my family and made use of God's blessings. When I go to pick blackberries, I generally don't tell anyone. I don't ask for volunteers or make a big fuss about the task at hand. Most times I go early in the morning before the heat and the bugs set in. My family only knows I've gone when they see the homemade blackberry syrup on the stove and know that pancakes are in their immediate future!

The book of Ruth is a beautiful story of commitment and redemption, sacrifice and blessings. Ruth was a Moabite who married an Israelite man living in Moab with his family. Her husband's father had died prior to their marriage, so his family consisted of his mother, Naomi, and his brother who also married a Moabite woman. We are not told Ruth's husband's name, but in verse 5 of chapter 1, both he and his brother die. Naomi is left destitute with no husband or son to provide for her. Being in a strange country, she decides to return to her family in Bethlehem. She praises her daughters-in-law for their treatment of her, thanks them for their commitment and urges them to return to their own families to seek a future for themselves, releasing them from their obligation to her. One agrees to

return to her own people, but Ruth refuses to leave Naomi and she renounces her family, country and gods to remain with Naomi.

There is so much that we are not told in the book of Ruth. We are not given information on Ruth's family or Ruth and Naomi's relationship prior to the deaths of her sons. We're not even told how or why Naomi's sons died. We are left to speculate and draw our own conclusions as to Ruth's motivation and commitment to Naomi. Perhaps it was the thought of Naomi making such a long trip alone. Maybe Ruth had an undying love for her husband and knew that he would have wanted her to care for his mother. Did Ruth feel that Naomi needed her more than her own family? Or had she witnessed something in Naomi's family that was different from the way her own people, the Moabites lived? Something that appealed to her so much that she was willing to sacrifice stability among the known world of her own country, for the risks involved in moving to a new country. Whatever her reasons, Ruth would not be swayed. Her commitment to Naomi required her to embark on a long journey to a strange place where no one knew her. She had no guarantees that she would be accepted among them. After all, Naomi was returning home to friends and family and a place familiar to her. What if Naomi's people rejected Ruth? Naomi refers to herself as being "too old to have a husband", what would happen to Ruth when Naomi died? Ruth seems to consider none of this. Her only concern is her life-long commitment to Naomi.

The disciples made similar commitments to Jesus. The books of Matthew, Mark and Luke all record Peter's comments to Jesus that the disciples had "left everything to follow you" (Matthew 19:27, Mark 10:28; Luke 18:28). Think of it, they had left their parents, their

livelihoods, even wives and children to travel the countryside with a man that many claimed was out of his mind. They turned their backs on those who were relying on them for financial support. They made their decisions suddenly, immediately when Jesus called them. They didn't return to kiss their children goodbye. They didn't make a plan to provide for their family during their absence, they didn't even know how long they would be gone! They completely relinquished their reputations, positions and everyone they loved.

When I first became a Christian, I was afraid to pray for Jesus to take all of me. I didn't want to surrender to Him completely because I was terrified of what He would ask of me. I didn't want to be a missionary in Africa. I could not bear to see the suffering of the children, their hunger and illnesses. I was overcome with grief at the evil men do to each other and I was certain I wouldn't last a day before I would march out to right the wrongs I had witnessed. Somehow I convinced myself that this was what Jesus wanted from me and with a heavy heart I began preparing to accept His assignment. I attended classes on becoming a missionary and involved myself in missions' groups. I slowly let go of material things and developed a plan to completely remove physical and financial attachments to my possessions. My husband and I had just started dating and I already knew that I loved him more than anyone, but I also believed that he was too good for me and the Lord would never allow me to have such a blessing. I committed to Jesus that I would not do anything to further the relationship, so He could begin drawing Tim away to his own future plan. Every time I prayed this way, the phone rang and it would be Tim calling. Then my grandfather became ill.

As a child, I spent a great deal of time with my grandparents. I travelled with them and spent weekends, vacations and day-to-day activities with them. I even lived with them for roughly six years of my life. I would not be the person I am today without their love and commitment to raising me. They were the constants in my life when everything else was changing. I did not have a good home life. My parents married young and were not ready for the commitment of family life when I was born. There was no consistency between them and we lived all over the city. My parents divorced when I was eight. I attended six grade schools, two Junior high schools and two Senior high schools before I graduated, so I had little chance to form friendships and bonds with others. Through it all, my grandparents were always there to provide stability in the midst of uncertainty and to comfort the scared little girl that I was most of the time.

My grandparents were a “matched set”, perfect bookends that complemented each other. Neither was good without the other. My grandfather did the driving and handled the financial area of their lives. My grandmother did the cooking and cleaning and basically made the house a home. Each of them in their own way taught me to be respectful, honest, trustworthy, dependable and consistent. Their home was an oasis to me, a place where the world made sense and the universe behaved in a uniform manner. I knew their expectations of me and did my best to live up to them. I learned that “boring” was good.

When my grandfather became ill with multiple myeloma cancer, I was devastated, but I knew I had to be strong for my grandmother. Their children, my mom and uncle, both had their own issues and were unable to care for their parents. So, the responsibility fell to me.

In my mind, there was never a question as to whether I would be the one to help. They never asked me, I volunteered. Yes, there were times when I was tired and just didn't think I could make it through one more day. I often felt I couldn't spend another lunch hour feeding my grandfather broth while he was in hospice because he couldn't move his arms and wouldn't eat for anyone else but me. I was overwhelmed trying to plan my days and continue working a full time job while providing dinner and companionship to my grandmother every night. I needed to make sure she had groceries, her bills were paid and her laundry done, but also keep up my own household simultaneously. Tim was a tremendous help to me during this time. It still brings tears to my eyes every time I remember coming home on a Saturday evening after spending the day at hospice with my grandfather to find that Tim had cut my lawn, without me asking or even hinting that it needed to be done. If I hadn't already been in love with him, that would have done it for certain.

When my grandfather passed in early September, the commitment to my grandmother did not end. It seemed most logical for me to sell my house and move in with her, but before any serious preparations could be made my grandmother entered a nursing home due to complications from COPD and died six months later.

Even though the events took place over a decade ago, there isn't a day that goes by that I don't miss them. They never got to see my wedding, or our new house, or any of the joys Tim and I have experienced together. Tim and my grandfather met a few times, but never got to know each other well. It is one of the great sorrows of my life because I know they

would have liked each other and gotten along very well. Tim and my grandfather are so similar that sometimes it's scary. One particular habit they share is whistling. My grandfather whistled frequently and the first time I heard Tim whistle, I got goosebumps. Tim proposed while my grandmother was in the nursing home and we married a few weeks after she passed.

When I look back on that period of my life, I see things that I was too close to see at the time. I was preparing to become a missionary and relinquish all of my physical possessions and everyone I loved. I had committed myself to serving Jesus wherever and however He needed me and I accepted the fact that I might not return home again. Jesus spared me that assignment and instead granted me the task of caring for those I loved. He rewarded me with the blessing of my life, my wonderful husband.

Altogether, eighteen months passed from when my grandfather became seriously ill to when my grandmother passed away. It was a very difficult time in my life. It was hard work. It was stressful. There were days when I felt I was going to lose my mind with grief. I cried more tears than I knew I had in me. But I would never give up those experiences. I grew closer to my grandparents than I ever could have without a crisis of this nature. I knew them as an adult and understood the importance of the principles they had taught me of consistency, stability, and commitment and how to apply them. I learned to rely on Jesus as no other event could have taught me. I made it through the fire of refinement and came out the other side a better person having been stripped of my selfish tendencies, my professional ambition and impatient attitudes.

Dear sister, do not shrink from the hard tasks. Do the things that no one else wants to do. Be the person who washes the dishes after Thanksgiving dinner to give the hostess (if it isn't you) a chance to relax. Be the one to take out the trash, clean up the mud, run the errands. Volunteer for the behind the scenes work of nursery duty, envelope stuffer or floor sweeper. Those who are last will be made first (Matthew 20:16). Do not fear what Jesus may ask of you. Do not refuse to sacrifice to Him what is His, what He rightfully purchased through His sacrifice on the cross for you. You are not your own, you have been bought at a price (1 Corinthians 6:19b-20a) and although we are not promised rewards here, rest assured that your treasure will be stored for you in heaven (Matthew 6:19-21).

## **Assessment and Further Thought**

What sacrifice are you afraid Jesus will ask of you?

How will you prepare to accept this assignment?

Is there someone right now that needs your help?

Do you already know what task Jesus has for you? Have you been resisting this assignment?

Why?



## Verses for study and encouragement

**James 4:17** -“Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins”

**Luke 9:23-25** – <sup>23</sup> Then he said to them all: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. <sup>24</sup> For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. <sup>25</sup> What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self?

**Matthew 6:19-21** - <sup>19</sup> “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. <sup>20</sup> But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

**Luke chapter 12**

**Deuteronomy chapter 28** – blessings for obedience, curses for disobedience

## **Prayer time**

Dear Jesus, enable me to take the leap of faith necessary to serve You wholeheartedly.

Grant me Your wisdom and discernment. Lead me like a sheep and prepare me for the task

You have assigned to me. Give me better eyes to see the blessings and purposefulness of

the assignment. Help me to recognize the lessons You have for me and allow me to learn

them the first time. Help me to become the woman You intend me to be. Amen

## **Additional items for prayer**