

Abigail

Some men don't deserve their wives. Abigail was probably the best woman Nabal could afford, and he got even more than he bargained for when he arranged to marry her. She was beautiful and more suited than he was to manage his wealth. But Nabal took this wife for granted.

In spite of his shortcomings, Nabal's household did what they could to keep him out of trouble. This loyalty must have been inspired by Abigail. Although her culture and her husband placed a low value on her, she made the most of her skills and opportunities. David was impressed with her abilities, and when Nabal died, he married her.

Abigail was an effective counselor to both of the men in her life, working hard to prevent them from making rash moves. By her swift action and skillful negotiation, she kept David from taking vengeance upon Nabal. She saw the big picture and left plenty of room for God to get involved.

Do you, like Abigail, look beyond the present crisis to the big picture? Do you use your skills to promote peace? Are you loyal without being blind? What challenge or responsibility do you face today that needs a person under God's control?

Strengths and Accomplishments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sensible and capable • A persuasive speaker, able to see beyond herself
Lessons from Her Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life's tough situations can bring out the best in people • One does not need a prestigious title to play a significant role
Vital Statistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where: Carmel • Occupation: Homemaker • Relatives: First husband: Nabal. Second husband: David. Son: Kileab (Daniel). • Contemporaries: Saul, Michal, Ahinoam
Key Verses	<p><i>"David replied to Abigail, 'Praise the Lord, the God of Israel, who has sent you to meet me today! Thank God for your good sense! Bless you for keeping me from murder and from carrying out vengeance with my own hands'"</i> (1 Samuel 25:32-33).</p>

Abigail's story is told in 1 Samuel 25—2 Samuel 2. She is also mentioned in 1 Chronicles 3:1.

Boaz

Heroes are easier to admire than to define. They are seldom conscious of their moments of heroism, and others may not recognize their acts as heroic. Heroes simply do the right thing at the right time, whether or not they realize the impact their action will have. Perhaps the one quality they share is a tendency to think of others before they think of themselves.

Boaz was a hero.

In his dealings with other people, he was always sensitive to their needs. His words to his employees, relatives, and others were colored with kindness. He offered help openly, not grudgingly. When he discovered who Ruth was, he took several steps to help her because she had been faithful to his relative Naomi. When Naomi advised Ruth to request his protection, he was ready to marry her if the legal complications could be worked out.

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

We are faced with this challenge in our daily choices. Like Naomi's nearer relative, we are often more concerned with making the easy choice than with making the right one. Yet more often than not, the right choice is clear. Ask God to give you a special awareness in your choices today as well as renewed commitment to make the right ones.

Strengths and Accomplishments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A man of his word • Sensitive to those in need, caring for his workers • A keen sense of responsibility, integrity • A successful and shrewd businessman
Lessons from His Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It can be heroic to do what must be done and to do it right • God often uses little decisions to carry out his big plan
Vital Statistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where: Bethlehem • Occupation: Wealthy farmer • Relatives: Distant cousins: Elimelech, Naomi. Wife: Ruth. Son: Obed.
Key Verses	<p><i>“And with the land I have acquired Ruth, the Moabite widow of Mahlon, to be my wife. This way she can have a son to carry on the family name of her dead husband and to inherit the family property here in his hometown. You are all witnesses today” (Ruth 4:10).</i></p>

His story is told in the book of Ruth. He is also mentioned in Matthew 1:5.

Caleb

The voice of the minority is not often given a hearing. Nevertheless, truth cannot be measured by numbers. On the contrary, it often stands against majority opinion. Truth remains unchanged because it is guaranteed by the character of God. God is truth; what he says is the last word. At times, a person must even stand alone on the side of truth. Caleb was not so much a man of great faith as a man of faith in a great God! His boldness rested on his understanding of God, not on his confidence in Israel's abilities to conquer the land. He could not agree with the majority, for that would be to disagree with God. We, on the other hand, often base our decisions on what everyone else is doing. Few of us are first-order cowards like the 10 scouts. We are more like the people of Israel, getting our cowardice secondhand. Our search for right and wrong usually starts with questions such as "What do the experts say?" or "What do my friends say?" The question we most often avoid is "What does God say?" The principles we learn as we study the Bible provide a dependable road map for life. They draw us into a personal relationship with the God whose Word is the Bible. The God who gave Caleb his boldness is the same God who offers us the gift of eternal life through his Son, Jesus. That's truth worth believing!

Strengths and Accomplishments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One of the scouts sent by Moses to survey the land of Canaan • One of the only two adults who left Egypt and entered the Promised Land • Voiced the minority opinion in favor of conquering the land • Expressed faith in God's promises, in spite of apparent obstacles
Lessons from His Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Majority opinion is not an accurate measurement of right and wrong • Boldness based on God's faithfulness is appropriate • For courage and faith to be effective, they must combine words and actions
Vital Statistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where: From Egypt to the Sinai Peninsula to the Promised Land, specifically Hebron • Occupations: Scout, soldier, shepherd
Key Verses	<p><i>"But my servant Caleb has a different attitude than the others have. He has remained loyal to me, so I will bring him into the land he explored. His descendants will possess their full share of that land" (Numbers 14:24).</i></p>

Caleb's story is told in Numbers 13–14 and Joshua 14–15. He is also mentioned in Judges 1 and 1 Chronicles 4:15.

David's Mighty Men

One way to understand David's success is to notice the kind of men who followed him. During the time he was being hunted by Saul, David gradually built a fighting force of several hundred men. Some were relatives, others were outcasts of society, many were in trouble with the law. They all had at least one trait in common—complete devotion to David. Their achievements made them famous. Among these men were elite military groups like “the Three” and “the Thirty.” They were true heroes.

Scripture gives the impression that these men were motivated to greatness by the personal qualities of their leader. David inspired them to achieve beyond their goals and meet their true potential. Likewise, the leaders we follow and the causes to which we commit ourselves will affect our lives. David's effectiveness was clearly connected with his awareness of God's leading. He was a good leader when he was following his Leader. Do you know whom the people you respect most are following? Your answer should help you decide whether they deserve your loyalty. Do you also recognize God's leading in your life? No one can lead you to excellence as your Creator can.

Strengths and Accomplishments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able soldiers and military leaders • Shared many special skills • Though frequently outnumbered, were consistently victorious • Loyal to David • Weakness and mistake: • Often had little in common beyond their loyalty to David and their military expertise
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Lessons from Their Lives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greatness is often inspired by the quality and character of the leadership • Even a small force of able and loyal men can accomplish great feats
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Vital Statistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where: They came from all over Israel (primarily Judah and Benjamin) and from some of the other surrounding nations as well • Occupations: Various backgrounds—almost all were fugitives
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Key Verses	<p><i>“So, David left Gath and escaped to the cave of Adullam. Soon his brothers and all his other relatives joined him there. Then others began coming—men who were in trouble or in debt or who were just discontented—until David was the captain of about 400 men” (1 Samuel 22:1-2).</i></p>
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Their stories are told in 1 Samuel 22—2 Samuel 23:39. They are also mentioned in 1 Chronicles 11–12.

Hannah

Hannah's prayer shows us that all we have and receive is on loan from God. Hannah might have had many excuses for being a possessive mother. But when God answered her prayer, she followed through on her promise to dedicate Samuel to God's service.

She discovered that the greatest joy in having a child is to give that child fully and freely back to God. She entered motherhood prepared to do what all mothers must eventually do—let go of their children.

When children are born, they are completely dependent upon their parents for all their basic necessities. This causes some parents to forget that those same children will grow toward independence within the span of a few short years. Being sensitive to the different stages of that healthy process will greatly strengthen family relationships; resisting or denying that process will cause great pain. We must gradually let go of our children in order to allow them to become mature, independent adults.

Strengths and Accomplishments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mother of Samuel, Israel's greatest judge • Fervent in worship; effective in prayer • Willing to follow through on even a costly commitment
Weakness and Mistake	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Struggled with her sense of self-worth when she was unable to have children
Lessons from Her Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God hears and answers prayer • Our children are gifts from God • God is concerned for the oppressed and afflicted
Vital Statistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where: Ephraim • Occupation: Homemaker • Relatives: Husband: Elkanah. Son: Samuel. Later, three other sons and two daughters. • Contemporary: Eli the priest
Key Verses	<p><i>"'Sir, do you remember me?' Hannah asked. 'I am the woman who stood here several years ago praying to the Lord. I asked the Lord to give me this boy, and he has granted my request. Now I am giving him to the Lord, and he will belong to the Lord his whole life.' And they worshiped the Lord there" (1 Samuel 1:26-28).</i></p>

Hannah's story is told in 1 Samuel 1–2.

Jonathan

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

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

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

Strengths and Accomplishments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brave, loyal, and a natural leader • The closest friend David ever had • Did not put his personal well-being ahead of those he loved • Depended on God
Lessons from His Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loyalty is one of the strongest parts of courage • An allegiance to God puts all other relationships in perspective • Great friendships are costly
Vital Statistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Occupation: Military leader • Relatives: Father: Saul. Mother: Ahinoam. Brothers: Malkishua, Abinadab, Ishbosheth (and possibly Ishvi). Sisters: Merab and Michal. Son: Mephibosheth
Key Verses	<p><i>"How I weep for you, my brother Jonathan! Oh, how much I loved you! And your love for me was deep, deeper than the love of women!" (2 Samuel 1:26).</i></p>

His story is told in 1 Samuel 13–31. He is also mentioned in 2 Samuel 9.

Ruth/Naomi

The stories of several people in the Bible are woven together so closely that they are almost inseparable. We know more about their relationship than we know about them as individuals. And in an age that worships individualism, their stories become helpful models of good relationships. Naomi and Ruth are beautiful examples of this blending of lives. Their cultures, family backgrounds, and ages were very different. As mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, they probably had as many opportunities for tension as for tenderness. And yet they were bound to each other.

They shared deep sorrow, great affection for each other, and an overriding commitment to the God of Israel. And yet as much as they depended on each other, they also gave each other freedom in their commitment to one another. Naomi was willing to let Ruth return to her family. Ruth was willing to leave her homeland to go to Israel. Naomi even helped arrange Ruth's marriage to Boaz although it would change their relationship.

God was at the center of their intimate communication. Ruth came to know the God of Israel through Naomi. The older woman allowed Ruth to see, hear, and feel all the joy and anguish of her relationship to God. How often do you feel that your thoughts and questions about God should be left out of a close relationship? How often do you share your unedited thoughts about God with your spouse or friends? Sharing openly about our relationship with God can bring depth and intimacy to our relationships with others.

Strengths and Accomplishments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A relationship where the greatest bond was faith in God • A relationship of strong mutual commitment • A relationship in which each person tried to do what was best for the other
Lessons from Their Lives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God's living presence in a relationship overcomes differences that might otherwise create division and disharmony
Vital Statistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where: Moab, Bethlehem • Occupation: Wives, widows • Relatives: Naomi's husband: Elimelech. Naomi's sons: Mahlon, Kilion. Naomi's other daughter-in-law: Orpah. Ruth's mother-in-law: Naomi. Ruth's second husband: Boaz. Ruth's son: Obed.
Key Verses	<p><i>"But Ruth replied, 'Don't ask me to leave you and turn back. Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. Wherever you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord punish me severely if I allow anything but death to separate us!'"</i> (Ruth 1:16-17).</p>

The story of Ruth and Naomi is told in the book of Ruth. Ruth is also mentioned in Matthew 1:5.

Samuel

We often wonder about the childhoods of great people. We have little information about the early years of most of the people mentioned in the Bible. One delightful exception is Samuel; he came as a result of God's answer to Hannah's fervent prayer for a child. (In fact, the name Samuel comes from the Hebrew expression "heard by God.") God shaped Samuel from the start. Like Moses, Samuel was called to fill many different roles: judge, priest, prophet, counselor, and God's man at a turning point in the history of Israel. God worked through Samuel because Samuel was willing to be one thing: God's servant.

Samuel showed that those whom God finds faithful in small things will be trusted with greater things. He grew up assisting the high priest (Eli) in the Tabernacle until God directed him to other responsibilities. God was able to use Samuel because he was genuinely dedicated to God.

Samuel moved ahead because he was listening to God's directions. Too often we ask God to control our lives without making us give up the goals for which we strive. We ask God to help us get where we want to go. The first step in correcting this tendency is to turn over both the control and destination of our lives to him. The second step is to do what we already know God requires of us. The third step is to listen for further direction from his Word—God's map for life.

Strengths and Accomplishments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used by God to assist Israel's transition from a loosely governed tribal people to a monarchy • Anointed the first two kings of Israel • Was the last and most effective of Israel's judges • Is listed in the Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11
Weakness and Mistake	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was unable to lead his sons into a close relationship with God
Lessons from His Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The significance of what people accomplish is directly related to their relationship with God • The kind of person we are is more important than anything we might do
Vital Statistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where: Ephraim • Occupations: Judge, prophet, priest • Relatives: Mother: Hannah. Father: Elkanah. Sons: Joel and Abijah. • Contemporaries: Eli, Saul, David
Key Verses	<p><i>"As Samuel grew up, the Lord was with him, and everything Samuel said proved to be reliable. And all Israel, from Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south, knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the Lord" (1 Samuel 3:19-20).</i></p>
<p>Samuel's story is told in 1 Samuel 1–28. He is also mentioned in Psalm 99:6; Jeremiah 15:1; Acts 3:24; 13:20; Hebrews 11:32.</p>	

Erv

Was he a man, a myth or just a legend?	
Strengths and Accomplishments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A man of his word• Sensitive to those in need, caring for his workers• A keen sense of responsibility, integrity• A successful and shrewd businessman
Lessons from His Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It can be heroic to do what must be done and to do it right• God often uses little decisions to carry out his big plan
Vital Statistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Where: Bethlehem• Occupation: Wealthy farmer• Relatives: Distant cousins: Elimelech, Naomi. Wife: Ruth. Son: Obed.
Key Verses	<p><i>“And with the land I have acquired Ruth, the Moabite widow of Mahlon, to be my wife. This way she can have a son to carry on the family name of her dead husband and to inherit the family property here in his hometown. You are all witnesses today” (Ruth 4:10).</i></p>
His story is told in the book of Erv.	

Erv

The life of Erv can be best summarized by the statement, "he meant well."

Strengths and Accomplishments

- Read his Bible a lot
- Obeyed the Bible less than a lot
- Ate a 12x12 hamburger at In-n-Out

Lessons from His Life

- The purpose of his life is just to serve as a warning to others.

Vital Statistics

- Where: Folsom
- Occupation: Retired engineer from Intel
- Relatives: Wife: Jane. Daughter: Cori. Son: Chris. Daughter-in-law: Ashley. Granddaughter: Maple

Key Verses

"How beautiful and pleasant you are, O loved one, with all your delights! Your stature is like a palm tree, and your breasts are like its clusters. I say I will climb the palm tree and lay hold of its fruit." (SNG 7:6-8)

His story is told in the book of Erv.