



# CHARACTERS

SEVEN-DAY DEVOTIONAL

**ALTHOUGH THE PEOPLE IN THE BIBLE  
LIVED THOUSANDS OF YEARS AGO,  
WE STILL HAVE MUCH IN COMMON.**

And we can obtain many of the lessons they learned without suffering the hardships they endured. We can learn more about the Author of their stories.

The content for the following devotions was adapted from the new seven-volume *Characters* Bible study. This year-long series offers a fresh way of looking at God's Word through the lens of its people. As we learn about them, what will they teach us about God and ourselves?

**[LifeWay.com/Characters](http://LifeWay.com/Characters)**

# ABRAHAM

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You'd be hard-pressed to find someone (other than Jesus) who figures more prominently in the Bible than Abraham. His story is referred to frequently by the biblical writers, and even by Jesus Himself.

But in the beginning, Abraham is just Abram, an aging and childless man who heard a simple call from God to go. Abram obeyed, and his story began as he followed God in faith, waiting for the fulfillment of the promises given to him. These promises frame the entire biblical story, for from Abram would come the nation of God's chosen people, the Israelites. And in the New Testament, we find that Abraham's fatherhood extends beyond blood to all those who believe in the same way that he did.

God told Abram to go, and that is what Abram did. Abram had a clear word from the Lord. God wanted him to leave the land where he lived and go to a new land. Abram was faced with the decision of obedience or disobedience.

This was a significant decision, and God knew it. To obey meant leaving everything he knew behind to pursue God's promise. If Abram was willing to act in faith, then he would be the father of a great nation. He would be blessed, and his name would be made great. And in the end, every nation on the earth would be blessed through him.

God chooses to use ordinary people who put their full faith in Him as conduits of His blessing to the ends of the earth. Those great blessings begin with people willing to take God at His Word and step out in faith.

In Abram's case, this promise was fulfilled in the person of Jesus. Through Jesus—born of the lineage of Abraham—people of every tongue and tribe can be blessed with the greatest gift, eternal life. When we turn from our sin and trust in Jesus we are grafted into the line of Abraham by faith. The blessing God promised Abraham belongs to us in Christ. And it all begins with a step of obedience, a willingness to trust Christ and respond to His call.

# RUTH

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Sometimes life's situations make us feel helpless and hopeless. Abandoned children deal with countless difficulties as they face vast need from a young age. Widows spend long hours alone facing uncertain futures. Sudden illness interrupts an otherwise normal life.

The surprise twists of life can make us wonder if unexpected crises and catastrophes can derail God's plans and purposes for our lives. We wonder if God is present with us or question if there is a purpose in our pain. This is what happened to Ruth.

In the opening verses of the book, we learn of a man named Elimelech who was moved by a famine to take his family away from the promised land and into the land of Israel's sworn enemies, the Moabites.

Quickly, the narrator reveals, Elimelech died (see v. 3). His two sons married Moabite women (Ruth and Orpah). Ten years later, the sons died as well (see vv. 4-5). Naomi was widowed in a foreign land without the support of a husband or sons. The Old Testament world offered little to no support for widows.

Here, Ruth made a shocking decision. She could have remained in Moab and found another husband. Instead, the Scripture tells us she "clung" to Naomi (v. 14). Ruth had bonded with Naomi to the point that she refused to leave, even though staying with Naomi consigned Ruth to a widow's fate. Ruth made a lifelong promise to Naomi, insisting she would follow Naomi and live wherever Naomi lived. Ruth vowed that Naomi's people would become her people. The relationship between the two of them could come to an end by one means only—death.

Ruth also declared her allegiance to Naomi's God. Ruth was willing to set aside her Moabite identity to join herself to Naomi and her God. In declaring her commitment to Naomi and to the Lord, Ruth was willing to give up everything. Ruth exemplified a living and vibrant faith, developed through trials. Ruth was faithful to her family and her God, and God was overwhelmingly faithful to her.

# JOSIAH

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How much of an impact do the previous generations have on our own?

The story of Josiah is a testimony to the Lord's ability to work in and through those who acknowledge Him as the one true God, even if their parents and grandparents before them did not. Josiah's life is set before us as an example of the dynamic impact the choice to follow God can make.

Josiah's father and grandfather were young, evil kings. When Josiah became king at the age of eight, idol worship saturated Israel. In spite of his family legacy, Josiah chose to seek the Lord as David had—to follow the Lord and His Word fully, regardless of what others did.

In the process of cleaning and repairing the temple, Hilkiah the high priest found a copy of the Book of the Law [2 Chron. 34:14]. As the prophet read the Book of the Law to the king, Josiah was struck by the seriousness of being in a covenant relationship with the God of Israel. Josiah realized that Judah was due the wrath of God for their unfaithfulness.

Josiah tore his robes in anguish over the evident sin of the people of Judah. His first action was to send his most trusted men to inquire of the Lord for him and for those in Israel and Judah. He wanted to know what the Lord would say at this time in the life of the nation. Josiah knew the absolute necessity of obeying the Word of God, and he was seeking to do that with all his heart.

Josiah had a tender heart, sensitive to what the Lord said. When he heard of the Lord's judgment against Judah, he immediately humbled himself before the Lord. He wept and cried out to the Lord in prayer. Because of that, Josiah would die in peace without seeing the desolation the Lord would bring on Judah and its inhabitants.

He made a personal covenant to follow the Lord and His Word. The people followed his lead and entered into that covenant. The Word of God made an impact not only on Josiah but on the nation as well. Josiah's life is a testimony to the impact one faithful person can have.

# MALACHI

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Have you ever been on the receiving end of a message that was both good and bad news? If so, Malachi's story will resonate with you. Malachi was a messenger of God tasked with the mission of communicating to the people of Israel. Years had passed since God had delivered His people to the Promised Land after they'd spent seven decades in Babylonian captivity. Sadly, after God restored them, the people returned to their old ways. Corrupt priests were sinning against God and leading their flock astray. Jews were showing blatant contempt against God by entering into pagan marriages, offering false worship, and withholding tithes. Infidelity and divorce were rampant, and there was a general attitude of arrogance demonstrating the people's hearts had grown cold to God. This was all bad news.

Malachi didn't gloss over the truth but instead called out the people's sins. He warned the people of Israel to repent and prepare for the coming Messiah. Israel had been unfaithful, and the situation was dire. But Malachi also communicated words of hope—if the people would turn from their sin they could be forgiven and restored to God.

Malachi's message is just as relevant to modern-day Christians as it was to his original audience. Every child of God will be confronted with an ongoing struggle with sin. Malachi was faithful to point out that believers must repent because blatant and habitual sin is not an acceptable lifestyle for the child of God. But when we do get off track, if we turn from our sin, God is faithful to forgive and restore us to fellowship.

Malachi's message is both bad and good news. The bad news is, the people of God are prone to wander and sin against God. Sin is something we'll have to deal with as long as we live on this planet. The good news is that because of the gospel of Jesus Christ; we don't have to live as enemies cut off from God. Because of Jesus Christ, we can receive forgiveness, live in freedom from sin, and enjoy the relationship with God He intends for us to have.

# JESUS

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The identity of Jesus Christ has stirred more debate than any other name in world history. For some, Jesus is worshipped as the Son of God, the long-awaited Messiah, and the Savior of the world. For others, Jesus' name is used in anger and irreverently slides off the tongue like a curse word. Same name—but very different responses. So, it begs the question; who is Jesus Christ? The answers to that question are found in the Scriptures.

In no other religious writings do we find specific predictive prophecies like we find in the Bible. The writings of Buddha, Confucius, Mohammed, or Lao-Tse are void of such content. Yet in Scripture, there are well over two thousand prophecies, most of which have already been fulfilled, and many of those relate to Jesus as Messiah.

While scholarly opinions vary, it is safe to say that more than 500 verses in the Old Testament have direct personal messianic foretelling, including more than 60 direct predictions of Jesus' coming. Few will dispute that the Pentateuch alone has at least six direct Messianic predictions: Genesis 3:15; 9:27; 12:2-3; 49:8-12; Numbers 24:15-19; and Deuteronomy 18:15-18.

No wonder Jesus rebuked Cleopas and another unnamed disciple as they walked along the road to Emmaus on that first Easter Sunday: “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Wasn't it necessary for the Messiah to suffer these things and enter into his glory?’ Then beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted for them the things concerning himself in all the Scriptures” (Luke 24:25-27).

People may arrive at various conclusions about who Jesus is, but Scripture clearly identifies Him as the Messiah. The good news of the gospel is that Jesus is who He says He is. And because of Christ's work on the cross, those who believe and follow Him as Lord, can be reconciled with the Father, and experience eternal life (John 14:6).

# PHILIP

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What does it mean to be spiritually mature? It is easy to identify someone who is physically mature and possibly emotionally mature, but how do you know if someone is spiritually mature?

Spiritual maturity results from a full knowledge of the biblical teaching about Jesus and salvation and from correct application of this teaching to everyday life. One can say that she is a mature Christian to the degree that she knows and lives by biblical truth. When we first come to know Jesus as our Savior, we are “babies in Christ.” We drink spiritual milk and learn spiritual basics, but we are expected to move on to more solid spiritual food in time. (See 1 Cor. 3:1-2.) Maturity is a natural part of our spiritual lives. If we aren’t growing, something is wrong.

Philip, one of Jesus’ disciples, showed signs of consistent growth over the course of his life. Philip “grew up” in Jesus and changed for the better. At first, Philip’s understanding of who Jesus was lacked clarity and insight into Jesus’ true self. As Philip spent three years with Jesus and his fellow apostles, Philip’s maturity grew.

Philip is identified as being among the twelve apostles in the all three Synoptic Gospels and Acts (Matt. 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:14; Acts 1:13). Only John’s Gospel provides several longer accounts of Philip’s activities. Jesus intentionally found Philip and called him to follow as a disciple. Philip responded by immediately inviting his friend Nathanael (also known as Bartholomew) to “come and see” Jesus the Messiah (John 1:43-46).

Philip had a front-row seat to Jesus’ ministry, and as a result of Jesus’ teaching and presence in his life, Philip grew into a mature man of God.

We too, can experience growth and maturity as we seek God through Bible study, worship, prayer, and engaging spiritual disciplines. Like Philip, we have the ability to grow and mature in faith.



# BARNABAS

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An encouraging word from someone we respect has the ability to keep us going when we are tempted to quit. Barnabas, which means “Son of Encouragement,” is a man whose quiet influence impacted the early church in incalculable ways.

After the apostle Paul’s conversion, other Christians were reluctant to welcome Paul into the early church because of his history of persecuting Christians. They feared it was a trap, and Paul was trying to lure believers into a vulnerable place where they could be persecuted. It was Barnabas who first met with Paul and convinced the other believers his conversion was authentic. Without Barnabas, Paul would’ve had a difficult time convincing his fellow believers that he had become a Christ-follower.

Later, Barnabas invited Mark to join him and Paul as they traveled on their first missionary trip to Antioch. Mark agreed to travel with them but returned home early. Because of this, Paul considered him a deserter and didn’t want Mark to travel with them on other missionary trips, but Barnabas thought Mark should get another chance. As a result of the disagreement, Paul and Barnabas went separate ways. Paul traveled with Silas, and Barnabas stayed with Mark. Although the conflict was unfortunate, it doubled the area they would cover with the gospel.

Barnabas’s patience with Mark and his continued presence in his life served as a tremendous encouragement for Mark’s future ministry. Mark needed time to mature and grow in his ministry, and Barnabas was able to offer Mark the mentorship he needed. Paul and Mark would later mend their relationship and serve together. Mark would go on to make his own significant contributions as he served the kingdom of God.

We all need someone like Barnabas to come alongside us and offer encouragement, especially when things aren’t going well. We may not realize it, but we can do people an enormous amount of good just by being a friend who is willing to offer a kind word and stick around when others are ready to stop believing.

