

The Sword

Issue 4

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Theme: God Works Through Ordinary People

As a way of stimulating our spiritual development, let's think about some familiar bible characters in a unique way. This issue features nine ordinary men and women who appear to have made conscious choices to submit their lives to God. As we consider these characters, let's focus on how God was not only an integral part of their lives, but in particular on how they allowed God to work His divine will through them to accomplish His purposes to bring honor and glory to His name.

Hopefully you'll find this collection of short articles to be somewhat different from typical character studies and this will encourage your self examination. Each article should follow this approach:

- Analyze the character and his/her setting to determine conscious and often difficult

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choices he/she made to serve God.

- Consider consequences and outcomes of their choices; good or bad.
- Consider how God looked at their faith, their decisions, their devotion, their sacrifice for His cause.
- Finally, how were God's purposes furthered because of their actions? How was honor and glory brought to His name?

As Paul concluded the Roman letter, he wrote, *“For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus; that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* Rom 15:4-6 Certainly we can be encouraged by the godly examples of biblical characters. And we gain strength and perseverance when we reflect on how our spiritual ancestors confronted similar trials and temptations to those we confront today. These men & women were not perfect, they stumbled spiritually, but they also exhibited a stubborn resiliency to serve the Lord. When times were tough, they chose to stay with

God. Our spiritual struggles are not very different; as Solomon observed, there really isn't anything new under the sun. The steadfast faith of these nine characters bears testimony to the wisdom, grace and love of our God. Their actions brought great honor and glory to His name.

We are keenly aware that as Christians we are members of God's family; a special household of brothers and sisters who want to please our Heavenly Father. In this family we discipline ourselves to be on guard against Satan's advances. But being a child of God is more than just resisting Satan. As members of God's family, we should be bursting to show our love and devotion to our heavenly father. We can do this by genuinely striving to please Him (individually and collectively), and by bringing glory and honor to His name. Notice these scriptures:

1Chr 16:28-29 Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due His name . . .

Psa 22:23 You who fear the Lord, praise Him; all you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him, and stand in awe of Him, all you descendants of Israel.

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Psa 115:1 *Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Your name give glory. Because of Your lovingkindness, because of Your truth.*

Mat 5:16 *Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*

1Cor 6:20 *You have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.*

Rev 4:11 *Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created.*

You probably see a consistent theme – indeed our God is worthy of glory and honor! He is not only worthy of our glory, honor and praise, He seems to have created us for the specific purpose of recognizing Him as our Father and exalting His name.

As parents, we want our children to honor us, to respect us, to obey us. Their actions and attitudes vividly demonstrate their love for us. God earnestly desires our love and devotion too. We know the foremost commandment: love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind (Mat 22:37). Just as we desire more than mental assent and words of devotion from our children, God wants us to demonstrate our love for Him. Our God is an awesome God! Let's now investigate

how the following nine men and women brought glory to God in their lives and then be encouraged to take stock of our efforts to glorify God in our lives. And if necessary, to rekindle our efforts to honor Him.

Phil Lumpkin



Noah

Berna McDonald

Do you sometimes think that you live in evil times? Noah certainly faced that challenge. We read in Gen 6:5; 11-12 *“Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. Now the earth was corrupt in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with violence, and God looked on the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth.”* Roughly 1500 years after Adam and Eve's initial sin, virtually all of mankind had given themselves over to the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life. Satan must have thought that victory was within his grasp! God's somber perspective is graphically recorded in Gen 6:6-7. *“And the Lord*

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was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. And the Lord said, I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them." Man's sin was so prevalent and despicable that God determined to utterly destroy the world, along with man whom He had so lovingly created in His own image.

Thankfully in the midst of this bleak situation God found one righteous man. *"But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. . . Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time; Noah walked with God."* Gen 6:8-9. In the midst of his crooked and perverse generation, Noah stood alone as a beacon of light in a dark world of sin and depravation. We're familiar with the story; Noah was instructed to build an ark, according to God's specific instructions. Then he was instructed to take his wife, their three sons and their wives (eight souls), along with a pair of the animals (male and female) into the ark, along with their food. There they would be saved from the flood of God's wrath. God then opened the fountains of the great deep and the floodgates of the sky for forty days and nights. The water covered everything and prevailed for one hundred and fifty days. Gen 7:23 says *"Thus He blotted out every living thing that was upon the face of the land, from man to animals to*

creeping things and to birds of the sky, and they were blotted out from the earth; and only Noah was left, together with those that were with him in the ark."

Noah made many difficult and lonely choices. He chose to serve God when "everyone" else on the face of the earth was wholly given over to wickedness. Like Joshua, we can imagine him shouting, *"as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."* Can you imagine the ridicule from his family, friends and neighbors when he was building the ark? He must have been the laughing stock of the neighborhood. Building that huge boat on dry land, for no apparent purpose, for almost a hundred years (Gen 5:32; 6:6) was weird enough. But during this time he also chose to warn others of the impending doom and try to convince them to be saved (2 Pet 2:5).

Heb 11:7 reads, *"By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith."* Through obedient faith, Noah saved himself and his household. It had never even rained on the earth up to this time, but Noah believed God's proclamation about the flood. He didn't just condemn the world through his preaching and ark building, he also chose to stand

apart from his own family. In Gen 5:30 we read that Noah's father Lamech had other sons and daughters. Yet apparently none of Noah's brothers or sisters heeded his preaching and all perished in the flood. Noah's father died about five years before the flood, but his grandfather, Methuselah appears to have died in the flood rather than repent.

It is obvious that God saved His creation through Noah's faith and actions. We can say that we're all descendants of Adam and Eve, but we're also all descendants of Noah and his wife. Noah was the original zoo keeper and through his actions we enjoy not only our pets, but also all the animals of the air and on the face of the earth. Gen 8:1 reads, *"But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark; and God caused a wind to pass over the earth, and the water subsided."* And in Gen 9:1. God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, *"Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth."* God was pleased, honored, and glorified by Noah. Noah made difficult choices. It would have been much easier to go along with the crowd and with his family. He apparently was the only righteous man standing in his generation – thankfully he chose to honor God through obedient faith.



Joseph

Jennifer Jones

God was with Joseph, the son of Jacob. Early in Joseph's life (Gen 37) he had dreams of what was to come, which God revealed to him. Unfortunately Joseph's brothers weren't pleased with God selecting him for what was to come. His brothers were jealous of the fact that their father Jacob loved Joseph more than all his other children. Gen. 37:3 Joseph's early adolescent years were filled with love from his father and surely he learned about God from his father. At seventeen it seemed that Joseph was faced with enduring an unspeakable act from his own brothers. It must have been a shock for him to have his own blood brothers turn on him, and openly speak of killing him. It was an ultimate act of betrayal to throw Joseph into the well and bring him up only to then sell him into slavery. This was a definitive turning of their backs and classifying him as good as dead. They literally were saying we do not love you, or want you around anymore. Joseph had to be a very godly man not to build up bitterness and hatred toward his brothers. He chose to remain focused on the plans God had revealed to him earlier in his dreams. This can be assumed based on Joseph's ability to interpret the dreams

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of others, but Joseph was always very explicit to explain that the interpretations belonged to God. Gen 40:8

Joseph was a young man when he was sold by his brothers to Ishmaelites for 20 pieces of silver, and then sold again in Egypt into slavery. Joseph was a hard worker who gained favor with Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's and captain of the guard. Gen. 37:36 Joseph proved to be a good man as he grew older, and was favored by many. Gen. 39:6 Seemingly yet again Joseph had a run in with evil, Potiphar's wife had immoral intentions for Joseph. She was constantly asking and wanting him to lie with her. Joseph stayed true to God and chose to follow God's commandments, and ran away from her temptations. Potiphar's wife accused Joseph of forcing himself on her, which was not true. Joseph must have cried out, Lord why is this unfairness being brought upon me, while again he was suffering unjustly. He was thrown into prison for a number of years, but the Lord remained with Joseph and continued to make him prosper. Gen. 39:23.

Then even while in captivity he chose to serve God, not spending time blaming others, or even talking evil of his brothers, or Potiphar's wife. He diligently went about everyday activities in anticipation of God answering his prayers. He showed compassion on two troubled cell mates and interpreted their dreams. He

only asked them to remember him to Pharaoh with kindness. Gen. 40:14 Even then Joseph had no mean or angry words to say about his brothers. He only said that he'd been stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews and stated that he had done nothing to be put into prison. In this he focused only on getting out of prison, he was not begrudging the unfairness of his situation or showing hostility. It was two additional years before God answered Joseph's prayer; through the same avenue as it had all started. Joseph was summoned to interpret Pharaoh's dream. Pharaoh saw that God was with Joseph and then without even being aware of it, fulfilled God's plan and glory, which God had revealed to Joseph in his dreams as a child. Gen. 41:39-44 Joseph later consoled and comforted his brothers with these words *"now therefore be not angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: God did send me before you to preserve life."* Gen. 45:5; 50:20-21 God is always in control and knows the ways and hearts of man. He allows us to choose to be obedient or not. Joseph chose to obey God, and because of it God remained faithful to him. We can have great confidence in God's faithfulness too when we chose to follow His plan for our lives.



Caleb

Carol Fertig

Almost everyone at one time or another has had to take a stand and be in the minority. It's not a comfortable place to be, and you have to be really sure of what you are doing in that situation. The temptation to "go along" is great, especially when the opposing point of view considers your position to be downright dangerous. Caleb, along with Joshua, found himself in this quandary when the children of Israel came to the edge of the land which God had promised them. Caleb was able to stand sure in his position because he followed God with all his heart – fully.

God gave very precise instructions to Moses for spying out the land of Canaan before entering it. Surely it would make the people feel confident if they knew what the land and the people they would face were like, so one man from each of the twelve tribes was to go to look over the Promised Land. Caleb was the one chosen from the tribe of Judah. The spies were to see what the land was like, whether the people were strong or weak, whether they were few or many, if the land was good or bad, if the cities were fortified, if the land was fat or lean, and if there were trees. They were also to get some fruit from the land. Easy enough assignment it seems! Everything they

would need to know to be successful in taking the promised land.

The spies were in the land forty days in which they looked at the things God through Moses had instructed and cut a huge cluster of grapes, so large it had to be carried on a pole. They also collected pomegranates and figs. Everything God had promised was there in abundance; the land surely flowed with milk and honey just as God had said. What a wonderful thing to see the bounty of God laid out before them!

Caleb carried out his assignment without a backward glance. His attitude toward what God had said to do is revealed in Numbers 14:8, when he said, *"If the Lord is pleased with us, then He will bring us into this land, and give it to us – a land which flows with milk and honey."* His attitude toward God was that we must be pleasing to Him if we are to expect His blessings. He quieted the people before Moses after the ten spies had given their fearful and cowardly report. Respect for God and His instructions was primary in his attitude. Caleb and Joshua tore their clothes in frustration when the people grumbled and once again wanted to return to Egypt in fear and defeat. He reminded the people that the land was good, as God had said, and that they should not have a rebellious attitude to-

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ward God. Caleb stood firm in his attitude, even though the people would have stoned him if the glory of the Lord had not appeared in the tent of meeting.

Caleb had an obedient and trusting heart. Three times in Joshua 14 it is stated that Caleb followed the Lord God fully. That means there were no reservations or misgivings in his heart, only complete belief and trust. When the other spies made the hearts of the people melt with fear (Joshua 14:8), Caleb followed Him fully. Moses said Caleb would inherit the land because he fully followed God (Joshua 14:9). Joshua repeated in Joshua 14:14 that Caleb inherited Hebron because he followed the Lord God of Israel fully. He had a heart full of trust in the Lord to add to his attitude of obedience.

God used Caleb to show what could have happened for all the children of Israel if they had been willing, as he was, to follow Him fully with a heart that was trusting and not rebellious. Not only was he allowed to enter the land of promise, but he was also blessed with strength and vigor well into his old age so that he could drive out the inhabitants as God intended for him to do. Caleb did not take the easy way out. He stood with Joshua alone when the other spies were afraid to go into the land, even when it appeared they might be stoned for their courage. When the land was finally

theirs for the taking, Caleb did not take the valleys or the plains, but said, *“Now then, give me this hill country about which the Lord spoke on that day, for you heard on that day that Anakim were there, with great fortified cities; perhaps the Lord will be with me, and I shall drive them out as the Lord has spoken.”* (Joshua 14:12)

What might we accomplish if we have the heart of Caleb? He didn't have to be the leader; that place belonged to Joshua. He only had to obey God with a confident and trusting heart. His history shows us that we too can attain our “Promised Land” (heaven) if we are willing to be used by our Father to do His will. The apostle Paul knew this when he said in Philippians 4:13, *“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.”*



Gideon

Russ Ward

Have you ever noticed that we as Christians often hold back from being bold for the cause of our Lord? Why? Do we not know that the faithful individual is never alone? He is continually supported by the Living God. There lies within us the

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power to accomplish many things, some far above even what we can imagine. So why do we, if we know this to be the case, need that little nudge, that gentle push from behind, that voice that whispers "You can do this!" Maybe it's because we all have a touch of Gideon within us.

The angel of the Lord came to Gideon during the period of the Judges to tell him that he was the chosen deliverer of Israel from the Midianite oppression. Who me? Don't you know who I am? My father is the least of the tribe of Manasseh and I am the least in my father's house. (Judges 6:11-15) Yet God responded with a gentle nudge and a sign that said, I Am the Lord. The angel consumed the offering provided by Gideon with fire – which immediately instilled within Gideon confidence and boldness to confront the Midianites. No! That isn't quite how the story unfolded. God commanded Gideon to first tear down the altar of Ba'al at his father's house. Gideon ventured out in the middle of the night, tore down the altar, built an altar and made a sacrifice to Jehovah – then fled from the coming repercussions. (Judges 6:16-27) Gideon chose to follow God's command, but his halting actions in the middle of the night didn't exactly exude the confidence of someone who was being directed by God?

Yet the people rallied around and gath-

ered to Gideon when he called them to battle. Then came more doubts and second guessing, the: "I don't know if I'm ready for this," "I'm not sure I can do what you want," "I'm afraid." Once again God provided that little nudge, that gentle push that said, "go on, I'm behind you." God twice provided a marvelous sign with the morning dew and the fleece of wool just as Gideon requested. Reluctantly Gideon allowed God's plan to unfold in his life. God had been faithful to strengthen his spirit and provide that gentle nudge. (Judges 6:33-40)

For pride's sake God had Gideon trim his army down to only three hundred men. Why? For what was about to be done was not for the glory of man, but for the glory of Jehovah. God commanded Gideon to take the Lord's army of three hundred and defeat the Midianites, whose army numbered into the thousands. Yet on the eve of battle and faced with such overwhelming odds Gideon was once again filled with misgivings, doubts, and fears. He like us had yet to relinquish self. Then came another gentle nudge from God in the form of the Midianite soldier's dream. It was the final voice of faith that said "I Am with you, you can do this for Me, for there is no failure in the faith of an ordinary man." Thus encouraged, Gideon

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led forth the tiny army of Israel. They surrounded the enemy camp during the night and at Gideon's command, they broke their pitchers and blew their trumpets. And God smote the Midianites from before them. (Judges 7:1-21)

You see, by faith Gideon chose to obey God. He allowed God to deliver Israel from the oppression of the Midianites using him. He realized exactly what we have to realize today to be faithful active people of God; it's not about me, it's not about strength in numbers, it's not about the strength of the opposition, it's not about fear or doubt. It's all about God and His plan for us. It is to His glory and to His honor that we live.



Ruth

Dick Dabney

It happened in the days of the judges of Israel, when God's people experienced an up-and-down relationship and devotion before holy God. There were times of obedience and times of rebellious disobedience. There were times of blessings from God and times when God allowed the effects of disaster and war to visit his people, for their righteous discipline and correction. Such a time brought events that introduced into God's nation the special Moabite woman

who would be the great-grandmother of King David, and therefore be part of the special lineage of the Messiah.

In the book of Ruth, the story is told of an Israelite family from Bethlehem, Naomi, her husband Elimelech and their two sons. A famine occurred in the land that normally "flowed with milk and honey." This famine might have been the result of cycles of nature or perhaps the result of wars. Or maybe this was the direct influence of God to get the attention of His people. Whatever the cause, we can be assured that God used the famine to bring together individuals who likely would never have met under other circumstances.

In God's providence, Naomi found herself living temporarily outside the land of Canaan, in the foreign land of Moab, where at least there was food. In time she was bereft of her husband and her two sons. What remained for Naomi was an attachment to two Moabite women, daughters-in-law who had married her two sons. One was Orpah and the other was Ruth. As Naomi came to the time of returning to the land of Canaan, she urged Orpah and Ruth to return to their Moabite families and cultures. Orpah apparently returned to her previous life, but the heart of Ruth had become bonded to this Israelite woman and her

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dedication to the living God. Ruth would not be separated from Naomi and her people, the people of God.

DEVOTION

In considering Ruth's devotion to Naomi, we should notice that Ruth apparently had family to which she might have returned (Ruth 1:8). She probably came from a background of worship to pagan gods (Ruth 1:15), in contrast to Naomi's religion of worship to the one living God. We see no temporal motive for Ruth to stay with Naomi, since there appeared to be difficult days ahead (Ruth 1:12-13, 21). Ruth could not expect to find prosperity in the company of Naomi.

And yet Ruth was devoted to Naomi. The apostle Paul points out (Romans 1:20) that the heart that openly watches for evidence of God will find it, and this may have been part of Ruth's conclusion. It may be that Ruth saw evidence of the powerful God in her observing of the world around her, and combined that evidence with the detail she learned from Naomi to come to a more complete understanding of a relationship with almighty God. We might find ourselves following a similar path today.

In following Naomi's guidance, Ruth humbly submitted to the will of God. She worked with energy and humility to further demonstrate her devotion. She made a conscious decision to abandon

her earlier life in Moab and be adopted into the nation of the children of God. It seems sure that Ruth was the kind of person who would be dearly missed by her Moabite family, and she likely reflected at times on the relationships she had left behind. But she intently looked forward and focused on the profound goodness that she had discovered in being part of the family of God.

REDEMPTION

God saw Ruth's favorable heart, seeing that she did not seek her own benefit but was interested in doing the best thing for those around her. God blessed Ruth by bringing her into the influence first of Naomi and then of Boaz. In the relationship of her marriage to Boaz, God provided well for Ruth in this life and redeemed her securely into God's family. In her subsequent relationship in the lineage of the Messiah (Matthew 1:1-16), Ruth is further afforded a place of honor among all who seek God.

And more than her personal honor, Ruth represents a redemption that is important to all of us who are adopted into God's family. She was outside the blood lineage of Israel but God demonstrated His plan even in these ancient times: He intended redemption to apply to any who would have the condition of heart to truly seek and submit to Him. The

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apostle Paul reinforces this as well in his writing to the Romans. Paul uses the image of our adoption in Romans 8:15 and specifically addresses Gentiles in Romans 11:11-24. Although Paul here laments the failures of the Jews in God's first contact, he very clearly states that "salvation has come to the Gentiles." Glory to God! Just as Ruth the Moabitess could be redeemed and adopted into the family of God, you and I can have that assurance through God's plan of salvation in Jesus Christ, the Messiah who came through her devoted and submissive heart.



Esther

Alyssa Johnson

In Shakespeare's Henry IV, Falstaff remarks, "The better part of valor is discretion, in the which better part I have sav'd my life." Falstaff's explanation is an attempt to redeem his cowardly act, but in Esther, God shows how both discretion and valor saved a people.

To me the overriding character trait displayed by Esther throughout her narrative is discretion. Even with the blessings of youth and beauty, Esther possessed "*the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.*" (1 Peter 3:4). This is first shown in her caution with regard to her

heritage. In Esther 2:10, "*Esther did not make known her people or her kindred, for Mordecai had instructed her that she should not make them known.*" Not only did Esther possess the inner discipline to keep her ethnic background secret, she possessed the wisdom to obey the council of her cousin (and adoptive father) Mordecai. Was Esther ashamed of her Jewish background? No, because Mordecai had to advise her not to reveal it. But, ironically, her ability to guard her birthright became the first step toward the salvation of the entire race. Take this lesson from Esther and rely on the wisdom of others. Discretion also often means keeping things to ourselves and this can be a monumental task. God understands the challenge of taming the tongue (James 3:1-12). Esther's wise choice shows us the way.

Esther's discretion doesn't waver as she moves under the influence of Hegai in the king's court. Surely her modesty and decorum appealed to Hegai and resulted in superior treatment. "*Now the young lady pleased him and found favor with him. So he quickly provided her with her cosmetics and food, gave her seven choice maids from the king's palace and transferred her and her maids to the best place in the harem.*" Esther 2:9. She also wisely follows Hegai's instructions when appearing before King Ahasuerus. "*Now*

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when the turn of Esther . . . came to go in to the king, she did not request anything except what Hegai, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the women, advised. And Esther found favor in the eyes of all who saw her." Esther 2:12. She could have taken anything she desired from the harem into the king's palace, but she chose to heed Hegai's insightful advice so she could succeed in God's purpose for her. Esther demonstrates that wise council can come from a variety of sources. Her decision to heed Hegai's council resulted in her being crowned queen. Do we sometimes discount the council of others just because they are non-believers? How many of our bosses or co-workers are Christians? And yet they may hold the key to our success in the workplace. A success which can bring glory to God just as Esther did.

But discretion only went so far and eventually she had to also call upon her courage. This seems to be outside Esther's comfort zone. The first time Mordecai asks her to go to the king she responds, *"All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that for any man or woman who comes to the king to the inner court who is not summoned, he has but one law, that he be put to death, unless the king holds out to him the golden scepter so that he may live. And I have not been summoned to come to the king for these thirty days."* Esther 4:11. Again she listens to Morde-

cai and trusts God. Because of the seriousness of the situation and the courage she needs to carry out her mission, Esther asks Mordecai to *"Go, assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa, and fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens also will fast in the same way. And thus I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish."* Esther 4:16. God can help us summon the courage to do terrifying things.

Now, Esther is prepared to summon her courage and appear before King Ahasuerus. God answers her prayers and she is spared. Once Esther has an audience with the king, she again relies on her tact and restraint to find the right time to reveal Haman's plot against the Jews. Haman's plot must have been at the forefront of Esther's mind all through the first banquet and the second banquet – remember Haman is sitting at her table. However, she waits until the appropriate time to reveal Haman's plot and the Jews are rescued. How many times do we have important things to discuss with our spouse, our boss, our fellow Christians and because of our emotions and the seriousness of our message, we choose the wrong time or place to share our thoughts? Pray God helps us not only with the proper words to say, but also with the discernment to

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choose the right time and place.

Hopefully, we can see from Esther the value of a discerning spirit and a courageous heart. In a variety of difficult situations, she chose to honor God by allowing His will to be done in her life. We know that because of her courageous choices the Jews were saved from annihilation. The exiles went on to rebuild the walls, as well as the whole city of Jerusalem so all would be in readiness for the coming Messiah. Mordecai aptly summed up Esther's choices, *"For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place and you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?"* Esther 4:14.



Mary

Ron Gray

The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary." Lk. 1:26-27. Mary was a relative of Elizabeth, the mother of John (the Baptist). These are a few details about Mary that are given to us in scripture. The genealogy given in Luke 3:23-38 (from Adam,

through David, to Jesus), is widely believed to be Mary's family line, while Matthew 1:1-17 (from Abraham, through David, to Jesus) lists Joseph's family line.

Why was Mary chosen? There were probably hundreds of maidens who were descents of King David who were able to fulfill the prophecy of Christ's lineage. Why was she outstanding? She wasn't famous or exceptionally beautiful, in man's eyes. Why then did the angel, *"Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God"* Lk. 1:19 visit her? Mary must have been wondering the same thing, since *"she was troubled at his saying and considered what manner of greeting that this was."* Lk. 1:29. God had no question about the matter. *"For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."* 1 Sam. 16:7b. The Lord God knew Mary's heart and knew it well. God knew that Mary would choose to honor Him. Notice in the text of Luke 1:26-38, only one question is asked and that question was asked by Mary. *"How can this be, since I do not know a man?"* God did not have to ask Mary to perform the most unique task in the history of mankind! He knew her answer before she spoke the beautiful words of verse 38, *"Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word."*

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Chosen by God to be the mother of His Son, Mary was truly honored. Even she knew that, *"henceforth, all generations will call me blessed."* Lk. 1:48b. She was the mother of the Savior of the world, the perfect Son who showed His love and devotion to God the Father and to His mother even in His dying moments. (Jn. 19:25-27) By choosing to let God's will be done in her life, she secured for herself this truly unique role.

When Mary told Gabriel, *"Let it be to me according to your word,"* she confirmed her role as a servant of God. She embraced the blessings and accepted the sacrifices that are woven together in the fabric of His service. Simeon prophesied while holding the child and he also told Mary, *"a sword will pierce through your soul also."* Lk. 2:35.

Consider some of the trials, heartaches, and fears that may have crossed Mary's path:

Unwed pregnancy would shame Joseph and the family.

Herod's a death sentence for baby Jesus.

Her Son would be *"despised and rejected by men. A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."* Isa. 53:3

Mary and Joseph "lost" their 12 year old Son of God for three days! (Lk. 2:41-52)

Jesus was *"one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin."*

Heb. 4:15. Did Mary fear that she might not be fully able to keep Him from temptation and failure?

She witnessed cruelty and hatred toward Jesus.

She was helpless at His trial, beating, and crucifixion.

She watched as He suffered for hours on the cross.

She witnessed the death of her dear child.

Mary lived her life in quiet service unto the Lord. She accepted the blessings that God bestowed on her without boasting. *"But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart."* Lk. 2:19. She suffered much as the mother of Jesus and probably shed many tears over her dear Son. She and her other children remained faithful even after Christ returned to Heaven.

Mary is an example of an ordinary person who did extraordinary things by faith in God Almighty. Because she was not afraid (Lk.1:30), the offer of salvation has come to all men through Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12). *"For with God nothing will be impossible."* Lk. 1:37. We have opportu-

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nity to serve God in our time just as Mary did in her day. She did not refuse or hold back and neither should we. In Luke 1:46-55, she tells us in her own words how she feels and addresses us in verse 50:

46. And Mary said: My soul magnifies the Lord.

47. And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.

48. For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; for behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed.

49. For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name.

50. And His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation unto generation.”



Philip

Craig Sweet

In Acts 6, we read of a situation where some of the widows' needs were not being addressed. The apostles gathered the congregation and they selected seven men of good reputation. Most people consider these men to be the first deacons who were appointed for a specific service need. Among those who were selected from the membership

was a man named Philip. This Philip was not one of the apostles, but a devout Christian who had a heart ready to serve the Lord and those in need. It is implied that the task he was requested to do was completed successfully. He then found himself in a situation where he had to make a decision. His decision was not whether to serve the Lord, but rather how best to serve the Lord. His heart pulled him to teach the gospel.

We next read of Philip in Acts 8:4 where he has decided to go preach God's word. Philip was bold and unafraid as he headed down to the city of Samaria (a place which was previously forbidden to go to by Jesus in Matt 10:5). Philip must have been an effective evangelist in Samaria for he had significant success healing the sick and convincing people of their need for Christ. He was persuasive to the point they were being baptized and rejoicing with a loud voice. During this effort, he met a man named Simon (a magician) who was also persuasive with his magic for he was astonishing people with what he could do. Philip was even successful converting Simon since Simon could tell what Philip was offering was not some sort of magic, but a demonstration of power directly from God.

The word spread quickly that the Gentiles in Samaria had received the gospel

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and the Lord was gaining souls due to Philip's efforts. Simon was traveling with Philip when Peter and John also come down from Jerusalem. As Simon was watching the power of the Apostles in awe, he saw an opportunity to capitalize on this power. Simon's faith was now being tested to see if he was following Christ for the right purpose. He asks Peter for the power in exchange for money. Of course, Peter chastises him because of the desire of Simon's heart was not to help people, but for selfish motives. The significant conclusion is that Peter's rebuke stirred Simon's heart unto repentance. Isn't that what we want today?

When Peter, John and Philip completed their work in Samaria, we are told in Acts 8:25 that as they were heading back to Jerusalem, God provided another opportunity for Philip to use his evangelistic skills. An angel appears to Philip and sends him down the road from Jerusalem to Gaza. Note that Philip did not challenge the angel, but did exactly as he was told to do. Philip was called and he chose to go without any question.

Philip did not know exactly what God had in mind, but it wasn't long before he found an Ethiopian on the road sitting in his chariot. It is interesting that sometimes things happen for reasons we don't understand, however if we are patient, God reveals His intentions in His time. It is obvious that God's hand was in

this opportunity for Philip to preach the gospel to an Ethiopian (Acts 8:25).

The first thing Philip did before he talked with this Ethiopian was to listen. Hearing him read from the prophet Isaiah, he knew how to approach this man. He then asked a question, *"Do you understand what you are reading?"* Acts 8:30. He did not force himself into the situation, but asked a question in order to put the Ethiopian at ease. In order to teach, it is essential to obtain some common ground to build a relationship. Once the common ground was established, an invitation occurred. Once invited, he seized the opportunity to teach. This was not a difficult discussion; Philip just led him to the place where the conclusion developed by the Ethiopian made it obvious that he needed to be baptized. Without hesitation, he took advantage of the opportunity and watched another soul rejoice in the Lord. The result of his efforts was that another soul was saved. How often do we overlook opportunities to teach God's word? We often will be given that opportunity if we just look for it. Philip is a great example of someone who not only looked for opportunities, but took advantage of them once he found them.

Once Philip completed this task, God was not finished with him. God had

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more work for him to do because just as quickly as he completed this task, he was snatched away for his next assignment in Azotus (Acts 8:39-40). Are we prepared to go and teach when God calls? Will we go without question and do God's will? Are we willing to be patient to see what God has in store for our life? Are we looking for opportunities to teach? Philip is a great example of what one person can do for the Lord because he chose to let God have His way with in his life. Philip chose to teach God's word and used his talents to the honor and glory of God.



Timothy

Mike Stapleton

Timothy is a key character in the Holy Scriptures. Unlike many other well-known characters of the Bible, we do not have any specific words spoken by Timothy and only really have small snippets of information about him. However, we have a wealth of information that provides implications as to the great character of Timothy and indicate the important work to which he was entrusted. This information comes from the writings of Paul – two letters of which were written directly to this fellow worker in the gospel (Rom 16:21). Timo-

thy, despite often appearing to fall underneath the shadow of Paul, was a pivotal, informal leader within the church. He consciously chose to dedicate himself to the gospel and labored diligently in the vineyard of the Lord.

Timothy's work as a leader and guide to the early church began in his early life with his childhood knowledge of the sacred writings (2 Tim. 3:15). Paul acknowledged Timothy's strong faith and attributed it in part to the godly influence of his grandmother Lois and mother Eunice (2 Tim. 1:5). It is clear from this evidence that Timothy's faith began at a young age. Despite having a father who was a Greek and most likely did not contribute to his faith in God (Acts 16:1) he still gained his faith from the influence of two faithful Jewish women. There are two lessons that can be garnered from this part of Timothy's life. First, the invaluable role a mother and grandmother can play in raising their children to fear and know the Lord, despite the lack of involvement of their father (Prov. 22:6). Second, is the vital role that parents play in teaching successive generations. This is a responsibility that is often neglected and pushed solely onto the church. The most influential teachers of our youth are parents and grandparents and we should never shirk this responsibility. The church is there to help parents, but

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never to replace them in this role.

Timothy understood that an effective leader and worker in the church requires no place of prominence. A true servant heart does not seek for its own glory but the glory of the Father. Timothy willingly served under the shadow of Paul. He was Paul's "son in the faith" (Phil 2:22) and traveled most obediently on behalf of Paul to strengthen the churches of the Lord. Are we willing to take up the second position as did Timothy? Are we willing to work in someone else's shadow? To be effective servants of God, it requires us to have this kind of humility and a willingness to place our service to the Lord above our own glory.

Timothy had a genuine concern for fellow Christians. Paul even commends Timothy's interest in the welfare of others to the church at Philippi and expressed the great trust he placed in Timothy as a kindred spirit (Phil. 2:19-24). Timothy's concern is contrasted with those that seek after their own interests instead of the desires of Jesus (v. 21). This is a characteristic that is often elusive for us. Our lives are dominated by the pursuit of selfish desires for ourselves and to do what we can to get ourselves personally ahead in life. This selfish desire is probably the greatest obstacle standing between service to the Lord and us. Until we learn to place others before ourselves and truly love others,

we will forever be hindered in our love for God (1 John 4:20). Our selfish desires place us in situations where we do not make the effort to get to know those of the faith and band together as a true family. Our selfish desires impede our ability to truly be effective in showing the glory and love of God to those around us.

Another key aspect of Timothy is the fact that he was a young man. Even though he was a youth, he proved to be an effectual worker and leader in the kingdom. He was even counseled by Paul to "*let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe.*" 1 Tim. 4:12. Many of the young oftentimes feel like they are inadequate to handle the work of the kingdom and find themselves using this as a crux for inaction. However, Timothy, chose not to let his youth be an excuse, nor did he allow others to look negatively upon his youth and deny the words that he carried from God. Notice that the correct path for this youth was to be an example of the faith and through diligence present to himself as workmen approved to God and handling accurately the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15). Timothy chose the better part. Carrying on the tradition of his mother and grandmother, the choices he made brought honor and glory to God.



In My Life, Lord, Be Glorified
Bob Kilpatrick

In my life, Lord, be glorified, be glorified
In my life, Lord, be glorified today
In my song, Lord, be glorified, be glorified
In my song, Lord, be glorified today



Psalms 79:9-13

Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of Thy name;
and deliver us, and forgive our sins, for Thy name's sake.

Why should the nations say, "Where is their God?" Let
there be known among the nations in our sight, vengeance
for the blood of Thy servants, which has been shed.

Let the groaning of the prisoner come before Thee; according to
the greatness of Thy power preserve those who are doomed to die.

And return to our neighbors sevenfold into their bosom the reproach with
which they have reproached Thee, O Lord.

So we Thy people and the sheep of Thy pasture will give thanks to Thee forever;
to all generations we will tell of Thy praise.

