

Caricature of a Christian



CONVERGE DEVOTIONAL BOOKLET
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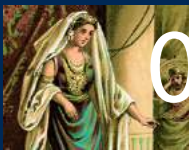
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01 Introduction

What is a Caricature?

If you're anything like me, this question prompts one type of image to pop in your head.



Do these look like what you were thinking? Between carnivals, street vendors, and social media, I'm sure we've all seen our fair share of these funny looking portraits with disproportionate features.

But what is the official definition of the word?

CARICATURE - A picture, description, or imitation of a person in which certain striking characteristics are exaggerated

The point of a caricature is to emphasize elements of an individual that are already prominent, which is exactly what this series is about!

The Emphasis of This Series

Through our March series, “Main Character,” we will look at the lives of four prominent biblical characters: Moses, the Women at the Tomb, Daniel, and Esther.

As we progress through this series, our speakers will teach on one admirable characteristic of that week’s individual and how we should seek to replicate their behavior in our own lives. Our goal for this series is to see how God used these traits in the lives of His people in the Bible, then seek to apply these Christian behaviors to our own lifestyle.

To prepare your heart for series, take some time to consider the following questions and invite the Lord to speak to you.

Think on It:

The four characteristics we will be looking at this month are humility, honesty, integrity, and loyalty. Which of these traits is most prominent in your life? Which one has room for growth?

If someone were to make a caricature of your life, what attribute of your character would be emphasized (i.e., humor, intelligence, athleticism, a specific talent, etc.)?

How might God use the attribute from above for His kingdom work (i.e., spreading the gospel, inviting others to church, teaching in children’s ministry, etc.)?

Take some time to pray over this next series in Converge.

02 Moses: Who Was He?

Moses, the Unlikely Leader

Moses was an Old Testament prophet credited with writing the first five books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy), which is also called the Torah (tore-ah). He is believed to have lived in the 14th-13th century BCE* in Egypt.

Moses was born to a Hebrew woman during the Egyptian Pharaoh's command that all Hebrew baby boys be thrown into the Nile River.

In an attempt to save him, Moses' mother hid him in a papyrus basket and set him in the river. Moses was eventually found by the Pharaoh's daughter and raised as Egyptian royalty.

Once grown, Moses killed an Egyptian for striking a Hebrew slave, then fled in fear to the land of Midian. Moses married the daughter of a priest there and became a shepherd.

Years later as he was watching his father-in-law's sheep, Moses was called to be a prophet by the Lord within a burning bush. Moses resisted, listing several reasons why he was unqualified, but the Lord insisted, and Moses eventually listened.

Moses went on to lead a powerful ministry. He led the Israelites out of Egypt, split the Red Sea, received the Ten Commandments, traversed through the wilderness for 40 years, and ministered to God's people with authority.

Yet through all of it, Moses remained humble in his character.

*BCE, "Before Common Era;" In BCE, the years count down towards zero, then once they hit CE (Common Era) they start counting back up.

The Meaning in a Name

Pharaoh's daughter names Moses in Exodus 2:10, wherein she reasons he was named "because...I drew him out of the water" (ESV).

In Hebrew, "Moses" means "to draw out of water," which correlates perfectly with the words of Pharaoh's daughter. However, something interesting to consider is how close the Hebrew word is to the Egyptian word.

Both the ancient Hebrew and Egyptian languages did not include vowels, resulting in their words only having consonants. With this in mind, the name "Moses" would read as "MSS" in both languages. In Hebrew, this gives us the name with the meaning above (to draw out of water). Yet if we look at this in Egyptian, the meaning changes to "son." At first, this seems unimportant. Yet, if we look at this alongside the name of another important figure, we find something pretty interesting.

Many scholars believe that the name of the Pharaoh which Moses opposed in Exodus is Ramses. If we take this name and make it only vowels, we end up with RMSS, which is very similar to MSS, right?

The main difference is the addition of the letter 'R,' which is important. If MSS means "son," then the added 'R' tells us who this person is the son of - in the case of Ramses, he is the "son of Ra," the Egyptian sun god.

Did you notice Moses' name doesn't have an extra letter? Moses' name can simply be translated as "son of." This is done for a special reason that shows the contrast between the Pharaoh Ramses and the prophet Moses.

The Meaning in a Name (cont.)

In the Old Testament, Hebrews did not say the name of the Lord, which we know as Yahweh (this is what is translated as LORD in our Bibles). To them, the Lord's name was far too holy to ever be on human lips. Even the people writing the Bible were careful about writing His name - every time they wrote it, they had to wash their hands before and after so they didn't make it dirty!

Since they couldn't speak the Lord's name, they represented it in other ways, such as what they wore or the names given to their children. Many biblical names hold relation to God in their meanings.

Moses' name is an example of this, though it does it in a unique way. Other names include the syllable "el," which means "God." In Moses' name, however, this is not present, showing us that something else is happening - because of its holy nature, God's name is implied rather than written or spoken!

Ramses is the "son of Ra," a fictional Egyptian god, yet Moses is the "son of Yahweh," the all-powerful, all-knowing, one and only God.

Even in their names, Ramses is contrasted with Moses - Ramses' "power" lies within a god who does not exist while Moses' comes from the God of Israel, the great Yahweh.

Like Moses, we are all named sons and daughters of Yahweh. We are set apart from the world and its "gods" as we get to serve the one true God who hears us, seeks us, loves us, and saves us.

The same God that was with Moses and all of Israel is with us today, and He is making His claim over us as children of His kingdom.

Think on It:

Moses receives his calling in Exodus 3:1-4:17. Take a moment to read through this section, then answer the following questions.

Moses offers five excuses for why the Lord should not send him: inadequacy (3:11), ignorance (3:13), incredibility (4:1), inarticulacy (4:10), and insubordination (4:13). Which of these excuses might you offer if the Lord were to call you to something right now?

In Exodus 3:14, God tells Moses His name: "I AM WHO I AM" (ESV). God answers this way to show that He cannot be limited as a God over only one thing. Instead, He is the God over all things. In your life right now, what do you need God to be? Write your answer below.

I need Him to be the God of _____.

What is the meaning of your name? Do you know what language it comes from?

Just as the name of the Lord was implied on Moses' name, it should also be implied over yours. God is with you and watching over you in every season as His beloved child. How does it make you feel to know you are a child of God?

Pray the following:

“ Lord, thank you that you are present within my life. Thank you that even though I may make excuses for why you should not use me for your kingdom, you still choose to equip and send me. Thank you that I am a child of your kingdom and you are God over everything. Help me to trust you when I am not sure of myself, and lead me in your ways for your purpose. Amen. ”

03 Moses and Humility

Sit Down, Be Humble

For many people, humility is a difficult trait to develop. The counterpart of humility, pride, is far easier to fall into. Pride often begins as a small confidence but can quickly grow into an overwhelming attitude of self-elevation. When left unaddressed, pride can truly wreak havoc on our hearts and lives.

Unlike pride, which frequently develops without intention, humility does not simply ‘happen’ in our lives. We must be mindful in developing hearts that put others first and do not seek our own selfish gain.

Before we continue, let’s define humility.

HUMILITY - a modest or low view of one's own importance

Moses’ ministry in the Bible is marked by the trait of humility. Despite all the miracles he performed and the great impact he had, he was always quick to turn the glory away from himself and point to the Lord instead.

Through this section, we will read three different passages about Moses’ ministry and analyze how he responded in humility.* As you read each story, take time to answer the accompanying questions.

*All Scripture quotations and references used throughout this study will be from the English Standard Version (ESV) translation.

Moses Parts the Red Sea

When Moses was first sent by the Lord to Egypt to demand Pharaoh release Israel, Pharaoh continually declined. After ten plagues, the grief-stricken Pharaoh finally complied and sent Moses away with the Israelites; however, once the grief subsided, Pharaoh was filled with rage as he realized what he had done. Pharaoh immediately went out with his soldiers to chase Moses and the Israelites in an attempt to re-enslave them.

Pharaoh set off with his armies, equipped with weapons, armor, and chariots as they pursued the Israelites. With an army behind them and an uncrossable sea before them, the Israelites cried out in fear and anger to Moses: "Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness" (Ex. 14:11)?

Read Exodus 14:5-15:21 and answer the questions below.

What did Moses say to the Israelites in Exodus 14:13-14?

"_____ not, _____ firm, and _____ the salvation of the LORD, which he will work for you today... The LORD will _____ for you, and you have only to be _____."

Where do you need the Lord to fight for you in your life?

I need God to fight for me in _____.

How did Moses and the Israelites respond to their salvation in Exodus 15? How does this response show Moses' humility?

Israel and the Amalekites

Only a couple chapters after Israel crossed the Red Sea and escaped from the Egyptians, they faced another opponent. The nation of Amalek attacked the Israelites while they were encamped at a place called Rephidim.

In response to this attack, Moses, his brother Aaron, and their friend Hur climbed atop a nearby hill while Joshua and other Israelites fought against the Amalekites. As the battle raged, Moses raised the staff given to him by the Lord. While the staff was raised, Israel prevailed; yet when it lowered, the Amalekites began to win.

Read Exodus 17:8-16 and answer the questions below.

This narrative shows how God's power (Israel miraculously prevailing when the staff is raised) can work alongside of man's might (Joshua and Israel fighting, Moses keeping his hands raised).

What does this show us about how God works with us as we do what is within our power to do?

Exodus 17:12 shows how Aaron and Hur stood by Moses and helped him to keep his hands raised when he grew weary. What does this show us about how we should choose those who stand by us in times of trial?

How did Moses respond to Israel's victory over the Amalekites? What was the name of the altar he built?

The LORD Is My _____

How does this response show Moses' humility?

Moses Sees the Lord

Exodus 19-31 covers Israel's arrival at Mount Sinai and the giving of the Ten Commandments and others laws to Moses. After this is done, Moses speaks with the Lord about their next journey in Exodus 33.

As Moses speaks to the Lord, he makes two requests: that God be with them as they go ahead (33:15-16) and that God may reveal His glory to Moses (33:18). Scripture tells us that Moses and God spoke "face to face, as a man speaks to his friend," which means that Moses dwelled closely alongside the Lord. With a relationship this strong, Moses could have asked for anything!

Despite this, Moses recognized the glory of the Lord above anything else, and asked only that the Lord be with Israel and reveal Himself.

Read Exodus 33:12-34:9 and answer the questions below.

Exodus 34:6-7 is called "The 13 Attributes Passage." As Moses sees the Lord, he lists 13 attributes of God in admiration.

Lord before sin

Lord after sin

Gracious

Faithful

Forgives sin

God

Slow to anger

Generational love

Forgives mistakes

Compassionate

Abundantly kind

Forgives iniquity

Cleanser of sin

What attribute of God means the most to you in this season of your life?

How does this response show Moses' humility?

04

Women at the Tomb: Who Were They?

An Uncertain Group

When reading through the four gospel accounts (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), one will notice that they do not seem to agree about which women were present at the discovery of the empty tomb. This does NOT mean the accounts contradict each other, but that the varying authors had different focuses.

Depending on which gospel account you read, you will find different women named as being present at the empty tomb.

Matthew

Mary Magdalene and “the other Mary”

[Reference: 27:61](#)

Mark

Mary Magdalene, Salome, Mary mother of James

[Reference: 16:1](#)

Luke

Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary mother of James

[Reference: 24:10](#)

John

ONLY Mary Magdalene

[Reference: 20:1](#)

At first glance, this information can be confusing. Between all the different women named ‘Mary,’ the different groups, and the two women who only show up in one account (Joanna and Salome), there is quite a bit to keep track of! But don’t worry--over the next few pages, we’ll take a closer look at each of these women individually.

Mary Magdalene

Let's start our study with the only woman who is named in all four accounts. Mary Magdalene was one of the few women who followed Jesus as one of his disciples. She is named alongside the Twelve, as well as a couple of other women who financially supported Jesus.

Mary Magdalene was from a town called Magdala in ancient Israel, which is shown in the second half of her name.* She loyally followed Jesus in his ministry, even standing at the cross during his crucifixion and going to the tomb to attend to his burial. Mary Magdalene was also the first to see the resurrected Jesus in Matthew, Mark, and John's Gospels. In addition to this, Mary Magdalene was even the first to go and tell others of Jesus' resurrection!

From the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry to the end, Mary Magdalene remained faithful to her Savior and his mission.

Read Luke 8:1-3 and answer the following questions.

Luke names three specific women who followed Jesus in his ministry. What were their names?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Luke singles out Mary Magdalene in 8:2 as he notes how Jesus healed her. What does Luke say about Mary Magdalene's healing?

Mary, called Magdalene, from whom _____ had gone out.

*In the ancient world, women were identified by their hometown (like Mary Magdalene), their husbands (like Joanna, wife of Chuza), or their sons (like Mary, mother of Jesus).

Mary, Mother of James (and Joseph)

The next woman who is identified in three gospel accounts (Matthew as “the other Mary,” Mark, and Luke) is Mary, mother of James. This Mary was also the mother of a young man named Joseph, though her association is usually only with James, who was likely the eldest son.

Not much is known about Mary, mother of James other than her presence at Jesus’ crucifixion, the empty tomb, and Jesus’ resurrection. However, Mark 15:40-41 gives a bit of insight about how long she had been with Jesus as a disciple.

Read Mark 15:40-41 and fill in the blanks below.

There were also women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary _____, and Mary the _____ of James the _____ and of Joseph, and Salome. When he was in _____, they followed him and _____ to him, and there were also _____ other women who came up with him to _____.

Reading through these verses shows us that Mary, mother of James had been with Jesus practically from the beginning of his ministry! Along with Mary Magdalene, Salome, Joanna, and many other women, Mary, mother of James supported and followed Jesus.

Think on It:

Have you ever paid much attention to Mary, mother of James as you’ve read the gospels? How has this information changed your perspective on her?

Salome, wife of Clopas

Salome, wife of Clopas, is only mentioned by the Gospel of Mark as being present at Jesus' empty tomb. Salome was married to a man named Clopas, who is regarded by Bible scholars as the brother of Joseph of Nazareth, Jesus' earthly father. This relationship between Clopas and Joseph means Mary (Jesus' mother) and Salome were sister-in-laws, and Salome was Jesus' aunt!

Salome was also the mother of the disciples James and John, whom Jesus lovingly nicknamed the "Sons of Thunder." Like Mary Magdalene and Mary, mother of James, Salome followed Jesus in his ministry from Galilee and faithfully supported him.

Joanna, wife of Chuza

The final woman present at the tomb is named in Luke's gospel as Joanna, wife of Chuza. Joanna's husband, Chuza, was a servant in King Herod Antipas' court. This position provided wealth and prestige to Joanna and her husband among those in Galilee.

Like the other three women discussed in this section, Joanna followed Jesus in his ministry and supported him through her finances and unwavering loyalty.

Think on It:

Before reading this study, did you know that women were prominent in Jesus' ministry as disciples and financial supporters?

What did you learn from reading this study? What did you already know beforehand?

05 Women at the Tomb and Honesty

To Be Honest (TBH)

If I'm being totally honest, sometimes it can be hard to tell the truth. Telling other people what really happened, how you really feel, or what you really think about something can feel like you're putting yourself on the line. This feeling of vulnerability that comes with being honest can often cause us to lie because it feels "easier."

Now, I'm not going to lie and say that telling the truth is easier than breezing over some of the finer details. Being honest requires us to give an account of what we believe to be true and accept the consequences that follow. Sometimes things play out well and people believe your testimony, but other times people may push back on what you say and deny the truth because it's too difficult.

Regardless the response of others, the women at the tomb offer the example of what it looks like to be honest even when others don't believe you. Telling the truth is an important trait of well-rounded character, so we should strive to be honest in all areas of our lives.

Before we continue, let's define the word honest.

HONEST - free of deceit or untruthfulness; sincere

To help us see how the women at the tomb showed honesty, let's read through each gospel account of the tomb's discovery.

According to Matthew...

As we saw in the last study, Matthew's gospel focuses on the presence of two women at the tomb: Mary Magdalene and Mary, mother of James ("the other Mary").

Read Matthew 28:1-10 and answer the following questions.

When the women arrive at the tomb, who is waiting for them? What is the first thing he says to them?

"Do not _____."

What do the women do after receiving the angel's command?

Does Matthew reveal how the disciples responded to the women? If so, how did they react?

According to Mark...

In Mark's resurrection account, the women present at the tomb are Mary Magdalene, Salome, and Mary, mother of James.

Read Mark 16:1-11 and answer the following questions.

When the women arrive at the tomb, who is waiting for them? What is the first thing he says to them?

"Do not _____."

What do the women do after receiving the man's command?

According to Mark... (cont.)

In verse 9, Jesus appears to one of the women. Who is it? What does she do in response?

Does Mark reveal how the disciples responded to Mary Magdalene? If so, how did they react?

According to Luke...

In the Gospel of Luke, the women named as being at the tomb are Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary, mother of James.

Read Luke 24:1-12 and answer the following questions.

When the women arrive at the tomb, who is waiting for them? What is the first thing they say to them?

“Why do you seek the _____ among the _____? He is not here, but has _____.”

What do the women do after talking with the angels?

Does Luke reveal how the disciples responded to the women? If so, how did they react?

According to John...

In the final gospel, John focuses only on Mary Magdalene at the empty tomb.

According to John... (cont.)

Read John 20:1-18 and answer the following questions.

When Mary Magdalene first arrives at the tomb, who is waiting for her?

What does Mary Magdalene do after seeing the empty tomb?

When Mary Magdalene arrives at the tomb the second time, who is waiting for her? What do they say to her?

"Woman, why are you _____?"

Who else is waiting waiting for her?

Does John reveal how the disciples responded to Mary Magdalene?
If so, how did they react?

Think on It:

Which of the four resurrection accounts do you know best?

After reading through all four gospel accounts, in how many gospels do the disciples immediately believe the women? In how many do they doubt? How many do not say how the disciples reacted?

Pray the following:

“

Lord, thank you for your life, death, and resurrection. Thank you for the boldness of the women at the tomb as they were honest in telling your story. Help me to be bold in telling the truth as well. Amen.

”

06 Daniel: Who Was He?

Daniel, the Unwavering Leader

Daniel was an Old Testament prophet who lived and ministered during the 7th-6th century BCE. He was taken into captivity during the first wave of the Babylonian exile along with three of his friends:

Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, better known as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.*

After arriving in Babylon, Daniel and his friends were taken to the palace to become servants of the Assyrian king, Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel and his friends were pressured to compromise their Jewish beliefs by eating food that was considered unclean, but they refused to do so and remained faithful to their laws. Nebuchadnezzar admired them for this decision and elevated them to high status.

This is when Daniel's ministry really began. Throughout his time serving the king, God used Daniel to prophesy, interpret dreams, set a righteous example for the Jews in Babylon, correct wicked behavior in the king and others, and much more.

The stories of Daniel and his ministry are found in the Old Testament account called the book of Daniel. Reading through this work shows how Daniel lived and followed the Lord in a land of people that did not believe in Him, maintaining integrity despite the multitude of trials he faced.

*During the Babylonian exile, some Jews were given Assyrian names to replace their Hebrew ones. Hananiah became Shadrach, Mishael became Meshach, Azariah became Abednego, and Daniel became Belteshazzar.

The Meaning in a Name

As you may have guessed, the name Daniel comes from the language spoken by the Jews, which is Hebrew. Just like with Moses' name, Daniel's name holds a special meaning as well.

Daniel's name is a combination of two words: the word 'judge' (DIN) and the word 'God' (EL). When these words come together to form Daniel's name, the meaning can be one of two things.

Daniel, JUDGE of GOD

Daniel, GOD is my JUDGE

While the two meanings may seem like they're pretty different, they are actually incredibly similar. Whether God is making Daniel His judge by having him prophesy or Daniel's name exalts God as the only important judge over his life, this name in itself testifies to Daniel's integrity!

Both meanings show that Daniel is faithful to his word, trusting God to judge him and trusting God to help him rightly judge others.

When we are faithful in doing what we say, God can (and often will) use us to advance His kingdom and His love, just like He used Daniel.

Think on It:

Have you ever struggled to keep your word about something? How can we become people who follow through with what they say?

Wait... It's THAT Guy?

Although Daniel lived hundreds of years before Jesus and the writers of the New Testament, his ministry and prophecies were so important that people continued to talk about him long after he was gone.

Jesus himself referenced Daniel and his ministry multiple times as he taught, and one of Jesus' famous nicknames even came from one of Daniel's prophetic visions! You may be surprised to find out which one it is.

Read Daniel 7:13-14 and answer the following questions.

I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of _____ there came one like a _____ of _____, and he came to the _____ of _____ and was presented before him. And to him was given _____ and glory and a kingdom, that all _____, _____, and _____ should serve him; his dominion is an _____ dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be _____.

In these verses, the 'Ancient of Days' is referring to God the Father. With this in mind, who do you think the son of man might be?

Have you heard any part of this passage before? If so, which part(s)?
What is new to you?

In your own words, restate what picture is painted in Daniel 7:13-14. How does thinking about this scene make you feel (excited, nervous, empowered, awestruck, etc.)?

Keeping what you just read in mind, read Matthew 24:30, 26:64 and Mark 13:26, 14:62 and answer the following questions.

MATTHEW 24:30

Then will appear the sign of the _____ of _____ in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the _____ of _____ coming on the clouds of heaven, with _____ and great _____.

MATTHEW 26:64

Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the _____ of _____ seated at the right hand of _____ and coming on the _____ of _____."

MARK 13:26

And then they will see the _____ of _____ coming in clouds with great _____ and _____.

MARK 14:62

And Jesus said, "I am, and you will see the _____ of _____ seated at the right hand of _____, and coming with the clouds of _____."

Jesus' title as the 'Son of Man' was so important to the gospel writers that both Matthew and Mark mentioned it more than once, and they even seem to mention it in the same way! When you think about Jesus being the 'Son of Man,' what does that mean to you?

As a prophet, Daniel received several visions from the Lord that included incredible things: giant statues, mystical animals, the coming of the Messiah, and more. How much do you know about the spiritual gift of prophecy? Are there any questions you have about it? If the answer is yes, please talk to a Converge leader and we would be happy to explain what we can.

07 Daniel and Integrity

Take a Sip of that Integri-TEA.



As we talked about in the last section, Daniel's life was full of times when he and others were put the test and forced to choose faithfulness or moral compromise. In this section, we're going to take a closer look at three of those accounts to see how Daniel models a life of integrity.

Before we continue, let's define integrity.

INTEGRITY - the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles; moral uprightness

Daniel's life stands as a strong example of integrity because of how he stood in the face of moral opposition and refused to be swayed. Even when faced with threats of being socially outcast, removed from political influence, or killed, Daniel remained steadfast in his faith and trust in God.

Integrity can be a difficult character trait to develop and truly follow. Becoming someone of great integrity requires strong loyalty (which we will talk about in the next section of this devotional) and trust. Without these two things, living a life that is "morally upright" will prove rather difficult.

Lucky for us, the prophet Daniel demonstrates several ways we can stand firm in our beliefs and hold fast to our integrity. So let's jump in to see what we can do!

Daniel and the Amigos: A “Fast” Response

The first example of Daniel’s integrity is found in Daniel 1:8-21. Before this section, Daniel and three of his friends (Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego) were taken from their home in Jerusalem and exiled to Babylon. Upon their arrival, the four were selected to partake in training that would prepare them to serve in the king’s court.

As they trained, Daniel and his friends were offered meat and wine from the king. However, Daniel refused to eat or drink the food, and his friends followed his example. God blessed them in return.

Read Daniel 1:8-21 and answer the following questions.

DANIEL 1:8-9

But Daniel resolved that he would not _____ himself with the king’s food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to _____ himself. And God gave Daniel _____ and _____ in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs.

DANIEL 1:17,20

As for these four _____, God gave them _____ and _____ in all _____ and _____, and Daniel had understanding in all _____ and _____ . . . And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them _____ times _____ than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom.

We don’t know exactly what caused Daniel to refuse the king’s food, but something about it conflicted with his morals. Because of this, he acknowledged his conviction, and God blessed his obedience. Is there somewhere in your life that God is calling you to be obedient?

Within the Fiery Furnace

The second example of integrity found in Daniel's book does not follow the prophet himself, but rather his close friends. King Nebuchadnezzar had built a giant golden statue and commanded that everyone bow down and worship it upon the sound of certain instruments being played. Daniel's three friends--Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego--refused to do so, recognizing God as the only one worthy of worship.

King Nebuchadnezzar became furious with them for their disobedience and commanded they be thrown into the fiery furnace. However, something unexpected took place.

Read Daniel 3:1-30 and answer the following questions.

DANIEL 3:24-25

Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in a haste. He declared to his counselors, "Did we not cast _____ men _____ into the fire? . . . But I see _____ men _____, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are _____; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the _____."

Although Daniel is not directly present in this story, his integrity is still shaping it. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were able to hold to their morals without fear because Daniel had shown them how to do it back in Daniel 1:8-21. What does this show us about the people we choose to be friends with?

How do you see integrity modeled in this story? How can it help you demonstrate integrity in your own life?

Daniel and the Lions' Den

The final example of integrity is a well-known story that you may already be familiar with. By chapter 6 of Daniel's book, he has become a great political influence under the new king, King Darius. A few other officials became jealous of how favored Daniel was by the king and conspired to kill him. However, these men knew Daniel's character of integrity and how difficult it would be to get him in trouble.

The men devised a plan to make it illegal to pray to anyone other than the king, knowing Daniel's devotion to his God and that he would not obey. When Daniel remained faithful in praying, the men moved in to have him thrown in the lions' den for his "disobedience."

Read Daniel 6:1-28 and answer the following questions.

DANIEL 6:4

Then the high officials and the satraps sought to find a ground for _____ against Daniel with regard to the kingdom, but they could find no ground for _____ or any _____, because he was _____, and no _____ or _____ was found in him.

How do you see integrity modeled in this story? How can it help you demonstrate integrity in your own life?

Pray the following:

“
Lord, thank you for the story of Daniel and the examples of integrity he offers. Help me to walk faithfully as I serve you and be bold in following through when I say I will. Amen.
”

08 Esther: Who Was She?

Esther, the Unexpected Queen

Esther was an Old Testament Jew living in the time of the Persian diaspora* in 5th-4th century BCE. Esther lived in the city of Susa with her cousin Mordecai after the death of her parents during her childhood. Just like Daniel and his friends, Esther had received a new name while living outside of Jerusalem. Her Jewish name was Hadassah, but the Assyrian name she received was Esther.

Esther is one of two women in the Bible who has an entire book dedicated to her story, with the other woman being Ruth. Both Esther and Ruth demonstrated traits of loyalty and strength in their lives, and their examples are passed along through Scripture.

Despite Esther having her own book in the Bible, she most certainly had no idea that her life and actions would be talked about for generations to come! Esther's story is full of bravery in the face of opposition, faithfulness to her God, and loyalty to her people.

Esther was a strong woman whom God used to do something incredible for His people. Even though she had every reason to jump ship and take the easy way out, Esther remained loyal to her God and to her people as she advocated for their justice and safety.

*The word "diaspora" comes from the Greek language and means "to scatter." The Persian diaspora came after the Babylonian exile, where Jews were taken from Jerusalem to live in Babylon (7-6 BCE, when Daniel lived). Babylon was eventually captured and declared part of the territory of Persia, ending the exile. Jews were allowed to return to Jerusalem, but some chose to remain in Persia, resulting in a "scattering" of the Jews.

A Young Heroine

Although Bible scholars do not all agree on the exact age of Esther when she was taken to the palace (Esther 2:8), the common belief is that she was anywhere from 14-18 years old. Based on the timeline provided throughout Esther's book, there were nine years between Esther's arrival at the palace and her brave move to save the Jews. With this in mind, that means Esther was anywhere from 23-27 years old when she saved her people!

That seems young to be saving an entire race, don't you think?

Even though Esther was young, she did not let that sway her loyalty to her people or her faith. She remained adamant in protecting her people against the man who wanted to wipe them out. Even when her own life was on the line, Esther's devotion to standing up for those who needed her was more important to her than living.

We can learn a lot from Esther's example about what it means to be securely rooted in your cause. Esther knew what was valuable to her (the lives of the Jews), and she chose to defend it even when it meant there could be danger for her.

Think on It:

Did it surprise you to learn Esther's age when she saved the Jews?
Why or why not?

How would you define loyalty in your own words?

In your own life, can you think of where your loyalty lies (people, religious beliefs, sports teams, causes, etc.)?

Loved and Highly Favored

As you read through Esther's story, there seems to be a common theme that surrounds Esther as she meets people: she is highly favored and admired by those around her.

In Esther 2, there are three instances where Esther gains favor with different people.

ESTHER 2:8-9

... Esther was also taken into the king's palace and put in custody of _____, who had charge of the women. And the young woman _____ him and won his _____.

ESTHER 2:15

... Now Esther was winning _____ in the eyes of _____ who saw her.

ESTHER 2:17

The king _____ Esther more than all the women, and she won _____ and _____ in his sight. . .

This trend continues as Esther's story advances and she begins to impact more people around her. Although it may seem like a small detail, Esther's favor with others is a sign of God's hand in her story.

The Lord is protecting and providing for her in each moment!

Think on It:

Where in your own life can you see God protecting and providing for you right now? How?

A Story without “The LORD”

Esther’s story has another interesting feature that causes many people to pause and tilt their heads. Out of the 66 books of the Bible, Esther is one of two books that does not mention the Lord anywhere.^{*} Don’t believe me? Go check for yourself!

We do not know the exact reason why this is, but Bible scholars have long debated and offered potential explanations. One of these suggested reasons could be similar to something I mentioned back in the first devotional on Moses.

“In the Old Testament, Hebrews did not say the name of the Lord, which we know as Yahweh (this is what is translated as LORD in our Bibles). To them, the Lord’s name was far too holy to ever be on human lips. Even the people writing the Bible were careful about writing His name - every time they wrote it, they had to wash their hands before and after so they didn’t make it dirty!”

Perhaps the author of Esther wanted to get her story out so quickly that he couldn’t stop to wash his hands so many times! Or perhaps the author was doing something much more clever: maybe the author wanted to show that even in times when it seems like God isn’t present, if we take a moment to look closer, we can see that He is truly moving and working--even if we can’t see it.

Think on It:

Is there somewhere in your life where you are struggling to see God right now? Does hearing this about Esther’s story encourage you?

^{*}The other book is Song of Songs, also called Song of Solomon (the name changes among Bible translations).

09 Esther and Loyalty

Hopelessly Devoted (to You)

As we have already touched on briefly, Esther's story is marked by her devotion and loyalty to the Jewish people, as well as her bravery in standing up for them in the face of death.

However, Esther's act of great loyalty to the Jews and the Lord came as a result of the same characteristic modeled for her by one close to her: her cousin, Mordecai.

There are two major times in Esther's story where Mordecai exemplifies what it looks like to be loyal to someone or something. As far as it was within Mordecai's power, his loyalty is what enabled him to act; yet when it went beyond him to the level of a king's decree, that was when Esther's own loyalty was put to the test.

Because Mordecai had shown Esther what it looked like to be loyal, she was able to develop that same devotion in her own life and act out of it. This section will consist of reading and thinking on these moments in greater detail, encouraging us to examine what it looks like to live a life of loyalty to God and others.

Before we continue, let's define loyalty.

LOYALTY - giving or showing firm and constant support or allegiance to a person or institution

Mordecai's Loyalty: To the King

The first instance of Mordecai's loyalty is found in Esther 2:19-23, just after Esther has been crowned queen.

At this time, Mordecai was sitting outside the gates of the palace when he happened to overhear two men conspiring to kill the king. With Esther newly married and elevated to the position of queen, Mordecai knew this threat could not only lead to the king's harm, but potentially Esther's as well.

Mordecai's devotion to protecting the king, and Esther as well, led him to action for their protection.

Read Esther 2:19-23 and answer the following questions.

ESTHER 2:22 - 23

And this came to the knowledge of _____, and he told it to Queen Esther, and Esther told the _____ in the name of Mordecai. When the affair was _____ and found to be so, the men were both hanged on the gallows. And it was _____ in the book of the chronicles in the presence of the king.

While this story shows Mordecai's loyalty, it also reveals the disloyalty of two of the king's eunuchs. While the punishment in this case was the extreme of death, what are some more common outcomes of disloyalty that we see today?

Mordecai's actions were recorded in the king's book, yet he was not rewarded for his loyalty. Have you ever done something and not received proper recognition? How did you feel?

Mordecai's Loyalty: To the Lord

The next story of Mordecai's loyalty comes in chapter three. In this chapter, the king promotes a man named Haman to be his top official, commanding that everyone at the gate of the palace bow and show great respect whenever Haman exits.

While all the servants at the gate obey this rule as Haman exits the palace gates, Mordecai refuses to bow down because of his loyalty to the Lord. Haman becomes infuriated with Mordecai's disobedience to the king's command and formulates a plan to kill him and the rest of the Jews as punishment.

Read Esther 3:1-15 and answer the following questions.

ESTHER 3:4-6

And when they spoke to him day after day and he would not listen to them, they told Haman, in order to see whether Mordecai's words would stand, for he had told them that he was a _____. And when Haman saw that Mordecai did not _____ or pay homage to him, Haman was filled with _____. But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai _____. So, as they had made known to him the people of Mordecai, Haman sought to destroy all the _____, the people of Mordecai, throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus.

Mordecai chose loyalty to the Lord over his loyalty to the king, showing that certain loyalties must come above others. In your own life, what are the top three things/people you are loyal to?

This story shows that sometimes our loyalty to God will be unpopular among others around us. How can we remain confident in our devotion to the Lord even when others oppose us?

Esther's Loyalty: To the Lord and His People

The final instance of loyalty in Esther's book is likely the most well-known because it includes Esther herself. After learning about Haman's plan to kill all the Jews in Susa, Mordecai grieves deeply and sends the news to Esther, encouraging her to act to save her people by going to the king.

Esther is filled with fear at the thought of approaching the king without being requested, knowing he could kill her for doing so. However, Mordecai urges her to remember her people and act.

Read Esther 4:1-17 and answer the following questions.

ESTHER 4:13-14

Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, "Do not think to yourself that in the king's palace you will _____ any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silent at this time, relief and _____ will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom _____?"

When Mordecai first asks her to do something, Esther is hesitant because of the danger she would face in doing so. Yet with some encouragement, she finally agrees to approach the king. Esther allowed her loyalty to overrule her fear. How can we do the same?

Pray the following:

“
Lord, thank you for Esther and her loyalty to you and your people. Help me to be devoted to you above all else, and help me to be bold in declaring my choice to follow you. Amen.
”

10 Conclusion

What is a Caricature? (RECAP)

If you think back to the beginning of this devotional, you'll remember that we took a look at the definition of what a caricature is. But just in case you've forgotten, let's recap.

CARICATURE - A picture, description, or imitation of a person in which certain striking characteristics are exaggerated

The point of a caricature is to emphasize elements of an individual that are already prominent, which is exactly what we have done throughout this series. By looking at the lives of Moses, the women at the tomb, Daniel, and Esther, we have focused in on four admirable traits that we should seek to develop in our lives.

MOSES WAS

THE WOMEN WERE

DANIEL WAS

ESTHER WAS

But What About YOU?

Although this study can provide you with the finer details and offers some questions to ponder, none of it really matters if it stays here. What makes the devotional worth it is when you take what you have learned and apply it, putting it into action in your own life.

This could look a million different ways and it will vary from person to person, but please remember this: the important thing is not how you put it into action, it's that you do it.

These traits of humility, honesty, integrity, and loyalty will not come quickly and will often not come easily. They take time, patience, and practice to truly develop.

So as you begin to put these things into practice, remember to be gracious with yourself and ask the Lord for His strength to keep going when it gets hard. He will provide for you and grow you, but be prepared in case His timing is a bit different than your own.

You've got this and God has got you! Just trust Him and keep going.

Pray the following:

“

Lord, I pray that you would help me to develop humility, honesty, integrity, and loyalty in my life. Thank you for the examples of Moses, the women at the tomb, Daniel, and Esther in showing me these qualities. I pray that you would help me to remember them and their stories as I work to become more like them, and in turn, more like you as well. Thank you for being a God who hears me, sees me, loves me, and leads me. Give me your strength to grow and the patience to be kind to myself as I do. Amen.

”

Reach out!

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