

DANIEL'S WALK HOME

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There once was a boy named Daniel who lived in a small house with his grandfather. They were very poor but had plenty of fun and love to share. Daniel remembered when they used to pick berries, chase birds through the fields, and play checkers together. Grandpa could not play with Daniel anymore though. He was very sick and stayed in bed, reading his Bible and praying for Daniel.

One day, Grandpa called Daniel into the big bedroom. "Daniel, I have something to tell you." Daniel walked into the room and looked at his grandfather. Grandpa's eyes had lost their sparkle and his body had lost its strength. He looked so small and weak.

"Although I am your only grandfather," Grandpa said, "you do have some other family members in another city. I don't want you to be left alone when I die so I am sending you to live with the rest of your family."

Daniel sat quietly in the room looking at his feet. He could see a hole in his left shoe and wiggled his toe. Two fat teardrops fell down his rosy cheeks. He wiped them away with the sleeve of his right arm. Grandpa reached over and patted the young boy's blonde hair.

"Daniel, I love you very much. You have been the joy of my life. But now it is time for me to leave and go to my eternal rest. I want to make certain that you are taken care of when I leave."

Grandpa handed Daniel a faded sheet of paper. "This is your birth certificate which proves you're my child. It will let you enter into our family's city. If you lose it, you will not be able to pass through the gates."

He picked up his Bible and placed it in Daniel's hand. "This is your compass which will help you find the way. If you become lost, look in the Bible and find your direction."

Grandpa reached over and kissed his grandson gently on the forehead. Daniel reached up and held onto his grandfather tightly. "Grandpa, I don't want to leave you. I want to stay here with you."

His grandfather looked at Daniel and smiled as he wiped away the tears. "Daniel, you aren't losing me. I'll always be right here," Grandpa said as he pointed to Daniel's heart. "I will keep you in my heart too."

Daniel stood up and looked around the room. He held tightly onto his birth certificate and Bible. He knew that they were the only things he would have from Grandpa. They were the key to his future in his new home and the reminders of his past with his dear grandfather.

"Daniel, the time for you to go is now. Remember, you must hold onto your birth certificate and your Bible. Without your Bible, you may not find your way. Without your birth certificate, you won't be able to enter the city. Hold onto them for they are your life."

Daniel walked out of the house and stood on the front porch. He didn't know where to start on his journey so he opened up his compass, the Bible. "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." He looked down the long winding path which led down the mountain into the valley below. Daniel noticed that the path seemed to have no end. However, he knew that at the end of his journey would be a new home with his new family.

He looked down at the dirt trail as he stepped off the porch. Step after step, Daniel began to walk very slowly. He felt like he was leaving more than his grandfather behind; he was leaving a part of himself behind and discovering a new Daniel: a boy who was growing up and becoming a man.

As night began to approach, Daniel began to worry. He wouldn't have a way to see through the thick dark night to continue on his trip. He began to worry about what

he would do when night came: he had no lantern, not even matches! Daniel remembered what Grandpa had said about the Bible. That's it! The Bible would have the answer that he needed.

He sat down on a cold stone along the path as he searched through the black leather book to find his answer. Finally, he found just what he needed. A light to brighten the darkness around him. "Your word is a lamp for my feet, and a light for my path."

As he spoke the words, light flowed from his Bible and lit the pathway ahead of him. The light felt warm and soft: like a comfortable blanket on a cold night. He stood up and began walking down the long, dusty road again. Although the light allowed him to see the path, he was still frightened. He could hear the lone call of a nightowl, the wind blowing the branches in the woods along the path, and occasionally the scream of a wild animal. He didn't know what hid in the darkness waiting for him to stumble off the path. The fear of the darkness and the promise of his family kept him walking. Each step was a step closer home. Step . . . by step . . . by step.

Finally, the darkness began to fade as the sun rose ahead. He could see the birds in the trees which were singing. Once in a while, he would see some wildflowers growing at the edge of the forest. He resisted the urge to go pick a handful of them. He didn't want to get off his path - he may end up lost- so he continued forward.

As he was walking, he looked ahead and saw the path split into two different roads. Each road had a huge gate at its entrance. The first path was very wide and turned off to the left side of the forest. The other part of the path cut to the right side and was very narrow.

When he came to the intersection he glanced through the gate to the large path. It seemed to lead downhill into a beautiful valley. He could see a lot of people walking on the path ahead of him. The people were playing as they traveled down the roadway.

He walked over to the gate of the narrow path which led up a steep mountain. It was empty and only had a few footprints in the dirt. It looked like no one was going in

that direction. Occasionally, he could hear a small voice in the distance though. He knew that this road would be harder and much lonelier.

Maybe he should go on the wide one. After all, it would be easier to get lost on a narrow path than on a wide one. He would also be able to play with the other people. What if the narrow path was too hard for him? He knew that he would have no problem walking down the wide one.

Daniel sat down in the middle of the intersection as he tried to decide which path to take: Should he take the wide pathway that was full or the narrow, empty road? He remembered the words of his dear grandfather, "This is your compass which will help you find the way. If you become lost, look in the Bible and find your direction."

He opened his Bible and saw his answer. "Enter the narrow gate: because wide is the gate and the path which goes to death, and many people travel on it. Narrow is the gate and hard is the path which leads to life, and few people find it."

Daniel swung open the squeaky, thin gate and started walking up the steep road. The pathway was so narrow that sometimes Daniel was afraid that he had missed the path; but, if he looked hard enough, he would be able to see a thin path running through the rocky mountainside.

Daniel worked hard to stay on the path and to climb the mountainside. Once in a while, he had to sit down and rest for a while. He was unable to move any farther. When he looked up the path, he could not see the top of the mountain. He became very tired and upset. What if the pathway up the mountain never ended? What if he had taken the wrong road?

Worried and confused, Daniel decided to sit down for a while to think about this trip. As he was sitting on the hard, cold clay of the path, Daniel pulled out his Bible. He glanced at the Bible which he held in his hands. The black leather was beginning to fade and the edges of the paper were curled and torn. Suddenly, the young boy realized that it didn't look as valuable as it had when he started his trip. Maybe it was too old to help him. Maybe he needed a newer map. Maybe Grandpa was wrong about the heavy book.

Daniel thought how big and heavy his Bible was becoming. He was certain that it was slowing him down. If he didn't have this heavy weight, he could move faster and get home sooner. Right? After all, it was an old book - even older than his grandfather.

The thought of Grandpa brought a smile to his face. He loved his grandfather very much and wanted to please him. Daniel's smile faded as he thought of his grandfather's warning to keep the birth certificate and Bible.

"Remember, you must hold onto your birth certificate and your Bible. Without your Bible, you may not find your way. Without your birth certificate, you won't be able to enter the city. Hold onto them for they are your life."

Daniel knew that he must hold onto the Bible - no matter how heavy it felt. He must do what his grandfather told him. Suddenly, Daniel felt very lonely. He thought about how he used to sit and talk to Grandpa for hours. The memories overflowed Daniel's mind and tears spilled down his cheeks. Each teardrop landed on the leather cover of the big, black Bible. Daniel watched his tears flow off the edge of the book and onto the ground. He reached over and wiped the tears off the valuable book.

After Daniel calmed down, he opened his Bible and began to read. "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you." Daniel thought about the words. Although he had family in another city, Daniel felt like an orphan. He wanted someone to come to him. Quietly, he bowed his head down and prayed, "God, please come to me. I don't want to be an orphan anymore."

Before he lifted his head up, Daniel heard a calm, strong voice. "Daniel, I am here to help you." He looked up and saw a beautiful man standing there. "Jesus?" asked Daniel. "Is that really you or am I dreaming?"

Daniel knew the answer without the man speaking. He could see the scars in Jesus' hands and the love in His eyes. It was Jesus! Jesus had come to meet him! Daniel suddenly knew that everything was going to be all right. He knew that he would make it to the city and his family.

Jesus grabbed Daniel's hand and they started to walk up the mountainside together. It was much easier to climb the steep mountain when Daniel was holding Jesus' hand. When Daniel held onto Jesus, the trip was so easy. If he let go of his new Friend's hand, Daniel would grow very tired. Daniel learned to hold tightly onto Jesus and not let go. He didn't even notice how steep the mountain was or how far they walked.

After a while, Jesus stopped in the path and turned to Daniel. "Daniel, I must go now." he said.

Daniel became very upset. "You can't leave me. I can't make it without you. Please, don't leave me alone."

"I will not leave you or give up on you. I will always be there for you." Jesus answered as He left Daniel on the path.

As Daniel looked around to find Jesus, he suddenly realized that he was on top of the mountainside. Jesus had helped him to get to the very top of the mountain.

Daniel enjoyed the beauty of the mountaintop: the sunshine warming his body, the smell of the brightly colored wildflowers which covered the land, the sound of a robin singing from its leafy hiding place. Daniel pulled the shoes off his feet and began to run around in the soft, thick grass. He ran faster and faster until he could look over the other side of the mountain. Looking down from his high watchtower, Daniel could see something shiny in the valley below. As he got closer, he could see what it was. It was the city: the city of his family. Home!

Daniel started running down the mountain. He was so excited that he didn't think about his shoes on top of the mountain. All he cared about was going home. Daniel kept running until he came to the edge of the city.

There was a beautiful gate at the entrance of the city. Looking through the gate, Daniel could see a river, beautiful houses and lots of people. He knew that each person was a part of his family. He walked up to a guard at the gate and pulled out his birth certificate. The guard looked closely at the paper Daniel handed him. He quietly

handed the paper back to Daniel and opened the gate wide. "Welcome home, son," he replied as he took Daniel into the gate.

When he walked into the gate, several people came running up to meet him. Before long, there was a large crowd surrounding Daniel to welcome him home. Daniel felt warm and loved by every person he met. He had never felt this way before - except by Jesus and his grandfather. Daniel continued to hug and talk to all of the people.

Suddenly, he heard a loud trumpet and looked to see a distant figure running towards him through the crowd. His heart beat quickly as he waited to see who was coming. Imagine his surprise, when he realized who it was. "Grandpa!" Daniel screamed as he started running to meet his favorite person. He ran into his beloved grandfather's arms and held onto him.

"Welcome home, Daniel. I knew you could make it." replied Grandpa.

Daniel smiled as he listened to his grandfather. He knew that at last he was truly home and he would never again have to leave those who loved him.