



CHARACTERS WHO MADE A DIFFERENCE

**Terry Benson
& Ron Pickell**

Leader's Guide

Characters Who Made A Difference – Leader's Guide

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Introduction

“You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless.

“You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.”—Matthew 5:13-16 (NLT)

Did you know that a believer’s life is meant to be full of good works? That’s what Jesus says. In this passage Jesus says that His followers will lead lives that make a difference. He tells us to let our good deeds be seen so that God will be glorified. In John 14:12 Jesus says that those who believe in Him will do “the same works” as He did, and even greater ones! But talking about “works” makes many Christians nervous. They think that somehow because Paul emphasizes grace, any mention of good works makes the gospel null and void.

But these words are not from Luther or even Paul, they are from Jesus! So, what does He mean? What kind of “works” did Jesus perform while on earth? Some might get preoccupied with the miracles, but what if Jesus is referring to His works of mercy, teaching, devotion, and service? He prayed daily, attended synagogue services with His disciples, and participated in worship together with others. He connected with and shared meals with His followers and friends, as well as foes. He went outside social and religious boundaries to minister to sick, lost, and hurting people. And He preached the good tidings of salvation to anyone who would listen, breaking through the barriers of pride, prejudice, fear, and ignorance.

Jesus didn’t sit around philosophizing and theorizing. He took action when action was required. He lived out His theology by doing something. Where He saw obstacles or problems or injustice, He did something. When He encountered seekers, He did something. And everything He did made a difference

He said that His followers would live the same kind of lives, acting when action was called for. He said that His followers would do good works as the result of their faith, not in order to gain favor or standing with God. He never intended His church to just pontificate about the woes of the world or fantasize about the pleasures of paradise. His family is to be a prevailing church, full of good works and dynamic action that makes a difference in an indifferent world.

He also said we should let our light shine, which seems to indicate that shining for Jesus or making a difference is more about letting the full life of God that is already ours through Christ simply emanate from us. In other words living for Jesus is meant to be something God is already working out within us instead of something we have to drum up from ourselves. It’s something God is doing if we just *let* the light of God’s Spirit shine out of us.

There is no better place for the light of God to shine than on a university campus. Students from a broad spectrum of society, from diverse cultures and nations, are seeking knowledge, even truth. How great then are the possibilities for letting our lights shine—how great will be the contrast between earthly knowledge and divine truth—if believing students and teachers live out their faith in an environment that can be hostile to faith.

Terry: My first year in college I got caught up with a group of about 50 students on campus who were experiencing spiritual revival. Every day at lunch time we would meet on campus under a huge tree to sing songs, share experiences, and pray together. Other students and teachers passing by would look at us as if we were spiritual geeks. There were rumors circulating that we were religious fanatics on the verge of becoming a cult. But we didn’t care. The gospel of Christ had taken hold of our hearts and captured our imaginations and we just wanted to celebrate and share the reality and grace of Jesus. That year was transformational for many of us, changing our lives forever. But it also made a difference in the lives of more than a few who witnessed our faith. By the grace and power of God, we made an *eternal* difference by letting Christ live His life out through us.

Ron: College was a great environment for my faith development. Though I had grown up in the church, I was a new convert when I entered college. I was the first person in my family to attend college and had my own doubts about “making the grade.” Accepting Christ was

the only reason I wound up in college, but faith in Christ was also the only thing that got me through the college experience. I remember being moved to tears as I was about to graduate with my bachelor's degree in theology. I not only survived in college through faith, but my faith grew through my college experience. College was where I began a consistent devotional life of spending time with God in a morning quiet time of Bible study and prayer. College was where I made friends who have stuck with me through life and had a lasting impact on my faith. College was also where I started regularly sharing my faith and being intentional about campus outreach. Granted, I was attending a Christian college, but living for Christ and growing spiritually can be challenging in college regardless of a Christian or non-Christian campus. As I reflect on my experience as an undergraduate, I realize how important my years in college were in growing my faith. If we can learn how to live for Christ on campus, we can begin a lifelong process of discipleship. Our college years may be the best time to live differently and make a difference.

Throughout history, many people have made a significant impact because of the difference God made in their lives. We will explore six such individuals in this study.

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Breaking Down *Journey*

Journey was created for larger weekly on or off campus meetings in a teaching format and small group discussion. The beginning story or illustration introduces the topic of study.



- **Journey Together** helps ease participants into the topic through ice-breaker related questions.



- **Road Map** is the main passage for discussion followed by questions that help draw out the topic. If you are leading *Journey*, feel free to depart from these as needed and come up with your own questions, while staying on track with the main direction of the study laid out in the leader's guide.



- **My Story** has been prepared as a continuation of the larger group meetings for smaller groups that meet during the week to check in with one another and reflect on how God is using *Journey* in their daily life. We recommend these groups be flexible in terms of location and meeting time. Also, the amount of questions are limited in the My Story section, allowing for more personal interactions and life application.



- **Back Story** is a helpful guide for those leading out in the *Journey* Series and is only included in the leader's book.

Getting the most out of *Journey*

What You're Going to Need for *Characters Who Made a Difference*:

- Good soil – an open and receptive heart
- Willingness to work the soil – determination and diligence
- Hunger and thirst – a desire for God

Here are five suggested practices to help us get the most from our study of *Characters Who Made A Difference*. I call them the five S's of hearing and discerning God's voice:

- **Seek:** Pray for God to open up the passage for you. Is there a promise for you to claim, a sin to confess, a word for you to follow, an insight to share?
- **Soak:** Read the passage each day and write down any observations, thoughts, questions, connections, or anything God speaks to you about the passage.
- **Seal:** Seal God's word deep within your heart by taking some time to meditate on the most important truth to you this week. Ask God to open the deeper recesses of your heart to teach you what you need most for your life this week.
- **Script:** Journal or write – it can be just a few lines – noting the ways that God spoke to you from the passage, your meditation, or our group time together. This will help you keep better track of God's voice and the way He is speaking through Scripture.
- **Share:** Share with someone what you are learning from your time with God. As you share what you are learning, it will help drive God's word home even more and you will notice how God will use what He has revealed to you to bless others.

Learning to practice these five disciplines will move us beyond a surface reading of the text to God's discernible voice in our lives. We want more than Bible facts. We want God to move and act in our life as we read about it in scripture. This requires a deeper listening to God's voice and soaking in His word. The great thing is that Jesus promised more for those who desire more.

"Consider carefully what you hear," he continued. "With the measure you use, it will be measured to you – and even more." Mark 4:24

We don't want to lose any of what Jesus has for us. We want to soak it up together – first in our own personal time with the passage for the day, then in group time, again during the teaching time as we all consider the broader lessons together, and finally in late night conversations as we wrestle with God's call in our lives. In the end, my prayer is that as we reflect on the difference that God made in these unlikely characters that we will begin to see how He can work through us to make a difference in the lives of others and on campus.

Journey
Covenant

I want to grow in my understanding of Jesus and the life he has for me. I want to participate in *Journey* to enhance my own relationship with God this year. I will commit to doing the weekly assignments and life group meetings.

Signature _____

My best times of availability are

Morning:

Evening: _____

Email address _____

Cell Phone _____

Matthew: The Least Likely Disciple

Did you know that Michael Jordan was cut from his high school basketball team and went home to his room and cried? That the Beatles were turned down by Decca Studios because they “didn’t like their sound” and “guitar music was on its way out”? And that Walt Disney was fired from a local newspaper because he “lacked imagination and had no original ideas”? Maybe you too know what it’s like to get passed over and to be viewed as a failure before you’ve even tried. Maybe you feel like you could never make a difference on campus—I mean what could you do, really? If that’s true, you just might relate to Matthew—the least likely of Jesus’ disciples. If Matthew could make such a huge difference in his world through the power of Jesus’ call, anything is possible with God! And if He could use someone like Matthew, what could God do with just one student who is listening, open, and ready to follow His call?



1. What kind of risks have you taken in your life? What risks are you taking in your educational journey? How are they working out?
2. If given a choice between great wealth and great adventure, which would you choose?
3. How much influence do your friends or professors have over you? How much do you have over them?

As Jesus left the town, he saw a tax collector named Levi sitting at his tax collector’s booth. “Follow me and be my disciple,” Jesus said to him. So, Levi got up, left everything, and followed him. Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” Jesus answered them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”—Luke 5:27-32 (NLT)

When Jesus said to Matthew, “Follow me and be my disciple,” He implied that there were benefits to doing so. Matthew didn’t leave his tax booth because he wanted less or wanted to be miserable—he left it and followed Jesus because he saw in Jesus someone who would give his life greater value and meaning.

Luke says that Matthew left *everything*. The outcast tax man saw Jesus as the one who could give him what he had never had—acceptance and participation in the kingdom of God. But to take hold of the hand of Christ meant he had to let go of his grip on wealth and a relatively comfortable life. So, when Jesus called, Matthew didn’t hesitate.

But Matthew didn’t simply follow Jesus. Right away he started inviting other people to follow Him too. He was so excited about this man who had invited him to be a part of the greatest endeavor in history that he had to tell his friends about Him too. So, he did what he knew how to do—he threw a party and invited Jesus as the guest of honor. Levi threw a party because he wanted his friends to get to know Jesus. Specifically, he wanted them to know what Jesus had done for him.

This is the gospel—the good news that *brings* joy is then passed on to *give* joy and salvation to others. And everyone was happy...everyone except for the church-leader killjoys. This is what Matthew was willing to risk everything for; it’s what enabled him to approach secular-minded friends and face arrogant and bigoted religious leaders. It was the very message and ministry of Jesus to *all* people, not just the righteous ones, that changed Matthew and set him on a course that would help change the world.



1. What surprises you most about Jesus' calling of Matthew? Why was his occupation as a tax collector such a focus of attention?
2. What do you think Jesus saw in Matthew that others could not see?
3. What other risks did Matthew take besides leaving his job? Why do you think his friends accepted the invitation to a party with Jesus?
4. What does Matthew's banquet tell you about his attitude toward other people?
5. What difference did Matthew make in the mission of Jesus and what can we learn from him about making a difference on campus?
6. How would you like your group to pray for you today?



1. How has God been using *Journey* in your life this week?
2. What is God teaching you through the story of Matthew?
3. What difference is God helping you make on campus?



Backstory

All of Jesus' followers, not just Matthew, were unlikely to be rabbinic candidates. The process to become a rabbi included three levels. The first, Beth Sefer, was like a K-6 Hebrew school that culminated in Bar Mitzvah at age 12, when the "graduates" demonstrated their knowledge of Torah. The next level was Beth Midrash, when only the most promising students would go on to study oral Torah, and to reflect on and interpret the finer application of biblical truth. The final level was to choose a rabbi to live with and follow for several years while they learned to become like them.

If a student had not been selected for further training in the Torah, it was clear that they were not cut out to be a rabbi and must return to their father to learn the family business. Clearly none of Jesus' followers had made the grade since He found them practicing the fishing trade of their fathers, or in Matthew's case, collecting taxes for Rome.

The disciples didn't choose Jesus—He chose them (John 6:70). Even more unheard of was the fact that several women were counted as among His followers. Women could never serve as rabbis according to Jewish tradition, but they had been allowed to follow and learn from Jesus, and in this sense be His disciples.

The most surprising (and scandalous) of Jesus' disciples, even more so than the women who followed Him, was Matthew. There was no possibility that Matthew could ever have been considered for rabbinic training. He was, after all, a traitor to his people. Matthew collected taxes from the Jews on behalf of the Roman government. In so doing he was collaborating with a foreign occupation. To participate with Rome was seen as a complete rejection of God's call to Israel as His chosen people.

His fellow Jews also detested him because he would collect a tax on top of Rome's designated amount to keep for himself. Tax collectors, or publicans, were so hated by the rest of the people that Jewish men would give thanks to God for not becoming a publican, as well as not being born a woman or a Gentile! The Zealots, one of Judaism's most radical sects, were committed to the overthrow of Rome and setting up the Messiah's reign through militant acts. One violent act that each Zealot vowed to carry out was to kill a tax collector as a way of undermining Roman rule. Most, if not all, of Jesus' other disciples were card-carrying Zealots, leading some to suggest that Jesus may have had to sleep between Matthew and the rest of the disciples at first just to protect him and keep him alive!

Such was the risk and commitment of Matthew, the ex-tax collector and unlikely disciple who made a lasting difference in revealing the person and message of Jesus Christ. The difference Jesus made in Matthew's life was turning a traitor into a trusted follower. If Matthew could become so different by following Jesus, imagine how Jesus can help us be the difference on campus!

Ruth: When Being Different Made the Difference

Life is a funny thing. Or maybe I should say that the way we live our lives is funny. We spend so much time dreaming about, preparing for, and planning things like education, career, mate/family. With one event, one accident or illness, one text or letter and everything changes. Rarely does life lead us down the path that we have mapped out for ourselves. So often I have looked back and said, "I never could have imagined this is how it would turn out."

When I began my college education, the plan was clear: I would use my four-year California state scholarship to attend a school and become an artist. Two years later I was standing at Harvard Square in Cambridge, Massachusetts with fellow theology students sharing the gospel. And that was only the beginning of the surprising twists and turns for me on life's highway. Maybe that's why I identify so much with the story of Ruth!



1. What is the most surprising change or event you have experienced? What do you think your life will look like ten years from now? Twenty?
2. Have you ever lost someone close to you? How would you describe your experience with grief?
3. How good are you at following directions or doing what someone else tells you to do?



In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. So, a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. The man's name was Elimelek, his wife's name was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there.

Now Elimelek, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband. When Naomi heard in Moab that the Lord had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, she and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there. With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah.

Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the Lord show you kindness, as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me. May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband." Then she kissed them goodbye and they wept aloud and said to her, "We will go back with you to your people."

But Naomi said, "Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me—even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons— would you wait until they grew up? Would you

remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord's hand has turned against me!"

At this they wept aloud again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her. "Look," said Naomi, "your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her." But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go, I will go, and where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me." When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.—Ruth, chapter 1 (NLT)

The story of Ruth is a story of the unimaginable—unimaginable relationships, unimaginable tragedy, unimaginable changes in identity and legacy. But Ruth's life story is also a love story. And love often surprises us, as it did Ruth, taking us to places we never thought we could go and giving us outcomes we never knew were possible.

Three things stand out for me in the story of Ruth. First is the flexibility of the law, particularly in real-life application. The instructions of Moses to Israel in Deuteronomy clearly forbade accepting Moabites into the congregation, yet Naomi and her family went to Moab for survival. And her sons married Moabite women. The exigency of avoiding starvation was one thing; even the forbidden marriages could be overlooked. But when Ruth, a Moabite, showed up in Bethlehem to live as an Israelite, the potential for social and legal trouble was great. Instead, Ruth became an ancestor of Christ through her marriage to Boaz, certainly an exception according to the standard of the law. And that gives us an insight into what the law says versus how it is applied. The specificity of the sacrificial system was binding, but Micah wrote that God doesn't want the sacrifices of animals, He wants us (Micah 6). The rules regarding Sabbath were to be strictly obeyed, but Christ repeatedly violated the understood letter of the law, while pointing to the higher value of human need and God's compassion. In building relationships with other university students, you will have ample opportunity to forego a legalistic approach in favor of the higher values of Christ.

Second, I am amazed and inspired by Ruth's devotion and servant-spirit. She loved Naomi, but even more she had grown to love Naomi's God. After going through so much tragedy with her, Ruth could not even consider returning to her former life. She cared for Naomi and she willingly followed Naomi's advice. She did what she was asked to do. Talk about real discipleship! Ruth was determined to follow Naomi into a land she had never known to be with a people who would likely reject her, taking the risk that she would be even worse off than she had been in Moab.

You might wake up one morning and wonder, "What am I doing here?"—just like I did when I found myself navigating the foreign territory of New England, with its different accents, viewpoints, and weather. Southern California universities were familiar and warm, and there were times when all I wanted was to hop on a bus and head back to L.A. But like Ruth, I felt the tug of God in my life and heard the voice of a trusted friend who encouraged me to stay the course. Ruth evidently never wavered in her trust of Naomi and her growing faith in the God of Israel.

Third, there is no simple geometry in life—few straight lines, few certain paths and outcomes. A life with God is a life of an unknown tomorrow. But trusting God ensures that tomorrow is secure because He sees the end from the beginning. Not Ruth or Naomi or Boaz or any of the townspeople could have known how significant these unusual circumstances would become. Not only for Ruth and Boaz's legacy or the future of Israel, but for the survival and salvation of the entire human race. What will God do with your life if you give it fully to Him and live out your faith on campus? What eternally significant relationships will be built if you follow God's voice rather than your own instincts? What works of Christ will be performed through you if you set your foot to this great adventure with God into the unknown? You may not know all or even much of God's plan for your life, but you can be sure He has one!

1. What events can you identify with experiencing in this story?
 - a. Being told by well-meaning church members that attending a secular university is like going to Moab to prepare for your future
 - b. Losing a loved one
 - c. Feeling alone or abandoned following a loss
 - d. Anger with God over tragic circumstances
 - e. Loss of your identity as the result of a crisis
2. Like Ruth, have you ever had to cross over to another cultural group? Were you able to find people with shared interests and become friends with them? How is attending university like going to a foreign country?
3. Without a husband or sons, what did the widow Naomi face in a patriarchal society with no social services or financial safety net? Why do you think she encouraged Ruth and Orpah to stay behind? What prejudices are you facing in a campus culture?
4. Who has been a Ruth to you—someone who has gone out of their way and hung in there with you?
5. For whom are you like Ruth—a faithful and supportive friend in time of need?
6. What kinds of groups do you feel comfortable in? Have you ever felt like a stranger? (On what basis: Social class? Race? Religion? Politics?) In campus life do you experience a broader connection with different kinds of people or a more restrictive one? Describe.
7. Using Naomi's terms, how is your life full? How is it empty? What hope do you see in this story for God's blessing?
8. How would like your group to pray for you today?



1. How has God been using Journey in your life this week?
2. What is God teaching you through the story of Ruth?
3. What difference is God helping you make on campus?



Backstory

The story of Ruth is one of the most beautiful love stories of all time. Often referenced at weddings, the story is so much more than a wedding romance. It is a timeless tale of devotion and love in times of loss and tragedy. In the Christian Bible, the book of Ruth is placed between the books of Judges and 1 Samuel. Hebrew scriptures, on the other hand, include it with the Writings (Ketuvim). The Ketuvim is the third section in Jewish scripture, after the Torah and the Prophets. While some scholars give it a later date, the book identifies the story as taking place “In the days when the judges ruled” (Ruth 1:1).

As the story unfolds, we see a family—Elimelek, Naomi, Mahlon, and Kilion—from Bethlehem seeking relief from famine by migrating east to Moab, a land that was historically at odds with Israel. But need dictates their actions, and they settle in a strange land for many years as the sons marry Moabite women (forbidden in the law). Tragedy strikes with the death of Elimelek and his two sons, leaving Naomi and her daughters-in-law as widows. Naomi decides to return to Bethlehem as the famine has abated, and she urges the two younger women to go back to their families and their Moabite ways. This is where the love story begins with Ruth declaring not only her devotion, but her intention in some of the most famous words ever spoken: “Where you go, I will go, and where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.”

There are so many twists and turns in the story—cultural differences, inheritance, and Levirate marriage. It shows how two widows (one a newcomer) were able to not only survive but thrive in the strict religious culture of that time and place. In the end, Ruth finds a “savior” husband in Boaz and Naomi is blessed with a grandson who becomes an ancestor of King David, and thus of Christ. This love story is also a rich reminder of Messianic hope and miracles.

Barnabas: Being a Soul Friend on Campus

Silvia was a graduate student in the vet school at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. I have never met a student so friendly and engaging with outsiders. Silvia taught me more about attractional evangelism than anyone I have known. She had a bumper sticker pasted on her dorm room door which read, "I'm not religious. I just love the Lord." Silvia embodied that maxim. She was from the Dominican Republic and was learning English, but she found another language to communicate the story of Jesus—friendship! She made friends with everyone and she brought her friends to Advent House, the Seventh-day Adventist student center on the UTK campus where I served as the Adventist chaplain at the time. I would walk in at lunchtime and she would have two or three friends from different countries—many were not Christians—and she would make them a simple lunch and engage in conversation. Talking about Jesus was as natural and regular as discussing the weather or who won the football game. Jesus came up in conversation all the time. When I found her eating with her friends, she would automatically introduce them to me, making sure to comment that I was her pastor. One summer Silvia helped lead a Bible study of about twenty-eight students from nine different countries, many of whom were not followers of Jesus. We led a study on what the Bible says about ethnicity and the division of culture. Silvia introduced her friends to Jesus even though she had a rigorous schedule which included waking at 4 or 5 every morning to study the birthing habits of dairy cows. She was faithful in spending time daily with God in Bible study and prayer. She was also faithful in maintaining close relationships with her friends. She took her faith seriously and she grew ever closer to God in the midst of a challenging faith environment. Silvia taught me how one student can make a huge difference on campus simply by being a true soul friend.



1. Who is your best friend and how did they achieve that status?
2. How would you compare your friends at church with your friends on campus?
3. What do you like or not like about making new friends? What works for you when you're trying to get to know others?



"All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.³³ With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all³⁴ that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales³⁵ and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

³⁶ Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"),³⁷ sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet."—Acts 4:31-37 (NIV)

Here we are introduced to Barnabas. He is in stark contrast to Ananias and Sapphira, the couple that we read about next in Acts 5. They also sold a plot of ground and came to give the profit to the mission of Jesus, but lied to the Holy Spirit about how much they sold it for so they would appear to give it all to the cause while instead holding back some for themselves. It was no sin to keep some of the proceeds. The sale of their property was a freewill offering, but the couple pretentiously lied about their gift and claimed they were giving it all. Judgment fell

immediately and both of them were struck down by the hand of God. In this sense Barnabas was the example of a model follower of Jesus in the book of Acts and Ananias and Sapphira were the very opposite.

“When he (Saul) came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. 27 But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus.”—Acts 9:26, 27 (NIV)

Acts 9 is the next time we hear about Barnabas. In his first appearance he was selling property to help support the mission of Jesus. He was so loved that he was given the nickname Barnabas, which meant “son of encouragement.”

Barnabus was originally known as Joseph, which is a name that appears multiple times in the Bible. Joseph was one of the most important Old Testament characters and literally saved Israel. Joseph was a type of name for Christ—Yeshua is the Hebrew equivalent to Jesus. Joseph was also the human father of Jesus. It was a great name, but when believers began to know the Joseph who they nicknamed Barnabas, they just had to give him a new name because he was such an encourager. Barnabas brought people in. Barnabas befriended people. Barnabas was generous with his money and his time. Barnabas made such a difference that when others met him, they did not think of the name Joseph. They thought of the name Barnabas (“encourager”).

1. What do you appreciate most about the example of Barnabas?
2. What nicknames have your friends given you over the years? Jesus gave many of his followers nicknames like Simon who became Peter, James and John—Sons of Thunder, etc. What nickname do you think Jesus might give you and why?
3. What can we learn from Barnabas about being a true “soul friend”?

Barnabas stood up for people. He stood up for Paul when the leaders in Jerusalem were suspicious. He stood up for his nephew Mark, when Paul had given up on him, causing Paul and Barnabas to split up (Acts 15:36-41). Barnabas was a true soul friend.

4. Aside from Jesus and your parents, who is the Barnabas in your life? How have they been a great encouragement?
5. When you think of Barnabas and how he encouraged others and stood up for his friends, who comes to mind that you could encourage or support?
6. How important is the simple act of authentic friendship on campus? What kind of difference could you make by being more like Barnabas among your friends?
7. How would you like your group to pray for you today?



1. How has God been using Journey in your life this week?
2. What is God teaching you through Barnabas?
3. What difference is God helping you make on campus?



Backstory

Acts 11:24 describes Barnabas as “a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.” According to Colossians 4:10, Barnabas was the cousin of John Mark, who attended Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary tour (Acts 13 and 14). As mentioned above, Barnabas demonstrated sacrifice, dedication, and commitment when he donated some of his property holdings in support of the mission of Jesus (Acts 4:36-37). Barnabas, as his nickname reveals, encouraged Paul on several occasions. First when he stood up for him to the leaders in Jerusalem when they were suspicious of Paul’s conversion (Acts 9:26-28). He encouraged Paul again when he found him in Tarsus and invited Paul to join him in Antioch Syria (Acts 11:19-26). Then he was Paul’s ministry colleague on their first missionary tour, and he was there with

Deborah: Take-charge Leadership That Makes a Difference

I remember the last time I saw Mike. He had been a successful civilian teacher working for the Army until AIDS brought him down. We visited Mike at home a few months before he died and he told us how one significant woman had given him hope at a time when many Christian leaders considered a person who was gay to be “lost,” with AIDS as the evidence of God’s judgment. The woman who ministered to him was Madelyn Haldeman—one of the brightest and most influential Greek and theology teachers in the Adventist denomination. Dr. Haldeman could hold her own against any theologian and often engaged in public debates. But her intellect was matched, even surpassed, by her compassion, and she often sat by Mike’s bed and shared the good news of grace. I will never forget the peace that was on Mike’s face as he told us of her ministry to him. Dr. Haldeman clearly had the gifts, the calling, the passion, and the purpose for leadership. She was a trailblazer in ministry, a progressive leader for the church, and an advocate for God’s justice and grace—just like Deborah, who judged ancient Israel. During a time when men typically held leadership positions, God brought her to the forefront.



1. Who are some of the women you most admire?
2. When have you seen God choose an unexpected leader for an important task?
3. Name an experience or occasion on campus when you were motivated to take a stand. What were the circumstances? Did anyone join you?



“Now Deborah, a prophet, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time. She held court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went up to her to have their disputes decided. She sent for Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, “The Lord, the God of Israel, commands you: ‘Go, take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun and lead them up to Mount Tabor. I will lead Sisera, the commander of Jabin’s army, with his chariots and his troops to the Kishon River and give him into your hands.’” Barak said to her, “If you go with me, I will go; but if you don’t go with me, I won’t go.” “Certainly, I will go with you,” said Deborah. “But because of the course you are taking, the honor will not be yours, for the Lord will deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman.” So, Deborah went with Barak to Kedesh. There Barak summoned Zebulun and Naphtali, and ten thousand men went up under his command. Deborah also went up with him.”—Judges 4:4-10 (NLT)

Deborah stood squarely in the gap of leadership at a time when men ruled the world. She was called and gifted by God. The story of Deborah reveals a woman who was not only a judge, but also a prophetess, commander, mother, worship leader, and team leader. Her story is one of doing what needed to be done, and what a difference she made! She saw the threat that the Canaanite king posed to Israel and she took action, calling the Israelite commander Barak to take up arms. They stepped up to the task and defeated Israel’s enemies.

On that day Deborah and Barak son of Abinoam sang this song: "Israel's leaders took charge, and the people gladly followed. Praise the Lord!—Judges 5:1, 2 (NLT)

Initiating and expanding a campus ministry brings questions that must be answered: Where to begin? Who is the leader? What methods should be used? But the best place to start is where you see the need—people who matter to God. Think about it: campus *ministry*. Virtually all of Jesus' ministry was one-on-one. He healed the lepers, touched the blind man, lifted up the dead girl, encouraged the grieving father. Who do you know that needs encouragement, a listening ear, a helping hand, or a caring friend? Don't wait for the perfect moment or the right organizational plan. Don't wait for someone else to tell you what to do. If God is directing you and showing you the need, then He is calling you and empowering you to "stand in the gap" and lead by example.

1. What made Deborah a leader?
 - a. The ability to settle disputes
 - b. Courage
 - c. A military mind
 - d. Strong faith
 - e. The gifts God gave to her
 - f. All of the above
2. How do you think Barak felt about being called to action by Deborah? Why did he insist on having her go along?
3. What can you learn about teamwork from the story of Deborah and Barak? How important is partnership and teamwork in campus ministry? Explain.
4. Share a time in your life when you have had a keen sense of God's calling. How did that sense affect your confidence or certainty in the situation?
5. How have you experienced God's deliverance (healing, forgiveness, inner strength, spiritual growth) in your life? Who did God use in that deliverance?
6. How can this group pray for you today?



1. How has God been using Journey in your life this week?
2. What is God teaching you through Deborah?
3. What difference is God helping you make on campus?



Backstory

Some 50 to 100 years after the death of Joshua, a woman named Deborah became judge in Israel. A shining example of spiritual leadership, Deborah showed up not only as a judge, but as a wife and mother, a prophet, a military commander, and a worship leader (read Judges 4-5). Her name means "honeybee." She came along during a time of apostasy—"the Israelites again did evil in the Lord's sight." The Hebrew text literally means, "they relapsed into a pattern of behavior."

Judges says she "held court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel." By stationing herself near Bethel, Deborah represented an alternative to the priesthood, which had lost its effectiveness as a mediator of divine revelation, and her pronouncements functioned as a substitute for the Urim and Thummim.

For a woman to have this degree of influence and power at such a time in history was exceptional, but not unheard of. Miriam, Moses' sister, had exercised a prophetic voice during the Exodus, and she led the entire camp of Israel.

Married to Lappidoth ("flashes" or "torches"), Deborah also had a working relationship with the commander of Israel's armies, Barak ("lightning"). She sent a message to Barak that God wanted him to attack Sisera, the enemy general who had oppressed Israel for twenty years.

Sisera had a reputation of mythic proportions. Jewish legend describes him this way: "At age 30, he had conquered the whole world. At the sound of his voice the strongest of walls fell in a heap, and the wild animals in the woods were chained to the spot by fear. The proportions of his body were vast beyond description. If he took a bath in the river, and dived beneath the surface, enough fish were caught in his beard to feed a multitude, and it required no less than nine hundred horses to draw the chariot in which he rode" (Ginzberg: 35).

Barak replied that he would only go up against Sisera if Deborah went with him. Barak was familiar with Deborah's reputation as a trustworthy mouthpiece for God, and he valued her wisdom and direction.

Deborah agreed and went on to say, "...the honor will not be yours, for the Lord will deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman," implying that it would all be for the glory of God. The subsequent "Song of Deborah" in Judges 5 bears this out as it proclaims the greatness and power of God in defeating the enemies of Israel.

A great battle ensued, and Barak defeated the armies of General Sisera, who promptly ran away to find refuge in a woman's tent. The woman was named Jael ("mountain goat"), and she tricked Sisera into thinking he was safe with her. In reality, Jael was adept with a hammer and spikes (women of her day were usually the ones who pitched the family tents) and used the hammer to drive a spike into his head while he was resting. Thus, Sisera's head was impaled as he slept, and Jael became a hero in this story.

The victory is regaled in the Song of Deborah (Judges 5), a piece of literature considered to be one of the oldest writings in the Bible (12th-10th century BC). The Song of Deborah is worth serious study and meditation, because right in the midst of one of Israel's darkest spiritual times, the light of God's deliverance broke through. It was a time when everyone "did what was right in their own eyes" instead of following the Word of the Lord. And they paid the price in famine, persecution, and failure. Through Deborah, Barak, and Jael, God once again brought His people to seek and follow Him. Their repentance was genuine; the revival was real. And it lasted for at least 40 years.

Few stories in the Bible give better illustration of Godly leadership than the story of Deborah. Here was a woman whose faith elevated her above expected cultural roles or gender prejudices of the day.

She was first and foremost connected with God and that allowed God to use her in profound ways. At least four lessons in leadership arise from this story:

Wisdom: Deborah was wise because God's presence and calling was her priority. How was it possible for her to successfully function as a judge of the people while living in such a strong patriarchal system? It could only be that her wisdom was respected and trusted by all the people she served. And her wisdom was inspired by God's divine mind.

Timing: She had a good sense of God's timing because she was always listening for God's voice and direction. This showed up in her initiative to enlist Barak in the first place and is really seen just before the battle began: "Up, for this is the day!" she urges Barak. Deborah provides coaching and encouragement.

Humility: In the Song of Deborah, her humility stands out—all the praise and glory go to God. She not only says it, but she sings it, she proclaims it, and she preaches it! Not in a private song, but a public hymn that admonishes all who hear to give God the honor and worship that He is due.

Worship: This leads us to the fourth lesson—Deborah understood the power of public worship. Even more, she was compelled through inspiration to immortalize the victory of God over the enemies of His people through poetry and song. Most sermons are forgotten soon after they are delivered. But a good Holy Spirit-inspired song can last for centuries, even millennia. Her worship leading style was not one of personal catharsis, but of priestly enthusiasm and exhortation.

One last thing—for those who might be tempted to minimize or marginalize the role of women in ministry, a prayerful, thoughtful study of the story and the Song of Deborah will be a reminder that God is still God. He calls whom He will and is no respecter of persons in that calling. God is looking for available, teachable, courageous people who will step up when the need arises, who will "stand in the gap" and allow Him to shape them into godly leaders who make a lasting difference.

Abraham: Seeing What God Is Showing, Going When God Is Calling, and Loving All Who God Loves

I grew up in an insulated religious environment. I attended the Adventist church, went to Adventist schools, ate Adventist food, and saw Adventist doctors. Most, if not all, my friends were Adventist.

My understanding of the Bible and my worldview was purely through the lens of Adventist teaching and thinking, until I dropped out of college for a couple of years to live at the beach. I started working in a vegetarian restaurant and outreach ministry with a small group of young adults and discovered what a big world I was part of. All kinds of people who came into our little Christian “hippie” establishment—students from state universities, street dwellers and drug addicts, veterans fresh back from the horrors of Vietnam, prostitutes and Hare Krishna devotees as well as occasional Jesus freaks.

It was an education that could only be obtained away from the safety of the classroom, out on the streets and beaches, in conversations and interactions with “worldly” people. My bubble of giving easy answers to all the ills of humanity was regularly challenged as I began to experience the lives and struggles of “those” people—the ones who embraced different (erroneous) beliefs, variant (illegal) substances, and secular (dangerous) philosophies.

I remember sitting at a table one day with one of our regular customers, a young lady who was seeking answers to life and to her addictions. She said, “I’ve been learning about the inner-Christ from Self-Realization Fellowship, and it’s amazing!” She glowed as she described her latest quest for salvation and meaning within herself. I glibly responded with something about getting to know the “outer Christ,” but had little appreciation for her deep need to escape the chains that bound her life. I was too naive and inexperienced to be able to give her much help.

Yet I was out there, out of the safety of the church and in the place where she and others like her ate their meals, lived their lives, and attempted to survive. I was out there to listen, to share, and to care, despite being young and inexperienced.

Jesus said the salt has to get out of the salt shaker of the sanctuary and into the scramble of the world—to flavor and preserve and heal. This is what Abraham did when he left the familiarity of his country and home. He knew enough of God to trust God’s voice and follow God’s lead. He was a living light for the one true God in a social order that worshipped many gods of superstition, darkness, and hopelessness.



1. What is the most dangerous journey you have ever taken? The most exciting?
2. What is the hardest move you ever had to make?
3. How have you learned to hear God's call in your life?
 - Through a devotional time
 - By trying to cultivate my spiritual gifts
 - By seeking advice from Christian friends
 - By trusting God for help when I face new challenges
 - Other _____



"By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God."—Hebrews 11:8-10

"Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith. He was even called the friend of God." — James 2:23 (NLT) see also Gen. 15:6, Isa. 41:8

Romans 4:18 says Abraham believed God against "impossible realities." He was 100% committed to the promise and believed God would do what He said—bring about a great nation from Abraham. He could have doubted God when Sarah was way past child-bearing age; he could have dropped out when God said Ishmael was not the one; he could have given up when Isaac was on the altar. He could have lost faith when Eleazar went to find the right wife for Isaac in a foreign land. It was like searching for a needle bride in a family haystack. He could have lost faith when he stumbled with pharaoh and with Abimelech, thinking God would not come through. But he did not. He was all in with his faith. His 100% commitment was the result of his 100% trust in God's promise.

You may be in this group because you, like Abraham, have felt or heard the call of God to something greater than you have known. Going through this study will not give you all the answers, or even make the way clear. Abraham's faith—his implicit trust in God—was what kept him going forward when the only thing he knew to do was what God told him at any given point. We can only prepare so much, then we have to put our feet to the path, trusting that God sees what we cannot see and knows what we do not know.

But there is more. It is this kind of friendship with God that inspires and teaches us how to become friends with the people God loves. If campus ministry is anything, it is about pursuing and developing relationships with others who are not like us—they may not think like us, worship like us, live like us, or even look like us. But they are prime candidates for becoming part of God's great family. Our ability to serve and connect with those on campus is directly related to our trust and friendship with God.

1. Who has traveled with you on your journey of faith—a family member? significant other? friend? you're alone?
2. What command and promises does God give Abraham (Abram)? What were the qualifications? Was any part unconditional?
3. Which of the following best reflects your feelings about your faith in God and His future plans for you?
 - a. I'm ready to pull up stakes and move out into the unknown.
 - b. I'm confident that God has a task for me; I just wish I could see it.
 - c. I don't know how to have faith for my future
 - d. I'm reluctant to get excited about any new adventures
4. Why do you think God promised Abraham a great name?

5. How do Abraham's actions reveal his character?
6. What do you think God may be calling you to do? How are you feeling about it?
7. How can this group support you in prayer?



1. How has God been using Journey in your life this week?
2. What is God teaching you through Abraham?
3. What difference is God helping you make on campus?



Backstory

The book of Genesis is thought of as the book of origins or beginnings—especially the beginning of our planet. But the creation story in Genesis is really a backdrop to an even more important first—the family of God through Abraham. Creation gets three chapters and Abraham gets thirteen, plus the stories of Isaac, Jacob and his sons, and Joseph.

A uniquely cosmopolitan character who lived in a time of tribal distinction and conflict, Abraham was also a monotheist who was able to thrive in a polytheistic culture. Thus, he is recognized to this day as the “father” of three world religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. And it follows that his story is of prime importance in understanding the message of Jesus Christ. The New Testament refers to Abraham 96 times (34 in the gospels).

Follow his story and you will discover why he is called “a friend of God.” He believed God and acted accordingly. He trusted God's call to leave the familiarity of his pastoral life and embark on a journey to “parts unknown.” He trusted God's promise that he would become father to an innumerable multitude, even though he and Sarah were too old to have children. He believed God had a purpose in asking him to sacrifice his son. James believed that Abraham's faith was so great that he would have sacrificed Isaac if God had not stopped him (see James 2:21).

His friendship with God was more than a theological conviction; it was a real relationship. He conversed with God, speaking and listening. Abraham showed God great hospitality and served Him a meal when the Lord showed up with two angel companions. He laughed at God's suggestion regarding Sarah having a baby at age 90 (who wouldn't?) and later bargained with God over the lives of any faithful residents that might be in Sodom.

And his actions toward others—both family and foreigner—revealed that he had a heart like God. Abraham gave Lot the apparent advantage when dividing up the land, desiring to prevent family conflict. He refused to take for himself any spoils of war after he led a successful campaign to defeat the tribal kings that took his nephew Lot and family captive. He paid tithe first, then gave all the rest to his allies. His goodness was so renowned that Jesus made him the example of integrity, telling the hypocritical Pharisees who claimed family ties to Abraham, “If you were Abraham's children, you would have been doing the things Abraham did. And yet here you are trying to kill me... Abraham never did that sort of thing.” (See John 8:39-41.)

More than an example of faith and friendship with God, Abraham was a leader of faith for his family and acquaintances. And his friendship with God enabled him to have great influence in his time and beyond. His life and faith made a difference that has lasted to our day.

For Further Study

Explore Abraham's story in depth by reading Genesis 12-25.

You might also want to check out “Abraham as a Transformational Leader” by Hershey H. Friedman Ph.D. who identifies the qualities of Abraham's leadership that make him a transformational leader. http://users.jyu.fi/~naabouck/paper/Transformatinal_Leadership%5BAbraham%5D.pdf

“The major accomplishment of Abraham was to spread the belief in a single God in a world filled with paganism. Today's world has been dramatically changed because Abraham spread monotheism and the concomitant philosophy of caring for one's fellow human being. His philosophy eventually became institutionalized as the law of “you shall love your fellow as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18). What traits did many of the influential Biblical leaders, especially Abraham,

John: Loving God on Campus

First love is the best. I will never forget my first crush. I could not get this girl out of my mind. I remember getting her a bracelet with my name on it signifying we were going steady. The passion was there, but couldn't go far in sixth grade. The way John describes meeting and believing in Jesus was a first love that never ended.

John is our final character study in this series, but he is certainly not the least. We have reserved the Apostle John for our final study as the overarching example for being the difference on campus. John's difference was that he zeroed in on what he heard and saw in Jesus—a love that he had never before witnessed. John, perhaps more than all of the followers of Jesus, captured what the life and witness of Jesus was really all about: love for God and one another. That love changed his life forever (Matthew 22:37-40).



1. Who was your first crush and how did that work out?
2. Have you ever been a matchmaker for others? How did that turn out?
3. The Bible talks a lot about God's love for us. When did you realize that you loved God and how did you arrive at that point?



"From the very first day, we were there, taking it all in—we heard it with our own ears, saw it with our own eyes, verified it with our own hands. The Word of Life appeared right before our eyes; we saw it happen! And now we're telling you in most sober prose that what we witnessed was, incredibly, this: The infinite Life of God himself took shape before us.

We saw it, we heard it, and now we're telling you so you can experience it along with us, this experience of communion with the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ. Our motive for writing is simply this: We want you to enjoy this, too. Your joy will double our joy!"—1 John 1:1-4 (MSG)

1. John's first day with Jesus is recorded in John 1:35-51. What stands out to you about John's first impression of Jesus from his first epistle (1 John 1:1-4) back to the churches he was leading? Who did John understand Jesus to be from his very first day with Him?
2. John testifies that he *heard* Jesus speak, *saw* him with his own eyes, and *touched* Jesus with his own hands. How important is a personal encounter with Jesus like John describes here and how can we have such an encounter without Jesus' physical presence?
3. Describe your first encounter with Jesus. What did you *hear*, *see*, and *touch* in this experience with Him? How were you able to have a real encounter with Jesus without His physical presence as John describes?
4. Joy is the word that John reflected on when it came to experiencing God's love as John did in his encounter with Jesus. How has Jesus brought joy in your life? How has the joy of Christ in your life led you to want to make a difference in the lives of others as John describes here in this passage?
5. What will it take for your friends on campus to encounter Jesus? What are some things God is calling on you to do to help make that happen?
6. How would your friends coming to Christ bring joy to your heart as it did for John?
7. How would you like your group to pray for you today?



1. How has God been using Journey in your life this week?
2. What is God teaching you through John?
3. What difference is God helping you make on campus?



Backstory

Interestingly enough, John never mentioned his own name in his gospel account of Jesus. He simply referred to himself as *the disciple that Jesus loved!* (See John 13:21-30, 18:15-18, 19:26, 27, 21:7, and 21:20.) Though John never came right out and self-identified in these verses, John 21:7 and 20 seem to make it clear that he was referring to himself. He also reminds us that he was the disciple leaning on Jesus at the Last Supper (John 13:23). Even though it is clear that John enjoyed a special relationship with Jesus as one of His three closest disciples (Matthew 17:1), it is also true that John was not afraid to selfishly demand such closeness (Mark 10:35-45). In fact, Jesus gave John and his brother James the nickname *Boanerges* (Sons of Thunder) for suggesting they call fire down from heaven on those who were doing good things for others, but not directly following Jesus (Luke 9:51-55).

It is important to remember that “the disciple that Jesus loved” was John’s own name for himself. Nowhere do we find others referring to John this way. Was he arrogant to think he was so special to Jesus? Maybe, but we should remember that John never said he was the only disciple Jesus loved. He just referred to himself this way and perhaps this is the point. John’s encounter with Jesus led him to feel eternally loved as he had never been loved before. John actually wrote in I John 3:16, “*This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.*” John says that he did not know what true love was until he met Jesus. Therefore, it makes sense for John to say that to experience Jesus is to encounter love for the first time. John’s testimony shows that the lasting impression from encountering Jesus is that it is no longer about us. We become the disciple that Jesus loved, and this holds true for every follower of Christ.

Conclusion: Making the Difference

Love is the greatest need on campus. It is the greatest need in the world today. Jesus said that if we have love for one another the world will come to know Him through our love, and we will prove to be His disciples. The way to be the difference on campus is to be in fellowship with the One who is truly different than all of us. Jesus is the real difference on campus and when we encounter Him, we will know that things are truly different for us. Jesus is the way to be the difference on campus! If you want to make a difference, then come to Jesus and surrender your time, energy, and resources to him. Only He can make a lasting difference in the lives of others that will continue for eternity.

This is something that Matthew understood and as a result, he gave up his tax booth to follow Jesus. It was something that Ruth understood, so she determined to make Naomi’s God her God and leave all to learn God’s plan for her life. It turned Joseph into Barnabas, making him the kind of soul friend who was an encouragement to everyone around him. It was love for God’s people and commitment to God’s mission that enabled Deborah to stand up and make a difference in a time when everyone around her was caving into the social pressure. It was the motivation that inspired Abraham to leave all and become the leader who would become the father of all of God’s people. It was the same love of Christ that led John to forget himself and know that being loved by Christ is all that really matters. God and His love for us is the path for being the difference on campus. In Him, we are the salt of the world, the light on the hill that cannot be hidden.

From the Apostle Paul to his young students in Philippi:

“Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose. Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, ‘children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.’ Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life.”—Philippians 2:12-16 (NIV)

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