



Those who Changed History Through Involvement

Matthew 25:35

**For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty,
and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and
you invited me into your home.**

Compiled By Dr. Harold Bollinger

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Introduction:

It is sometimes easier not to get involved.

Genesis 14:14-16

And when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained servants, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them unto Dan.

And he divided himself against them, he and his servants, by night, and smote them, and pursued them unto Hobah, which is on the left hand of Damascus. [16] And he brought back all the goods, and also brought again his brother Lot, and his goods, and the women also, and the people.

Lot's greedy desire for the best of everything led him into sinful surroundings. His burning desire for possessions and success cost him his freedom and enjoyment. As a captive to Kedorlaomer, he faced torture, slavery, or death. In much the same way, we can be enticed into doing things or going places we shouldn't. The prosperity we long for is captivating; it can both entice us and enslave us if our motives are not in line with God's desires.

These incidents portray two of Abram's characteristics: (1) He had courage that came from God. Facing a powerful foe, he attacked. (2) He was prepared. He had taken time to train his men for a potential conflict.

We never know when we will be called upon to complete difficult tasks. Like Abram, we should prepare for those times and take courage from God when they come.

When Abram learned that Lot was a prisoner, he immediately tried to rescue his nephew. It is easier and safer not to become involved. But with Lot in serious trouble, Abram acted at once. Sometimes we must get involved in a messy or painful situation in order to help others. We should be willing to act immediately when others need our help.

Bible characters who got involved in making a difference:

Abel

Abel was the second child born into the world, but the first one to obey God. All we know about this man is that his parents were Adam and Eve, he was a shepherd, he presented pleasing sacrifices to God, and his short life was ended at the hands of his jealous older brother, Cain.

The Bible doesn't tell us why God liked Abel's gift and disliked Cain's, but both Cain and Abel knew what God expected. Only Abel obeyed. Throughout history, Abel is remembered for his obedience and faith (Hebrews 11:4), and he is called "righteous" (Matthew 23:35).

Hebrews 11:4

By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaks.

Cain and Abel were Adam and Eve's first two sons. Abel offered a sacrifice that pleased God, while Cain's sacrifice was unacceptable. See Abel's Profile for more information. Also see Cain's Profile. Abel's sacrifice (an animal substitute) was more acceptable to God, both because it was a blood sacrifice and, most important, because of Abel's attitude when he offered it.

Matthew 23:35

That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.

In Jesus' world, as in ours, people looked for the outward sign of authority—education, title, position, connections. But Jesus' authority came from who he was, not from any outward and superficial trappings.

As followers of Christ, God has given us authority—we can confidently speak and act on his behalf because he has authorized us. Are you exercising your authority?

The Bible is filled with God's general guidelines and expectations for our lives. It is also filled with more specific directions. Like Abel, we must obey regardless of the cost and trust God to make things right.

Abel was the first member of the Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11.

He was the first shepherd.

Able was the first martyr for truth (Matthew 23:35)

As a result, you will become guilty of murdering all the godly people from righteous Abel to Zechariah son of Barachiah, whom you murdered in the Temple between the altar and the sanctuary.

Able sets an example of truth for all to follow.

Noah

The story of Noah's life involves not one, but two great and tragic floods. The world in Noah's day was flooded with evil.

The number of those who remembered the God of creation, perfection, and love had dwindled to one. Of God's people, only Noah was left.

God's response to the severe situation was a 120-year-long last chance, during which he had Noah build a graphic illustration of the message of his life.

Nothing like a huge boat on dry land to make a point! For Noah, obedience meant a long-term commitment to a project.

Many of us have trouble sticking to any project, whether or not it is directed by God. It is interesting that the length of Noah's obedience was greater than the lifespan of people today.

The only comparable long-term project is our very lives. But perhaps this is one great challenge Noah's life gives us—to live, in acceptance of God's grace, an entire lifetime of obedience and gratitude.

Noah's strengths and accomplishments:

Noah was the only follower of God left in his generation.

Noah was the second father of the human race.

Noah was a man of patience, consistency, and obedience.

Noah was the first major shipbuilder.

We must remember that God is faithful to those who obey him.

God does not always protect us from trouble, but cares for us in spite of trouble.

Obedience is a long-term commitment to God.

A man may be faithful, but his sinful nature always travels with him

Abraham

We all know that there are consequences to any action we take. What we do can set into motion a series of events that may continue long after we're gone.

Unfortunately, when we are making a decision most of us think only of the immediate consequences. These are often misleading because they are short-lived.

Abraham had a choice to make. His decision was between setting out with his family and belongings for parts unknown or staying right where he was.

He had to decide between the security of what he already had and the uncertainty of traveling under God's direction. All he had to go on was God's promise to guide and bless him.

Abraham could hardly have been expected to visualize how much of the future was resting on his decision of whether to go or stay, but his obedience affected the history of the world.

His decision to follow God set into motion the development of the nation that God would eventually use as his own when he visited earth himself. When Jesus Christ came to earth, God's promise was fulfilled; through Abraham the entire world was blessed.

You probably don't know the long-term effects of most decisions you make. But shouldn't the fact that there will be long-term results cause you to think carefully and seek God's guidance as you make choices and take action today?

Abraham shows great strength in that:

- His faith pleased God

He became the founder of the Jewish nation.

Abraham was respected by others and was courageous in defending his family at any cost.

Abraham was not only a caring father to his own family, but practiced hospitality to others.

Abraham was a successful and wealthy rancher.

He usually avoided conflicts, but when they were unavoidable, he allowed his opponent to set the rules for settling the dispute.

We have learned from Abraham's life that:

- God desires dependence, trust, and faith in him—not faith in our ability to please him
- God's plan from the beginning has been to make himself known to all people.

Become involved and you will become useful to the kingdom of God.

Sarah

There probably isn't anything harder to do than wait, whether we are expecting something good, something bad, or an unknown.

One way we often cope with a long wait (or even a short one) is to begin helping God get his plan into action. Sarah tried this approach.

She was too old to expect to have a child of her own, so she thought God must have something else in mind. From Sarah's limited point of view this could only be to give Abraham a son through another woman—a common practice in her day. The plan seemed harmless enough.

Abraham would sleep with Sarah's maidservant, who would then give birth to a child. Sarah would take the child as her own. The plan worked beautifully—at first. But as you read about the events that followed, you will be struck by how often Sarah must have regretted the day she decided to push God's timetable ahead.

Another way we cope with a long wait is to gradually conclude that what we're waiting for is never going to happen.

Sarah waited 90 years for a baby! When God told her she would finally have one of her own, she laughed, not so much from a lack of faith in what God could do, but from doubt about what he could do *through her*.

When confronted about her laughter, she lied—as she had seen her husband do from time to time. She probably didn't want her true feelings to be known.

What parts of your life seem to be on hold right now? Do you understand that this may be part of God's plan for you?

The Bible has more than enough clear direction to keep us busy while we're waiting for some particular part of life to move ahead.

Strengths and accomplishments of Sarah

Sarah was intensely loyal to her own child.

She became the mother of a nation and an ancestor of Jesus.

She was a woman of faith, the first woman listed in the Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11.

From Sarah's life, we learn that:

- God responds to faith even in the midst of failure.
- God is not bound by what usually happens; he can stretch the limits and cause unheard-of events to occur.

Joseph

As a youngster, Joseph was overconfident. His natural self-assurance, increased by being Jacob's favorite son and by knowing of God's designs on his life, was unbearable to his ten older brothers, who eventually conspired against him.

But this self-assurance, molded by pain and combined with a personal knowledge of God, allowed him to survive and prosper where most would have failed.

He added quiet wisdom to his confidence and won the hearts of everyone he met—Potiphar, the warden, other prisoners, the king, and after many years, even those ten brothers.

Perhaps you can identify with one or more of these hardships Joseph experienced.

He was betrayed and deserted by his family, exposed to sexual temptation, and punished for doing the right thing.

He endured a long imprisonment and was forgotten by those he helped.

As you read his story, note what Joseph did in each case.

His positive response transformed each setback into a step forward.

He didn't spend much time asking "Why?" His approach was "What shall I do now?"

Those who met Joseph were aware that wherever he went and whatever he did, God was with him.

When you're facing a setback, the beginning of a Joseph-like attitude is to acknowledge that God is with you. There is nothing like his presence to shed new light on a dark situation.

Strengths and accomplishments of Joseph in that he:

Rose in power from slave to ruler of Egypt.

He was known for his personal integrity.

He was a man of spiritual sensitivity.

He prepared a nation to survive a famine.

We learn from Joseph's life that:

That whatever matters is not so much the events or circumstances of life, but your response to them.

With God's help, any situation can be used for good, even when others intend it for evil.

Moses

Some people can't stay out of trouble. When conflict breaks out, they always manage to be nearby. Reaction is their favorite action.

This was Moses. He seemed drawn to what needed to be righted. Throughout his life, he was at his finest and his worst responding to the conflicts around him.

Even the burning bush experience was an illustration of his character.

Having spotted the fire and seen that the bush did not burn, he had to investigate. Whether jumping into a fight to defend a Hebrew slave or trying to referee a struggle between two kinsmen, when Moses saw conflict, he reacted.

Over the years, however, an amazing thing happened to Moses' character.

He didn't stop reacting, but rather learned to react correctly.

The kaleidoscopic action of each day of leading two million people in the desert was more than enough challenge for Moses' reacting ability.

Much of the time he served as a buffer between God and the people. At one moment he had to respond to God's anger at the people's stubbornness and forgetfulness.

At another moment he had to react to the people's bickering and complaining. At still another moment he had to react to their unjustified attacks on his character.

Leadership often involves reaction. If we want to react with instincts consistent with God's will, we must develop habits of obedience to God.

Consistent obedience to God is best developed in times of less stress. Then when stress comes, our natural reaction will be to obey God.

In our age of lowering moral standards, we find it almost impossible to believe that God would punish Moses for the one time he disobeyed outright. What we fail to see, however, is that God did not reject Moses;

Moses simply disqualified himself to enter the Promised Land. Personal greatness does not make a person immune to error or its consequences.

In Moses we see an outstanding personality shaped by God. But we must not misunderstand what God did.

He did not change who or what Moses was; he did not give Moses new abilities and strengths. Instead, he took Moses' characteristics and molded them until they were suited to his purposes.

Does knowing this make a difference in your understanding of God's purpose in your life?

He is trying to take what he created in the first place and use it for its intended purposes.

The next time you talk with God, don't ask, "What should I change into?" but "How should I use my own abilities and strengths to do your will?"

We see the strengths and accomplishment of Moses in that:

Egyptian education and desert training made him a great leader.

He was the greatest Jewish leader and set the exodus in motion.

He was the prophet and lawgiver in giving the record of the Ten Commandments.

He was the author of the first five books in the Bible.

From Moses life, we learn that:

- God prepares, then uses. His timetable is life-sized.
- God does his greatest work through frail people.

Rahab

Rahab was a prostitute in the city of Jerusalem. As a prostitute, she lived on the edge of society, one stop short of rejection.

Her house, built right into the city wall, provided both lodging and favors to travelers. It was a natural place for the Israelite spies to stay, as they would be mistaken for Rahab's customers.

Stories about the Israelites had been circulating for some time, but now it was evident that the Israelites were about to invade.

Living on the wall, Rahab felt especially vulnerable. Yet while she shared the general mood of fear with the rest of Jericho's population, she alone turned to the Lord for her salvation.

Her faith gave her the courage to hide the spies and lie to the authorities.

Rahab knew her position was dangerous; she could have been killed if she were caught harboring the Israelites.

Rahab took the risk, however, because she sensed that the Israelites relied on a God worth trusting. And God rewarded Rahab by promising safety for her and her family.

God works through people—like Rahab—whom we are inclined to reject.

God remembers her because of her faith, not her profession.

If at times you feel like a failure, remember that Rahab rose above her situation through her trust in God. You can do the same!

Rahab showed strength in that:

She was relative of Boaz, and thus an ancestor of David and Jesus.

She was one of only two women listed in the Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11.

She was resourceful, willing to help others at great cost to herself.

She did not let fear affect her faith in God's ability to deliver.

Ruth and Naomi

The stories of several people in the Bible are woven together so closely that they are almost inseparable. We know more about their relationship than we know about them as individuals.

In an age that worships individualism, their stories become helpful models of good relationships. Naomi and Ruth are beautiful examples of this blending of lives.

Their cultures, family backgrounds, and ages were very different. As mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, they probably had as many opportunities for tension as for tenderness. And yet they were bound to each other.

They shared deep sorrow, great affection for each other, and an overriding commitment to the God of Israel. And yet as much as they depended on each other, they also gave each other freedom in their commitment to one another.

Naomi was willing to let Ruth return to her family. Ruth was willing to leave her homeland to go to Israel. Naomi even helped arrange Ruth's marriage to Boaz although it would change their relationship.

God was at the center of their intimate communication. Ruth came to know the God of Israel through Naomi. The older woman allowed Ruth to see, hear, and feel all the joy and anguish of her relationship to God.

How often do you feel that your thoughts and questions about God should be left out of a close relationship? How often do you share your unedited thoughts about God with your spouse or friends? Sharing openly about our relationship with God can bring depth and intimacy to our relationships with others.

Strengths and accomplishments of Ruth and Naomi:

Their relationship was where the greatest bond was faith in God.

Their relationship was of strong mutual commitment.

Their relationship was one in which each person tried to do what was best for the Other.

God's living presence in a relationship overcomes differences that might otherwise create division and disharmony.

Nehemiah

God is in the business of working through his people to accomplish seemingly impossible tasks. God often shapes people with personality characteristics, experiences, and training that prepare them for his purpose, and usually the people have no idea what God has in store for them.

God prepared and positioned Nehemiah to accomplish one of the Bible's "impossible" tasks.

Nehemiah was a common man in a unique position. He was secure and successful as cupbearer to the Persian king Artaxerxes.

Nehemiah had little power, but he had great influence. He was trusted by the king. He was also a man of God, concerned about the fate of Jerusalem.

Seventy years earlier, Zerubbabel had managed to rebuild God's temple.

Thirteen years had passed since Ezra had returned to Jerusalem and helped the people with their spiritual needs. Now Nehemiah was needed.

Jerusalem's wall was still in ruins, and the news broke his heart. As he talked to God, a plan began to take form in Nehemiah's mind about his own role in the rebuilding of the city walls.

He willingly left the security of his home and job in Persia to follow God on an "impossible" mission. And the rest is history.

From beginning to end, Nehemiah prayed for God's help. He never hesitated to ask God to remember him, closing his autobiography with these words: "Remember me with favor, O my God."

Throughout the "impossible" task, Nehemiah displayed unusual leadership. The wall around Jerusalem was rebuilt in record time, despite resistance. Even Israel's enemies grudgingly and fearfully admitted that God was with these builders.

Not only that, but God worked through Nehemiah to bring about a spiritual awakening among the people of Judah.

You may not have Nehemiah's unique abilities or feel that you are in a position where you can do anything great for God, but there are two ways you can become useful to God.

First, be a person who *talks* to God. Welcome him into your thoughts and share yourself with him—your concerns, feelings, and dreams.

Second, be a person who *walks* with God. Put what you learn from his Word into action. God may have an “impossible” mission that he wants to do through you.

We see the strengths of Nehemiah as:

- He was a man of character, persistence, and prayer.
- He was a brilliant planner, organizer, and motivator.
- Under his leadership, the wall around Jerusalem was rebuilt in 52 days.
- As political leader, he led the nation to religious reform and spiritual awakening
- He was calm under opposition
- He was capable of being bluntly honest with his people when they were sinning.

Lessons from Nehemiah's life:

- The first step in any venture is to pray
- People under God's direction can accomplish impossible tasks
- There are two parts to real service for God: talking with him, and walking with him

Esther

We treasure security, even though we know that security in this life carries no guarantees—possessions can be destroyed, beauty fades, relationships can be broken, death is inevitable.

Real security, then, must be found beyond this life. Only when our security rests on God and his unchanging nature can we face the challenges that life is sure to bring our way.

Esther's beauty and character won Xerxes' heart, and he made her his queen.

Even in her favored position, however, she would risk her life by attempting to see the king when he had not requested her presence.

There was no guarantee that the king would even see her. Although she was queen, she was still not secure. But, cautiously and courageously, Esther decided to risk her life by approaching the king on behalf of her people.

She made her plans carefully. The Jews were asked to fast and pray with her before she went to the king. Then on the chosen day she went before him, and he *did* ask her to come forward and speak. But instead of issuing her request directly, she invited him and Haman to a banquet. He was astute enough to realize she had something on her mind, yet she conveyed the importance of the matter by insisting on a second banquet.

In the meantime, God was working behind the scenes. He caused Xerxes to read the historical records of the kingdom late one night, and the king discovered that Mordecai had once saved his life.

Xerxes lost no time in honoring Mordecai for that act. During the second banquet, Esther told the king of Haman's plot against the Jews, and Haman was doomed.

There is grim justice in Haman's death on the gallows he had built for Mordecai, and it seems fitting that the day on which the Jews were to be slaughtered became the day their enemies died. Esther's risk confirmed that God was the source of her security.

How much of your security lies in your possessions, position, or reputation?

God has not placed you in your present position for your own benefit. He put you there *to serve him*. As in Esther's case, this may involve risking your security. Are you willing to let God be your ultimate security?

The strengths and accomplishments of Esther is seen as:

- Her beauty and character won the heart of Persia's king.
- She combined courage with careful planning.
- She was open to advice and willing to act.
- She was more concerned for others than for her own security.

From the life of Esther, we learn that:

- Serving God often demands that we risk our own security.
- God has a purpose for the situations in which he places us.
- Courage, while often vital, does not replace careful planning.

Get involved in the needs of others.

⁷Matthew 25:34-40

Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

For I was an hungry, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungry and fed thee? Or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? Or naked, and clothed thee?

Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

This parable describes acts of mercy we all can do every day. These acts do not depend on wealth, ability, or intelligence; they are simple acts freely given and freely received.

We have no excuse to neglect those who have deep needs, and we cannot hand over this responsibility to the church or government. Jesus demands our personal involvement in caring for others' needs (Isaiah 58:7).

There has been much discussion about the identity of the "brothers." Some have said they are the Jews; others say they are all Christians; still others say they are suffering people everywhere. Such a debate is much like the lawyer's earlier question to Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29).

The point of this parable is not the *who*, but the *what*—the importance of serving where service is needed.

The focus of this parable is that we should love every person and serve anyone we can. Such love for others glorifies God by reflecting our love for him.

To ask Jesus to come into your heart please pray this Prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus, I believe you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. I ask you to forgive me of my sins and coming into my heart. I accept you as savior and will follow you as Lord. Amen.

References:

Holy Bible: King James Translation

Holy Bible: New Living Bible translation.

Additional comments and charts are taken from: *Life Application Study Bible*. Illinois: Tyndale House 2007. Print