



A Distant Trumpet

*Learn from
Adventures & Mistakes
of
Bible Characters*

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Table of Contents

Forward	3
1. Adam	4
2. Noah	6
3. Abraham	7
4. Isaac	8
5. Esau	10
6. Amalek	11
7. Jacob	13
8. Judah	15
9. Tamar	16
10. Perez	18
11. Boaz	19
12. David	21
13. Joab	22
14. Ammon	24
15. Absalom	26
16. Adonijah	28
17. Bathsheba	30
18. Solomon	32
19. Reuben	34
20. Aaron	35
21. Nadab & Abihu	36
22. Eleazar	37
23. Korah	38
24. Joshua	40
25. Saul	41
26. Jonathan	42

Forward

Many of the people in the Bible have exciting stories that can be traced through the Bible. As you view some of these individuals and their characteristics, you may be surprised what you discover!

You will learn about 26 Bible Characters, what they have accomplished, their character strengths and weaknesses, and any lessons we can learn from their lives. These people of the Bible profiles will help you better understanding how God interacts with his people. It will also assist you in applying God's truth to your life as you study the Bible.

Be blessed, as you identify with your chosen characters

List of Bible characters and their influence then and now

Adam

Lesson from life Genesis 2-3

Our sins have far greater implications than we may realize.

We can hardly imagine what it must have been like to be the first and only person on earth. It's one thing for us to be lonely; it was another for Adam, who had never known another human being.

He missed much that makes us who we are—he had no childhood, no parents, no family or friends. He had to learn to be human on his own. Fortunately, God didn't let him struggle too long before presenting him with an ideal companion and mate. Theirs was a complete, innocent, and open oneness, without a hint of shame.

One of Adam's first conversations with his delightful new companion must have been about the rules of the garden. Before God made Eve he had already given Adam complete freedom in the garden, with the responsibility to tend and care for it.

But one tree was off limits, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam would have told Eve all about this. She knew, when Satan approached her, which the tree's fruit was not to be eaten. However, she decided to eat the forbidden fruit. Then she offered some to Adam.

At that moment, the fate of creation was on the line. Sadly, Adam didn't pause to consider the consequences. He went ahead and ate.

In that moment of small rebellion something large, beautiful, and free was shattered.

God's perfect creation, man, was separated from God by his desire to act on his own. The effect on a plate glass window is the same whether a pebble or a boulder is hurled at it—the thousands of fragments can never be regathered.

Noah

Lesson from life

Great rewards come from obeying God. Genesis 6-9

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 God directs it.

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.

Abraham

Lessons from life

Faith alone makes one right in God's eyes. Gen. 11:26 –25 - 10

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?

Isaac

Lesson from life

Seeking peace brings true respect Genesis 21 – 35

A name carries great authority. It sets you apart. It triggers memories. The sound of it calls you to attention anywhere.

Many Bible names accomplished even more. They were often descriptions of important facts about one's past and hopes for the future. The choice of the name *Isaac*, "he laughs," for Abraham and Sarah's son must have created a variety of feelings in them each time it was spoken.

At times it must have recalled their shocked laughter at God's announcement that they would be parents in their old age. At other times, it must have brought back the joyful feelings of receiving their long-awaited answer to prayer for a child. Most important, it was a testimony to God's power in making his promise a reality.

In a family of forceful initiators, Isaac was the quiet, "mind-my-own-business" type unless he was specifically called on to take action. He was the protected only child from the time Sarah got rid of Ishmael until Abraham arranged his marriage to Rebekah.

In his own family, Isaac had the patriarchal position, but Rebekah had the power. Rather than stand his ground, Isaac found it easier to compromise or lie to avoid confrontations.

In spite of these shortcomings, Isaac was part of God's plan. The model his father gave him included a great gift of faith in the one true God. God's promise to create a great nation through which he would bless the world was passed on by Isaac to his twin sons.

It is usually not hard to identify with Isaac in his weaknesses. But consider for a moment that God works through people in spite of their shortcomings and, often, through them. As you pray, put into words your desire to be available to God. You will discover that his willingness to use you is even greater than your desire to be used.

Esau

Lesson from life

It is never too late to put away bitterness and forgive.

Gen. 25:20 – 36:43

Common sense isn't all that common. In fact, the common thread in many decisions is that they don't make sense.

Esau's life was filled with choices he must have regretted bitterly. He appears to have been a person who found it hard to consider consequences, reacting to the need of the moment without realizing what he was giving up to meet that need.

Trading his birthright for a bowl of stew was the clearest example of this weakness. He also chose wives in direct opposition to his parents' wishes. He learned the hard way.

What are you willing to trade for the things you want? Do you find yourself, at times, willing to negotiate *anything* for what you feel you need *now*? Do your family, spouse, integrity, body, or soul get included in these deals? Do you sometimes feel that the important parts of life escaped while you were grabbing for something else?

If so, your initial response, like Esau's, may be deep anger. In itself that isn't wrong, as long as you direct the energy of that anger toward a solution and not toward yourself or others as the cause of the problem. Your greatest need is to find a focal point other than "what I need now."

The only worthy focal point is God. A relationship with him will not only give an ultimate purpose to your life; it will also be a daily guideline for living. Meet him in the pages of the Bible.

Amalek

Lesson from life

There are evil men and nations who seek to harm God

Ex. 17:8-16

While the people of Israel were still at Rephidim, the warriors of Amalek came to fight against them. Moses commanded Joshua,

"Call the Israelites to arms, and fight the army of Amalek. Tomorrow, I will stand at the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand."

So Joshua did what Moses had commanded. He led his men out to fight the army of Amalek. Meanwhile Moses, Aaron, and Hur went to the top of a nearby hill.

As long as Moses held up the staff with his hands, the Israelites had the advantage. But whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites gained the upper hand. Moses' arms finally became too tired to hold up the staff any longer. So Aaron and Hur found a stone for him to sit on. Then they stood on each side, holding up his hands until sunset.

As a result, Joshua and his troops were able to crush the army of Amalek.

Then the Lord instructed Moses, "Write this down as a permanent record, and announce it to Joshua: I will blot out every trace of Amalek from under heaven."

Moses built an altar there and called it "The Lord Is My Banner." He said, "They have dared to raise their fist against the Lord's throne, so now the Lord will be at war with Amalek generation after generation."

When an individual or a government fights against the people of God, they will find that God will manifest his power with the righteous.

Do you need to hold up someone's hands.

Jacob whose name was changed to Israel

Lesson from life

While our sins may haunt us, God will honor our faith.

Gen. 25:20-50:13

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are among the most significant people in the Old Testament. It is important to realize that this significance is not based upon their personal characters, but upon the character of God.

They were all men who earned the grudging respect and even fear of their peers; they were wealthy and powerful, and yet each was capable of lying, deceit, and selfishness. They were not the perfect heroes we might have expected; instead, they were just like us, trying to please God, but often falling short.

Jacob was the third link in God's plan to start a nation from Abraham. The success of that plan was more often in spite of than because of Jacob's life. Before Jacob was born, God promised that his plan would be worked out through Jacob and not his twin brother, Esau.

Although Jacob's methods were not always respectable, his skill, determination, and patience have to be admired. As we follow him from birth to death, we are able to see God's work.

Jacob's life had four stages, each marked by a personal encounter with God. In the first stage, Jacob lived up to his name, which means "he grasps the heel" (figuratively, "he deceives").

He grabbed Esau's heel at birth, and by the time he fled from home, he had also grabbed his brother's birthright and blessing.

During his flight, God first appeared to him. Not only did God confirm to Jacob his blessing, but he awakened in Jacob a personal knowledge of himself. In the second stage, Jacob experienced life from the other side, being manipulated and deceived by Laban.

But there is a curious change: the Jacob of stage one would simply have left Laban, whereas the Jacob of stage two, after deciding to leave, waited six years for God's permission.

In the third stage, Jacob was in a new role as grabber. This time, by the Jordan River, he grabbed on to God and wouldn't let go.

He realized his dependence on the God who had continued to bless him. His relationship to God became essential to his life, and his name was changed to Israel, "he struggles with God." Jacob's last stage of life was to *be* grabbed—God achieved a firm hold on him.

In responding to Joseph's invitation to come to Egypt, Jacob was clearly unwilling to make a move without God's approval.

Can you think of times when God has made himself known to you? Do you allow yourself to meet him as you study his Word? What difference have these experiences made in your life?

Are you more like the young Jacob, forcing God to track you down in the desert of your own plans and mistakes? Or are you more like the Jacob who placed his desires and plans before God for his approval before taking any action?

Judah

Lesson from Life

God can change the hearts of even the most wicked people

Genesis 37-50

People who are leaders stand out. They don't necessarily look or act a certain way until the need for their action is apparent.

Among their skills are outspokenness, decisiveness, action, and control. These skills can be used for great good or great evil.

Jacob's fourth son, Judah, was a natural leader. The events of his life provided many opportunities to exercise those skills.

Unfortunately Judah's decisions were often shaped more by the pressures of the moment than by a conscious desire to cooperate with God's plan. But when he did recognize his mistakes, he was willing to admit them.

His experience with Tamar and the final confrontation with Joseph are both examples of Judah's willingness to bear the blame when confronted. It was one of the qualities he passed on to his descendant David.

Whether or not we have Judah's natural leadership qualities, we share with him a tendency to be blind toward our own sin. Too often, however, we don't share his willingness to admit mistakes. From Judah we can learn that it is not wise to wait until our errors force us to admit to wrongdoing.

Tamar

Lesson from Life

God works his purposes even through sinful events.

Genesis 38:15-53

Why does this story seem to take a light view of prostitution? Prostitutes were common in pagan cultures such as Canaan. Public prostitutes served Canaanite goddesses and were common elements of the religious cults. Fornication was encouraged to improve fertility in crops and flocks.

They were more highly respected than private prostitutes who were sometimes punished when caught. Tamar was driven to seduce Judah because of her intense desire to have children and be the matriarch of Judah's oldest line; Judah was driven by his lust. Neither case was justified.

Why was Judah so open about his relations with a prostitute, yet ready to execute his daughter-in-law for being one?

To understand this apparent contradiction, we must understand the place of women in Canaan. A woman's most important function was bearing children who would perpetuate the family line. To ensure that children belonged to the husband, the bride was expected to be a virgin and the wife was expected to have relations only with him. If a wife committed adultery, she could be executed. Some women, however, did not belong to families. nobody's bloodlines.

Judah saw no harm in hiring a prostitute for a night; after all, he was more than willing to pay.

He was ready to execute Tamar, however, because if she was pregnant as a result of prostitution, his grandchild would not be part of his family line.

Apparently the question of sexual morality never entered Judah's mind; his concern was for keeping his inheritance in the family. Ironically, it was Tamar, not Judah, who acted to provide him with legal heirs.

By seducing him, she acted more in the spirit of the law than he did when he refused to send his third son to her.

This story in no way implies that God winks at prostitution. Throughout Scripture, prostitution is condemned as a serious sin. If the story has a moral, it is that faithfulness to family obligations is important. Incidentally, Judah and Tamar are direct ancestors of Jesus Christ (see Matthew 1:1-6).

A seal was a form of identification used to authenticate legal documents. Usually a unique design carved in stone and worn on a ring or necklace inseparable from its owner, the seal was used by the wealthy and powerful to mark clay or wax. Because Tamar had Judah's seal, she could prove beyond a doubt that he had been with her.

When Tamar revealed she was pregnant, Judah, who unknowingly had gotten her pregnant, moved to have her killed. Judah had concealed his own sin, yet he came down harshly on Tamar. Often the sins we try to cover up are the ones that anger us most when we see them in others. If you become indignant at the sins of others, you may have a similar tendency to sin that you don't wish to face.

Perez

Lesson from life

Your background does not matter to God.

Gen. 38:27-30

In due season the time of Tamar's delivery arrived, and she had twin sons.

As they were being born, one of them reached out his hand, and the midwife tied a scarlet thread around the wrist of the child, who appeared first, saying,

"This one came out first." But then he drew back his hand, and the other baby was actually the first to be born. "What!" the midwife exclaimed. "How did you break out first?"

And ever after, he was called Perez. Then the baby with the scarlet thread on his wrist was born, and he was named Zerah.

Jesus came forth through the line of Judah. This is a confirmation that God does not hold you responsible for all the sins of your ancestors.

Do you sometime feel that because of your background, you can accomplish little for the kingdom of God?

Here is evidence that God can use whomever he wishes regardless of their background. God is waiting for your call of dedication today.

Boaz

Lesson from life

Those who are kind to others receive kindness themselves

Ruth 2:12

Heroes are easier to admire than to define. They are seldom conscious of their moments of heroism, and others may not recognize their acts as heroic.

Heroes simply do the right thing at the right time, whether or not they realize the impact their action will have. Perhaps the one quality they share is a tendency to think of others before they think of themselves. Boaz was a hero.

In his dealings with other people, he was always sensitive to their needs. His words to his employees, relatives, and others were colored with kindness.

He offered help openly, not grudgingly. When he discovered who Ruth was, he took several steps to help her because she had been faithful to his relative Naomi. When Naomi advised Ruth to request his protection, he was ready to marry her if the legal complications could be worked out.

Boaz not only did what was right; he also did it right away. Of course he could not foresee all that his actions would accomplish. He could not have known that the child he would have by Ruth would be an ancestor of both David and Jesus. He only met the challenge of taking the right action in the situation facing him.

Jesse

Lesson from life

Never take lightly the impact you may have on your children.

1 Samuel 16

Jesse was the father of David. Samuel “consecrated” Jesse and his sons to prepare them to come before God in worship or to offer a sacrifice.

You may not be able to fulfill your dreams, but sometimes the Lord is depending on you to train your children for a special work.

As times goes in, there are those who can affect their generation even more than a parent has opportunity to do dedicated service.

A parent must never forget the necessity of preparing their children for Godly service.

David

Lesson from life

True greatness is having a heart for God.

1st Samuel and 2nd Samuel

When we think of David, we think: shepherd, poet, giant-killer, king, and ancestor of Jesus— in short, one of the greatest men in the Old Testament.

But alongside that list stands another: betrayer, liar, adulterer, and murderer. The first list gives qualities we all might like to have; the second, qualities that might be true of any one of us.

The Bible makes no effort to hide David's failures. Yet he is remembered and respected for his heart for God. Knowing how much more we share in David's failures than in his greatness, we should be curious to find out what made God refer to David as "a man after my own heart" (Acts 13:22).

David, more than anything else, had an unchangeable belief in the faithful and forgiving nature of God. He was a man who lived with great zest. He sinned many times, but he was quick to confess his sins. His confessions were from the heart, and his repentance was genuine. David never took God's forgiveness lightly or his blessing for granted. In return,

God never held back from David either his forgiveness or the consequences of his actions. David experienced the joy of forgiveness even when he had to suffer the consequences of his sins.

Joab

Lessons from life

Those who seek power die with nothing

2 Samuel 2:13 - 1 Kings 2:34

Joab, the great military leader, had two brothers who were also famous soldiers: Abishai and Asahel. Joab proved to be the greatest leader of the three and was the commander of David's army throughout most of David's reign. There is no record that his troops ever lost a battle.

Joab was a fearless fighter like his brothers. Unlike them, he was also a brilliant and ruthless strategist. His plans usually worked, but he was seldom concerned about those hurt or killed by them. He did not hesitate to use treachery or murder to achieve his goals.

His career is a story of great accomplishments and shameful acts. He conquered Jerusalem and the surrounding nations, defeated Abner, and reconciled Absalom and David. But he also murdered Abner, Amasa, and Absalom, took part in Uriah's murder, and plotted with Adonijah against Solomon. That plot led to his execution.

Joab set his own standards—he lived by them and died because of them. There is little evidence that Joab ever acknowledged God's standards. On one occasion he confronted David about the danger of taking a census without God's command, but this may have been little more than a move to protect him.

Joab's self-centeredness eventually destroyed him. He was loyal only to himself, even willing to betray his lifelong relationship with David to preserve his power.

Joab's life illustrates the disastrous results of having no source of direction outside oneself. Brilliance and power are self-destructive without God's guidance. Only God can give the direction we need. For that reason, he has made available his Word, the Bible, and he is willing to be personally present in the lives of those who admit their need for him.

Ammon

Lesson from life

Giving into lust leads only to tragedy

2 Samuel 13

Ammon was encouraged by his cousin Jonadab to commit sexual sin. We may be more vulnerable to the advice of our relatives because we are close to them.

However, we must make sure to evaluate every piece of advice by God's standards, even when it comes from relatives.

Love and lust are very different. After Ammon raped his half-sister, his "love" turned to hate. Although he had claimed to be in love, he was actually overcome by lust.

Love is patient; lust requires immediate satisfaction. Love is kind; lust is harsh. Love does not demand its own way; lust does. You can read about the characteristics of real love in 1 Cor. 13. Lust may feel like love at first, but when physically expressed, it results in self-disgust and hatred of the other person. If you just can't wait, what you feel is not true love.

Rape was strictly forbidden by God (Deut. 22:28-29).

Why was sending Tamar away an even greater crime? By throwing her out, Ammon made it look as if Tamar had made a shameful proposition to him, and there were no witnesses on her behalf because he had gotten rid of the servants. His crime destroyed her chances of marriage—because she was no longer a virgin, she could not be given in marriage.

David was angry with Amnon for raping Tamar, but David did not punish him. David probably hesitated because

- (1) he didn't want to cross Amnon, who was his firstborn son (1 Chron. 3:1) and therefore next in line to be king, and
- (2) David was guilty of a similar sin himself in his adultery with Bathsheba.

While David was unsurpassed as a king and military leader, he lacked skill and sensitivity as a husband and father.

Absalom

Lesson from Life

**Those seeking to oust a God-appointed leader
will have a difficult battle.**

2 Samuel 13-18

A father's mistakes are often reflected in the lives of his children. In Absalom, David saw a bitter replay and amplification of many of his own past sins. God had predicted that David's family would suffer because of his sin against Bathsheba and Uriah.

David's heart was broken as he realized that God's predictions were coming true. God forgave David, but he did not cancel the consequences of his sin. David was horrified as he saw his son's strengths run wild without the controls God had built into his own life.

By most casual evaluations, Absalom would have made an excellent king, and the people loved him. But he lacked the inner character and control needed in a good leader.

His appearance, skill, and position did not make up for his lack of personal integrity.

David's sins took him away from God, but repentance brought him back. In contrast, Absalom sinned and kept on sinning. Although he relied heavily on the advice of others, he was not wise enough to evaluate the counsel he received.

Can you identify with Absalom? Do you find yourself on a fast track toward self-destruction?

Absalom wasn't able to say, "I was wrong. I need forgiveness."

God offers forgiveness, but we will not experience that forgiveness until we genuinely admit our sins and confess them to God.

Absalom rejected his father's love and ultimately God's love. How often do you miss entering back into God's love through the door of forgiveness?

Adonijah

Lesson from life

God must determine what is rightfully ours

1 Kings 1-2

God-fearing people like David and Samuel were used by God to lead nations, but nevertheless they had problems in family relationships.

God-fearing leaders cannot take for granted the spiritual well-being of their children. They are used to having others follow their orders, but they cannot expect their children to manufacture faith upon request.

Moral and spiritual character takes years to build, and it requires constant attention and patient discipline.

David served God well as a king, but as a parent he often failed both God and his children. Don't let your service to God even in leadership positions take up so much of your time and energy that you neglect your other God-given responsibilities.

Because David had never interfered by opposing or even questioning his son, Adonijah did not know how to work within limits.

The result was that he always wanted his own way, regardless of how it affected others. Adonijah did whatever he wanted and paid no respect to God's wishes.

An undisciplined child may look cute to his or her parents, but an undisciplined adult destroys himself and others.

As you set limits for your children, you make it possible for them to develop the self-restraint they will need in order to control themselves later.

Discipline your children carefully while they are young, so that they will grow into self-disciplined adults.

Bathsheba

Lesson from Life

One wrong act does not disqualify us from accomplishing things for God.

1 Ki. 1-2 – 2 Samuel 11-12

Bathsheba was the unlikely link between Israel's two most famous kings—David and Solomon. She was lover and wife to one, mother to the other. Her adultery with David almost brought an end to the family through which God planned to physically enter his world.

Out of the ashes of that sin, however, God brought good. Eventually Jesus Christ, the salvation of mankind was born to a descendant of David and Bathsheba.

David and Bathsheba's story shows that little wrong decisions often lead to big mistakes. It is likely that neither was where he or she should have been. Bathsheba may have been rash in bathing where she might be seen; David should have been at war with his army.

Each decision contributed to the beginning of a very sad series of events.

Bathsheba must have been devastated by the chain of events—unfaithfulness to her husband, discovery of pregnancy, death of her husband, death of her child.

We are told that David comforted her (2 Samuel 12:24), and she lived to see another son, Solomon, sit on the throne.

From her life we see that the little, day-to-day choices we make are very important.

They prepare us to make the right choices when the big decisions come. The wisdom to make right choices in small and large matters is a gift from God.

Understanding this should make us more conscious of the decisions we make and more willing to include God in our decision making. Have you asked for his help with today's decisions?

Solomon

Lesson from life

Man's wisdom is foolishness without God.

1 Kings 1-11

Wisdom is only effective when it is put into action. Early in his life, Solomon had the sense to recognize his need for wisdom. But by the time Solomon asked for wisdom to rule his kingdom, he had already started a habit that would make his wisdom ineffective for his own life—he sealed a pact with Egypt by marrying Pharaoh's daughter.

She was the first of hundreds of wives married for political reasons. In doing this, Solomon went against not only his father's last words, but also God's direct commands.

His action reminds us how easy it is to know what is right and yet not do it.

It is clear that God's gift of wisdom to Solomon did not mean that he couldn't make mistakes. He had been given great possibilities as the king of God's chosen people, but with them came great responsibilities; unfortunately, he tended to pursue the former and neglect the latter.

While becoming famous as the builder of the temple and the palace, he became infamous as a leader who excessively taxed and worked his people. Visitors from distant lands came to admire this wise king, while his own people were gradually alienated from him.

Little is mentioned in the Bible about the last decade of Solomon's reign. Ecclesiastes probably records his last reflections on life. In that

book we find a man proving through bitter experience that finding meaning in life apart from God is a vain pursuit.

Security and contentment are found only in a personal relationship with God. The contentment we find in the opportunities and successes of this life is temporary.

The more we expect our successes to be permanent, the more quickly they are gone. Be sure to balance your pursuit of life's possibilities with reliable fulfillment of your responsibilities.

Reuben

Lesson from life

What is gained from a moment of passion is only perceived; what is lost is real and permanent.

Gen. 35:22; Gen. 37; Gen. 49:3-4

Parents are usually the best judges of their children's character. Jacob summarized the personality of his son Reuben by comparing him to water.

Except when frozen, water has no stable shape of its own. It always shapes itself to its container or environment.

Reuben usually had good intentions, but he seemed unable to stand against a crowd. His instability made him hard to trust. He had both private and public values, but these contradicted each other. He went along with his brothers in their action against Joseph while hoping to counteract the evil in private.

The plan failed. Compromise has a way of destroying convictions. Without convictions, lack of direction will destroy life. Reuben's sleeping with his father's concubine showed how little he had left of the integrity he had displayed earlier in life.

How consistent are your public and private lives? We may want to think they are separate, but we can't deny that they affect each other. What convictions are present in your life at all times?

Aaron

Lesson from Life

Don't expect God's leaders to be perfect, but don't let them get away with sin either.

Ex. 4-Numb. 20

Effective teamwork happens when each team member uses his or her special skills. Ideally, each member's strengths will contribute something important to the team effort. In this way, members make up for one another's weaknesses.

Aaron made a good team with Moses. He provided Moses with one skill Moses lacked—effective public speaking. But while Aaron was necessary to Moses, he needed Moses as well. Without a guide, Aaron had little direction of his own.

There was never any doubt as to which God's chosen and trained leader was. The pliability that made Aaron a good follower made him a weak leader.

His major failures were caused by his inability to stand alone. His yielding to public pressure and making an idol was a good example of this weakness.

Most of us have more of the follower than the leader in us. We may even be good followers, following a good leader. But no leader is perfect, and no human deserves our complete allegiance. Only God deserves our complete loyalty and obedience. We need to be effective team members in using the skills and abilities God has given us. But if the team or the leader goes against God's Word, we must be willing to stand alone.

Nadab and Abihu

Lesson from life

Pretending to be God's representative is dangerous business

Lev. 10

Some brothers, like Cain and Abel or Jacob and Esau, get each other in trouble. Nadab and Abihu got in trouble together.

Although little is known of their early years, the Bible gives us an abundance of information about the environment in which they grew up.

Born in Egypt, they were eyewitnesses of God's mighty acts of the exodus. They saw their father, Aaron, their uncle, Moses, and their aunt, Miriam, in action many times.

They had firsthand knowledge of God's holiness as few men have ever had, and for a while at least, they followed God wholeheartedly (Leviticus 8:36). But at a crucial moment they chose to treat with indifference the clear instructions from God. The consequence of their sin was fiery, instant, and shocking to all.

We are in danger of making the same mistake as these brothers when we treat lightly the justice and holiness of God. We must draw near to God while realizing that there is a proper fear of God.

Don't forget that the opportunity to know God personally is based on his gracious invitation to an always unworthy people, not a gift to be taken for granted. Do your thoughts about God include a humble recognition of his great holiness?

Eleazar

Lesson from life

Those who are consistent in their faith are the best models to follow.

Numbers. 26-34; Joshua 24:33 Numbers 20:25-29

An understudy must know the lead role completely and be willing to step into it at a moment's notice.

Eleazar was an excellent understudy, well trained for his eventual leading role. However, his moments in the spotlight were painful. On one occasion, he watched his two older brothers burn to death for failing to take God's holiness seriously.

Later, as his father was dying, he was made high priest, surely one of the most responsible—and therefore potentially most stressful—positions in Israel.

An understudy benefits from having both the script and a human model of the role. Ever since childhood, Eleazar had been able to observe Moses and Aaron. Now he could learn from watching Joshua. In addition, he had God's laws to guide him as he worked as priest and adviser to Joshua.

Korah

Lesson from life

Rebelling against Leaders will always be unsuccessful

Numbers 16

Some notorious historical figures might have remained anonymous if they hadn't tried to grab on to more than they could hold. But by refusing to be content with what they had, and by trying to get more than they deserved, they ended up with nothing. Korah, one of the Israelite leaders, was such a person.

Korah was a Levite who assisted in the daily functions of the tabernacle.

Shortly after Israel's great rebellion against God (Numbers 13; 14), Korah instigated his own mini-rebellion. He recruited a grievance committee and confronted Moses and Aaron.

Their list of complaints boils down to three statements:

- (1) You are no better than anyone else;
- (2) Everyone in Israel has been chosen of the Lord;
- (3) We don't need to obey you. It is amazing to see how Korah twisted the first two statements—both true—to reach the wrong conclusion.

Moses would have agreed that he was no better than anyone else.

He would also have agreed that all Israelites were God's chosen people. But Korah's application of these truths was wrong.

Not all Israelites were chosen to lead. Korah's hidden claim was this: "I have as much right to lead as Moses does." His error cost him not only his job—a position of service that he enjoyed—but also his life.

Korah's story gives us numerous warnings:

- (1) Don't let desire for what someone else has make you discontented with what you already have.
- (2) Don't try to raise your own self-esteem by attacking someone else's.
- (3) Don't use part of God's Word to support what you want, rather than allowing its entirety to shape your wants.
- (4) Don't expect to find satisfaction in power and position; God may want to work through you in the position you are now in.

Joshua

Lesson from life

Real courage comes from God.

The book of Joshua

One of the greatest challenges facing leaders is to replace themselves, training others to become leaders. Many outstanding accomplishments have been started by someone with great ability whose life or career ended before the vision became reality. The fulfillment of that dream then became the responsibility of that person's successor.

Death is the ultimate deadline for leadership. One of the best tests of our leadership is our willingness and ability to train another for our position.

Moses made an excellent decision when he chose Joshua as his assistant. That choice was later confirmed by God himself when he instructed Moses to commission Joshua as his successor (Numbers 27:15-23).

Joshua had played a key role in the exodus from Egypt. Introduced as the field general of Israel's army, he was the only person allowed to accompany Moses partway up the mountain when Moses received the law. Joshua and Caleb were the only two among the 12 spies to bring back an encouraging report after being sent into the Promised Land the first time.

Other references show him to have been Moses' constant shadow. His basic training was living with Moses—experiencing firsthand what it meant to lead God's people. This was modeling at its best!

Saul

Lesson from life

Those who say they follow God but don't live like it waste their God-given potential.

1 Sam. 8-31

First impressions can be deceiving; especially when the image created by a person's appearance is contradicted by his or her qualities and abilities.

Saul presented the ideal visual image of a king, but the tendencies of his character often went contrary to God's commands for a king. Saul was God's chosen leader, but this did not mean he was capable of being king on his own.

During his reign, Saul had his greatest successes when he obeyed God. His greatest failures resulted from acting on his own. Saul had the raw materials to be a good leader—appearance, courage, and action.

Even his weaknesses could have been used by God if Saul had recognized them and left them in God's hands. His own choices cut him off from God and eventually alienated him from his own people.

From Saul we learn that while our strengths and abilities make us useful, it is our weaknesses that make us usable

Jonathan

Lesson from life

True friends always think of the other person, not just themselves.

1 Samuel 14-31

Loyalty is one of life's most costly qualities; it is the most selfless part of love. To be loyal, you cannot live only for yourself. Loyal people not only stand by their commitments, they are willing to suffer for them. Jonathan is a shining example of loyalty. Sometimes he was forced to deal with conflicting loyalties: to his father, Saul, and to his friend David. His solution to that conflict teaches us both how to be loyal and what must guide loyalty. In Jonathan, truth always guided loyalty.

Jonathan realized that the source of truth was God, who demanded his ultimate loyalty. It was his relationship with God that gave Jonathan the ability to deal effectively with the complicated situations in his life. He was loyal to Saul because Saul was his father and the king. He was loyal to David because David was his friend. His loyalty to God guided him through the conflicting demands of his human relationships.

The conflicting demands of our relationships challenge us as well. If we attempt to settle these conflicts only at the human level, we will be constantly dealing with a sense of betrayal. But if we communicate to our friends that our ultimate loyalty is to God and his truth, many of our choices will be much clearer. The truth in his Word, the Bible, will bring light to our decisions. Do those closest to you know who has your greatest loyalty?

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:

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Additional comments and charts are taken from:

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