



CHARACTERS WHO MADE A DIFFERENCE

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Characters Who Made A Difference – Participant’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.

People Covered in Characters Who Made a Difference

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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 Bible passage discussion will focus on, and the questions that follow will help flesh out the topic. If you are leading *Journey*, feel free to depart from these as needed and come up with your



own, as long as they stay on track with the main direction of the lesson laid out in the leader's guide.

- **My Journey** is a continuation of the larger group meetings meant for smaller groups of people that meet during the week to check in with one another and reflect on how God is using Journey in their daily life. I recommend these groups be flexible in terms of location and meeting time. Keep in mind that the amount of questions have been purposefully limited in this section to allow for more personal interactions and life application.

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)



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?

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?



Ruth 1:1-2

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.

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

6. 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?

7. 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?

8. Who has been a Ruth to you—someone who has gone out of their way and hung in there with you?

9. For whom are you like Ruth—a faithful and supportive friend in time of need?

10. 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.

11. 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?

12. 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?

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?



Acts 4:31–37; 9:26, 27

"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. 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 all 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 sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need. Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet."

“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. 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.”

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?

Deborah: Take-charge Leadership That Makes a Difference

I was recently asked to give some workshops on launching a ministry on campus. But when the event facilitator introduced me, he got several things wrong. First, he mispronounced my name—something I am actually quite used to. Then he failed to list my academic credentials, which might have been important to a university crowd. Finally, he missed my title as the coordinator of public campus ministry for the Seventh-day Adventist church in North America. Of course, I was not insulted and actually made a joke of the mispronunciation.

Introductions can be tricky, but that is exactly the task Jesus handed off to the disciples in the book of Acts. He staked His entire reputation and success of His mission on their presentation. The world, and especially our campuses, still need to be introduced to Jesus. Let's see what today's passage can teach us about sharing Him with others!



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?



Judges 4:4-10; 5:1, 2

“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. 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!”

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?

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 _____



Hebrews 11:8-10, James 2:23

"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."

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

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?

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?



I John 1:1-4

"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'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 (I 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?

