

If you enjoy watching movies, sometimes you might hear words or a phrase that captures your attention, becoming a memorable line that echoes in your mind.

In high school after watching the first *Star Wars* movie, my friends and I often went around saying, “May the force be with you,” echoing the words Obi-Wan Kenobi said to Anakin Skywalker.

Growing up watching the *Wizard of Oz*, the high-pitched voices of the Munchkins still echo in my mind when trying to decide which direction to go: “follow the yellow brick road.” When facing a great change in life, others may remember another line from that movie when Dorothy discovered she was in the land of Oz and commented to her dog, “Toto, I’ve a feeling we’re not in Kansas anymore.”

The Bible is filled with memorable lines, often spoken to offer comfort, such as “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want; he leads me beside still waters.” We often hear that opening line from Psalm 23 read at funerals, for the words remind us that

wherever we go—even in death—God is with us, continuing to offer comfort.

At weddings I often read from 1 Corinthians 13, “Love is patient; love is kind,” reminding the couple that marriage takes a lot of work and that love requires an enormous amount of patience and kindness.

The letter to the Romans contains words of hope in the midst of turmoil: “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (8:38-39). It’s reassuring to know that nothing can get in the way of God’s love.

Martin Luther called John 3:16 “the Gospel in miniature”: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” Children may memorize that line as their first memory verse, for it captures the essence of God’s nature: sending

2

Jesus to the world to proclaim a word of hope even in the face of danger.

I imagine you have a memorable line from the Bible as well. What are some of your favorite lines?...

These memorable lines from the Bible shape our lives, giving us hope when we face despair, giving us courage when encountering obstacles, reminding us of the depth of God's love and compassion.

Having these words in our memories often come in handy, for when facing a difficult challenge, hearing them echo in our minds can bring comfort.

The book of Ruth offers such a memorable line. Remember the story? Naomi had moved from her home to a foreign land due to a draught, and while there, her sons married foreign wives, Ruth and Orpah. When Naomi's husband and sons died, Naomi encouraged her daughters-in-law to return to their families since Naomi had decided to return to her home country. It's here that Ruth spoke her memorable lines to Naomi: "Where you go, I will go;

where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God" (1:16).

We know the end of the story: Ruth meets Boaz, they marry, and they have a son. A few generations later came King David, and many generations later Jesus was born in their lineage. Ruth, the woman who was a foreigner, an outsider, pledged her love and commitment, and from her descendants, Jesus was born.

At the time, though, when faced with the decision of whether to follow Naomi or go back to her family, Ruth probably had no idea what would happen if she followed Naomi.

Jessica Tate, the director of the organization called NEXT Church, reminds us that when the two women arrive in Bethlehem, Naomi is bitter and empty. "At this point in the story," she says, "we do not know that Ruth will become Naomi's savior." We do not know that there will be a new family or plentiful food. All we are left with is Naomi's emptiness.

"This is where we so often find ourselves," says Tate, "with a scary diagnosis, a relationship crumbling, the loss of a job, the death of a loved one. We find ourselves in these empty

places, uncertain of the end of the story. We do not know how, or if, our fortunes, our security, our confidence, our hope will be restored.”¹

How many of you have ever said, “I wish I knew what I was supposed to do? If only God would tell me what to do, then it would be much easier to follow. I wish I could receive an email from God, or better yet, how about a text message with instructions for making the best decision?”

We don’t know what went through Ruth’s mind when she decided to follow Naomi back to her home county and trust in this God that Ruth had learned about from Naomi, but somehow, Ruth trusted in the relationship with her mother-in-law. From that relationship, she learned to trust in God. Their story reminds me of two things: First, that our faith connects to those around us, and second, that no matter what choice we make, God will be with us.

But sometimes we need a little extra reassurance, as was the case with a young girl awakened in the middle of the night.

A burst of thunder sent a three-year-old flying into her parents’ bedroom. “Mommy, I’m scared,” she said. The mother, half awake and half unconscious, replied, “Go back to your bed. God will be there with you.” The young girl stood in the unlit doorway for a moment and then said softly, “Mommy, I’ll sleep here with Daddy, and you go in there and sleep with God.”²

Sometimes we need each other as a reminder of God’s presence, just as Ruth’s connection to Naomi helped Ruth to trust in God when she said that memorable line, “Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God.” It’s more than just the memorable lines that shape our lives, it’s the memorable relationships we have with one another that give us hope and remind us of God’s presence in our lives.

Even after our loved ones have died, our memories of them continue to shape us, as in the story Disciples preacher Fred Craddock told about his sister:

My sister Frieda died six years ago of cancer. She knew she was dying. About a week before she

4

died, she had her husband label every item in the house that had been given to her over the last number of years, sometimes as much as twenty-five or thirty years ago. She had a wall-hanging or a piece of glassware, or a vase or something, given by her friends, and she told him who gave her every item, and the occasion for it—birthday, anniversary, so forth.

Then he called these friends to come and get their presents to her. I was there that weekend when the people came driving up to receive the presents that they had given to Frieda, my sister, years ago. I was embarrassed about this, and when I got to the house...a woman was coming out. She had driven from Huntsville, Alabama, and she had a vase that she had given my sister twenty-five years before. I said, "I want you to please forgive my sister. We were taught as kids you don't return gifts that people give you; you keep them and you prize them. But she is very ill, and I hope you'll understand that's the reason for it."

And the woman said, "I have never had a gift like this in my life—to have a gift that is twice blessed. For twenty-five years it reminded Frieda of me. Now it goes into my home and will remind me of her."³

A memorable gift, offering a blessing, not once but twice. A memorable line from a movie. A memorable scripture reflecting God's loving nature. A memorable relationship that offers trust. All signs of God's presence in our lives, so when faced with a decision...remember those memorable people and words that offer direction and hope.

¹ *Homiletics Online*, 11-4-18.

² Hodgin, Michael. *1001 More Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking: Fresh, Timely, and Compelling Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers, and Speakers* (Kindle Locations 3352-3355). Zondervan. Kindle Edition, #624.

³ Fred B. Craddock; Mike Graves; Richard F. Ward. *Craddock Stories* (Kindle Locations 1838-1847). Kindle Edition.