

It's All About the People

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The Bible is a book about people. It uses the lives of people to teach and illustrate truth and righteousness, rebellion and impiety. People are the ultimate products of God's creation, the only part of His creation blessed with a sense of ought—the will to determine which way to go, what path to choose. He has set before man a blessing and a curse—a blessing if he seeks after the good, a curse he seeks after his own desires in preference to what God has commanded (see Deut. 11:26-28). Jesus spoke of this choosing when He described the two ways a man may choose: a broad way that leads to destruction, or a strait way that leads to life eternal (Matt. 7:13-14). It's people who make these choices. They do it of their own free will.

God has given us great illustrations of faithfulness, couched in the character and personalities of men. For instance, have you ever considered:

The faithfulness of Abraham? Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees of his own free will, choosing deliberately to go out, “not knowing whither he went.” Think about that. You want to talk about faith? “By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country,” (Heb. 11:9), “for he looked for a city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God” (11:10). He saw, by the eye of faith, something better. Do you reckon we would have the courage to do as he did? Abraham's faith is a model for us today. God treats our willingness to obey in the same way He did that of Abraham.

The virtue of Joseph? Joseph had all kinds of difficulties handed to him—difficulties he had done nothing to deserve. He was sold into slavery by his own brothers. He was thrown into prison for no crime, for an accusation by Potiphar's wife (Gen. 39). One thing impresses me about his virtue. When he was with Potiphar's wife, he hadn't taken off his cloak; he never intended to stay. And when she sought to seduce him, his question was, “how then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?” (39:9). He was rejected and forgotten by those whom he befriended, yet he never lost that virtue, nor did he ever become bitter at the allotments of life. In fact, when he could have gotten revenge against his brothers for selling him into slavery, he said, “Now be not grieved nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life” (Gen. 45:5). His faithfulness remained intact, no matter the circumstances. Joseph—an excellent example of moral excellence.

The wisdom of Solomon? Solomon lived life with all the gusto you can. He experienced everything life had to offer, he dipped into every phase of possible enjoyment. He had lands and houses, slaves and servants, power and repute, riches immeasurable. He engaged in great philanthropic enterprises, experimented with botany, and stored up treasures of all sorts. Furthermore, with each experiment he conducted, he said, “my wisdom remained with me” (Eccles. 2:2; 2:9). When it was said and done, he determined that “all was vanity and vexation of spirit and there was

no profit under the sun" (2:11). He ultimately concluded, after all had been said, and in perhaps the wisest of all his statements, "...fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man" (Eccles. 12:13). Consider the wisdom of Solomon. He tried it all; but he reached the proper conclusion about life.

The meekness of Moses? Moses was reared in Pharaoh's house. He had everything, what was described as "great riches," and "treasures in Egypt" (Heb. 11:25-26). But in the midst of all this power and wealth, he choose—deliberately chose—"...to suffer affliction with the people of God, rather than the pleasures of sin for a season." Why? Because, "he had respect unto the recompense of the reward" (11:26). He saw, by faith, something better. He took control of his faith and, in doing so, made himself the object of scorn and disdain in a true statement of meekness. He put his strength under control. He managed himself in accordance with what he understood to be the greater. To subordinate one's will to the will of God is the essence of meekness. Moses demonstrated that meekness in a most marvelous manner.

The devotion of Paul? Saul was an enemy of the church in his early years. He calls himself a "Hebrew of Hebrews" (Phil. 3:5). He was likely destined for greatness in the religion of the Jews. This same Saul was to become the Apostle Paul, the most intense defender of the faith of his or any other time. He "suffered the loss of all things" that he might win Christ. He counted all the worldly things he had discarded as mere refuse in order to maintain his devotion to the cause of his Master, Jesus. He was beaten, shipwrecked, had his brethren swore out oaths to slay him. He was stoned and left for dead, was in perils of various sorts (see II Cor. 11:22-28), and walked with death at his heels all the days of his life. Yet, was it not he who said, "our light affliction, which is but for a moment worketh for us a far greater and eternal weight of glory" (II Cor. 4:17-18)? See his devotion—his total commitment to the cause, his unfaltering faith in Jesus Christ. What a great example of devotion.

Or all the others? On and on we could go. What about the heart of David, or the humility of John the Baptist, or the courage of Peter, or the love of the Apostle John, or the encouraging words of Barnabas? They were all people, people just like you and me. God has given us information about them so that we might learn how to please Him and what to do to avoid His displeasure. What a wonderful book, this Bible! What a people book!