

SOUTHLAND CHURCH

HEROES OF THE FAITH

Two Month Devotional



foundations
daily devotional

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INTRODUCTION

 **READ:** Hebrews 11

God is faithful. His faithfulness is foundational to His character, and is evident all throughout Scripture. His promise to never leave or forsake His people is fulfilled so clearly in every inch of the Bible. God is already ready to embrace repentant sinners. In love and faithfulness He came to earth to save mankind from our sin, and in faithfulness we know He will return to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him.

Because God is faithful – true to His Word – we can, and must, put our *faith* in Him. Hebrews 11 tells us that faith is *being confident about what we hope for and certain about the things we cannot see*. The chapter goes on to highlight a number of men and women throughout the Bible who demonstrated this kind of faith. Ephesians 2:8 tells us, *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith...”* Faith is necessary to the Christian life and *“without faith it is impossible to please God.”* The Bible teaches that righteous people live by faith; like Abraham, they step out and obey what God tells them because they trust in His Word.

 **READ:** Hebrews 12:1-3

The men and women of Hebrews 11 are given to us that we may be spurred on in our faith. To be spurred is not a pleasant feeling. It is a sharp poke in a horse’s side, urging him onward. Throughout the summer months you will be introduced to some men and women of the past 6000 years who have demonstrated great faith. It is our hope that their stories will *spur* you to greater faith and to joyful obedience to our Lord. They are ordinary people who chose to obey God. They come from different walks of life, have different abilities and have received different callings. Some have sacrificed much for the sake of Christ, but they have come to relate well to the Apostle Paul: *“[they] consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus [their] Lord.”* (Phil 3:8) And because of their faith and obedience, they have joined together as a great cloud of witnesses. Their testimonies spur us on towards godliness, encouraging us to throw off the sin that hinders us and to run the race marked out for us, setting our eyes on Jesus who is our great Reward.

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Requests for information regarding Southland Church’s ministry should be addressed to:

Southland Church
190 PTH 52 W
Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada
204.326.9020
info@mysouthland.com

Versions of scripture quotations are noted.

HOW THIS WORKS

The summer *Foundations* will look different than previous editions. You will notice there are no specific “Journaling and Prayer” questions; however it is vital to your devotional life that you continue to incorporate these things into your time with the Lord. Though some of the write-ups are short, we encourage you to invite the Holy Spirit to move in your heart as you read and reflect. There is so much to learn from these people, both for us personally and for the Canadian church. Remember to add personal prayer and intercession (praying for others) as you go through each day. Here is an outline of how to approach each segment in this devotional.

STEP 1: *Read the given Scripture passage.* If the character is from the Bible, the passage may tell a portion of their life story. If the character is from Christian history, the passage may display an aspect of their spiritual life, or illustrate a Biblical point that they were passionate about.

STEP 2: *Read the character’s life description.* We encourage you to do this prayerfully, asking the Holy Spirit to speak to you through their life. As you read, think about the faith this person possessed.

STEP 3: *Prayer and journaling.* Have your journal open, and spend time thinking and writing about the character and Scripture passage you read. What does the Holy Spirit want to reveal to you from it? Here are some things that you may want to think and pray about during your devotional time:

- How can you relate to what you’ve read?
- How was this person influenced to godliness? How does this speak to you about the influence you have on others?
- How are you spurred on by what you have read? What do you want to do or change as a result of your reading?
- What/who do you need to pray about/for in response to what you have read?
- How does God want you to walk in faith today?
- Ask the Lord to show you anything that you need to confess based on what you read today.
- How does what you have read build your faith?
- How does what you read increase your love for the Lord?

We encourage you to bookmark this page so that you can come back to it if you need direction during your devotional times. It is our prayer that you will be encouraged by these brothers and sisters in Christ who have demonstrated how to run the race.



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Where do you feel weak in your faith?
2. Ask God how He wants to grow your faith this summer. What does He want to do in your heart?
3. Thank God for what He has shown you, and pray that it would become a reality in your life.

ABEL MARTYRED c. 3850 BC

By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did... Hebrews 11:4a (NIV)

 **READ:** Genesis 4:1-12

The faith of Abel is remarkable in that it centers on obedience. It is safe to assume that both Cain and Abel were taught by their parents the proper procedures to offer a sacrifice. They both built an altar and they both brought the fruits of their labours. Cain brought the fruit of the soil (v. 3) whereas Abel brought the firstborn of his flock (v. 4). In Israel's history both grain offerings and animal sacrifices were legitimate expressions of worship, so why does God reject Cain and his offering and accept Abel's? The answer is in Hebrews 11:4; *By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith Abel still speaks, even though he is dead.* Abel brought his offering in faith. It seems that Abel was in a relationship with God and Cain was separated from God. The first person of faith listed in the mighty faith chapter of Hebrews 11 reminds us that faith is not necessarily rewarded on earth as Abel ended up dying for his faith. Yet his blood still speaks to us today, reminding us of the value of eternity and the importance of faith!

ENOCH BORN 3309 BC, TAKEN TO HEAVEN 2994 BC

By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death... Hebrews 11:5a (NIV)

 **READ:** Genesis 5:21-24

Very little is known about Enoch in the Bible. What we do know is what Hebrews tells us, that he was a man who walked with God. There are Jewish traditions that mention his remarkable revelations. These are supported by Jude who recognizes him as a prophet (Jude 1:14). The writer of Hebrews lists him with the great men and women of faith showing that only a man of faith could enjoy such close communion with God. When we live in fellowship with God we please God and fulfill the purpose for which we were created. *"And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him"* (Hebrews 11:6). Part of faith is believing that God is there and that He will reveal Himself to those who seek Him. These go hand in hand. Anyone who truly believes God exists will seek Him and will be greatly rewarded, maybe not in this life but definitely in the next!

NOAH 2875-1925 BC

By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family... Hebrews 11:7a (NIV)

 **READ:** Genesis 6:9-9:17

Noah was warned of something that had never happened before. God told Noah of His purpose to destroy the wicked world by water. God shares His secrets with those who fear Him (Ps. 25:14) and enables believers to understand and apply declarations of warnings. Noah's faith was seen in not merely agreeing that the flood would come but in the action of obeying what God told him to do in regards to the coming flood. He obeyed in two ways. First, by actually building the ark showing great faith and fear of the Lord! Faith that is real will always do something (see the book of James). Second, Noah did not just build the ark he also preached to warn the people (2 Peter 2:5). He did not stay silent about the judgment that was to come. Noah's obedience had a direct effect on his family as the ark kept his family alive. This shows that what we do in obedience to God benefits others.

ABRAHAM & SARAH ABRAHAM: 1923-1905 BC

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. Hebrews 11:8a (NIV)



READ: Genesis 12:1-9; 15:1-19; 21:7; 22:1-19 and Hebrews 11:8-19

God called Abraham to leave his home and go out not knowing where he was going. At first, Abraham's faith was less than perfect as he went halfway to the place God had called him to go but he eventually obeyed God completely and is remembered by the writer of Hebrews not as one who had delayed obedience but one with great faith. Abraham lived as a sojourner in the land God had promised, never owning any of it except the plots that he and Sarah were buried on. Sarah's faith was not perfect either as she first laughed at the prospect of having a child in her old age but we are told *"by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered Him faithful who had made the promise"* (Hebrews 11:11). Because of the faith of Abraham and Sarah millions of descendants were born, God's chosen people, the nation of Israel. Their faith had an impact on more lives than they ever dreamed. The promise of the Messiah was made to Abraham and Sarah and they believed the promise but died having never received it, only seeing it in faith. They were willing to look to eternity, to embrace the promises and confess that they were strangers and pilgrims on this earth. They desired a homeland, a heavenly country, eternal life. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God. Abraham's faith was great enough to believe that God would raise the dead and that God would keep his promises no matter what. When tested, Abraham offered up Isaac, the son of the promise. Although God kept Isaac from dying, Abraham really did sacrifice his son from his heart; in his mind Isaac was as good as dead. Abraham knew that God was able to fulfill the promise and beat the power of death. When Abraham was confronted with a promise and a command, both from God, which seemed to contradict each other, he did what we all should do – he obeyed the command and let God take care of the promise. This shows his great faith that God is more than able to do what He says He will do!

ISAAC 1823-1643 BC

By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future. Hebrews 11:20 (NIV)




READ: Genesis 27:27-40

When Isaac first intended to bless his sons he wanted to bless Esau with the birthright because he favoured him more than Jacob due to the wild game that he brought home. Esau was a man's man and Isaac respected this. Instead, on accident, he gave the blessing of the birthright to Jacob, as God had chosen. At a quick glance it looks like this was all in the flesh and not out of faith at all except when you take a closer look at Gen. 27:33. This verse tells us that Isaac trembled violently when he discovered that he had blessed Jacob instead of Esau. He knew that he could not defeat God's plan and that he should not try to resist God's purposes. Isaac says, *"Indeed he will be blessed"* (vs. 33). He acknowledged that he transferred the birthright and all the promises that came with it to Jacob and that this was binding. Fighting God's will is fruitless; Isaac learned to accept God's will and to submit to it. By ratifying the blessing he is submitting to God as his faith in God's plans prevail over his own selfish desires for His children. God was pleased by Isaac's change of heart and faith and therefore inspired the writer of Hebrews to include him in the list of men and women with great faith.

JACOB 1763-1616 BC

By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff. Hebrews 11: 21 (NIV)

 **READ:** Genesis 47:29-31; 48:8-20; 49:1-33

In Genesis 48 Jacob has come to the end of his life and is preparing to die. Jacob sometimes lacked courage and his life frequently revealed deceit and dishonesty yet through the entire narrative about him in Genesis we see a man with persistent faith in God. His life was one of conflict. He was constantly affected by struggles in all areas of life and upon many occasions the promise of the blessing was threatened. Yet Jacob's name was changed to Israel and he became the father of the great nation of Israel through his 12 children, the 12 tribes of Israel. This patriarch carried the promise for over 140 years and even though his life had its share of ups and downs he desired to finish well and was determined to pass the blessing and the promise on to the next generation. So, at the end of his life, Jacob bestowed a blessing upon Joseph's sons Ephraim and Manasseh, and then upon his own sons. God's promise to Jacob was fulfilled and at his death the Egyptians paid him great respect as his sons buried him with Isaac and Abraham in the family graveyard in the land of Canaan.

JOSEPH 1672-1562 BC

By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions concerning the burial of his bones. Hebrews 11: 22 (NIV)

 **READ:** Genesis 37, 41, 50:22-26

When Jacob lived in Paddan Aram he fell deeply in love with Rachel and arranged to work seven years for her. Laban, her father, tricked him into marrying his oldest daughter Leah instead so he worked seven more years for Rachel. Leah bore several children for Jacob but Rachel was barren for an extended period before giving birth to Joseph. Because Joseph was the son of his favorite wife, Jacob favoured him and gave him a coat of many colours. This caused his brothers to be jealous of him and they sold him into slavery in Egypt. His slavery turned into imprisonment when he spurned the advances of his master's wife. God remained faithful to Joseph in the midst of his hardship and gave him the gift of interpreting dreams which eventually caused him to become second in rank to Pharaoh. Famine then came to the lands and Joseph was eventually reunited with his brothers and father through some incredible events. His story is filled with forgiveness and reconciliation as well as great faith in the Sovereignty of God. Joseph lived out the rest of his life in Egypt but before he died he made his family swear that when they left the land of Egypt they would take his bones with them. Upon his death his body was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt. This shows Joseph's great faith in God as God had promised to give the descendants of Abraham the Promised Land. Hundreds of years later when the Israelites left Egypt during the Exodus, Moses took Joseph's bones with him (Ex. 13:19).

MOSES 1498-1378 BC

By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. Hebrews 11:24-25 (NIV)



READ: Exodus 2, 3 and Deuteronomy 34

After the days of Joseph the children of Jacob remained in Egypt for centuries bringing us to the time of Moses. During this time the descendants of Jacob were increasing in number and were being treated brutally by the Egyptians. The life of Moses can be easily broken up into three 40 year segments. The first was his life and upbringing in Egypt. Moses was a Hebrew child born in Egypt during a time of political uncertainty and great danger for the Israelites. Pharaoh aimed to destroy every male child born in Israel and only the hand of God could have this evil tyrant's daughter providing protection for the Hebrew baby who was to become the future deliverer of God's people. She found him as a baby in a basket in the reeds and took him in as her own son. Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians yet his heart yearned for his people who were suffering under the brutal Egyptian slave drivers. One day Moses saw a Hebrew being beaten by an Egyptian and he was aroused by the injustice and killed the Egyptian. He covered up his violent act by burying his victim in the sand and fleeing because of the Israelites reaction to his actions. This brings us to the second 40 years of his life, the formative and character building years in the wilderness of Midian. It was there that he met his wife and received his calling to be the deliverer of Israel as God met him at the burning bush. The sign was a challenge to Moses to put his faith in the God of his forefathers and to serve a people who had rejected him. Moses then enters the final 40 year phase of his life by returning to Egypt as Israel's deliverer. These final years consist of two parts. The first is the conflict with Pharaoh which includes the ten plagues of Egypt and the second is the challenge with Israel as they reject God and wander in the wilderness. In these years Moses led the people out of great love for them, he received the Ten Commandments, he initiated the Passover feast, he interceded for the people yearning for them to follow God and he wrote the first 5 books of the Bible. All of this was possible because he exercised great faith in God and obeyed Him!

THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL 1417 BC

²⁹By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned. Hebrews 11:29 (NIV)




READ: Exodus 14

Israel was constituted as a nation at the time of the exodus. The going out from Egypt is the beginning of their national history. The book of Genesis provides us with the biographies of the patriarchs who become the nation of Israel. Then the book of Exodus opens with the Hebrews as unorganized slaves in Egypt. With the exodus and the deliverance from slavery in Egypt, the Israelites become a nation and enter the course of national development which is recorded in the historical books of the Bible. Connected with the exodus were mighty works of God beginning with the plagues. These showed God's control over nature and finally persuaded Pharaoh to let the Israelites to leave Egypt. The opening of the Red Sea to let the Israelites cross and the destruction of the coming Egyptian army by the waters was further evidences of God's hand in the deliverance of the Israelites. The difference between the Israelites crossing the Red Sea and the Egyptians who followed them was not courage but faith. While scholars like to debate dates and places the important thing about the exodus was the fact that God had delivered them from bondage and had called them to be His chosen people with a unique role in history. These great events were commemorated each spring in the Passover festival.

JOSHUA c. 1430-1350 BC

By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the army had marched around them for seven days.
Hebrews 11:30 (NIV)

 **READ:** Numbers 13:1-14:9; Joshua 5:13-27

Joshua, the son of Nun, was a significant leader during the 40 years that the Israelites wandered in the wilderness and was a commander of the Israelites during the conquest of Canaan. This was in part because of his faithfulness to God when he was chosen as one of the 12 spies sent to learn the nature of the Canaanites and the topography of the land. Joshua showed great faith in God. Upon the return of the spies he grew in strength and character as he and Caleb stood against the majority and called the community to rise up in faith and expect Yahweh to give them the land. Only Caleb and Joshua followed the Lord faithfully and therefore remained alive to be registered at the end of the forty years of wilderness wandering leading Joshua to be chosen as the one to lead the children of Israel into the Promised Land. When Moses was told that he must die instead of being allowed to lead the Israelites into Canaan he asked God to give the community a new shepherd and Joshua was selected. Moses formally ordained Joshua and imparted to him the spirit of wisdom and commanded him to be strong and to lead Israel to possess the land. Joshua also received this commission from the Lord and relied on God to direct and lead in the conquests. Joshua was a man of great faith and was faithful to his calling. When the Lord appeared to him as he scouted out Jericho, Joshua was quick to bow in worship and receive orders in how to capture the enemy. Blowing trumpets daily may have looked stupid but Joshua obeyed showing his faith in God. This key leader of Israel also repented when the people sinned at Ai and was dedicated to the word of God, meditating on it day and night.

RAHAB c. 1390-1330 BC

By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient. Hebrews 11: 31 (NIV)

 **READ:** Joshua 2

Rahab was a prostitute of Jericho at whose house two spies stayed just prior to the conquest of Canaan by Joshua. She made an agreement with the spies to guarantee the safety of her family and herself and she hid the spies from the king's men who were searching for them helping them escape through her window on the city wall. At the fall of Jericho, Joshua spared Rahab and her relatives. According to Matthew, Rahab became the mother of Boaz who married Ruth and who were the great-grandparents of David which makes Rahab an ancestor of Jesus. The writer of Hebrews commends her for her faith and James refers to her as demonstrating faith by good works (Jam. 2:25). This once heathen harlot chose to leave her sinful life behind her and follow the one true God. She was saved and is an illustration of the miracle of salvation as she was sanctified and is now known for her faith which brought a change in heart and life. She exemplified her faith with her brave act of hiding the spies as she believed and acted on her confession at the risk of her life.

BARAK

JUDGE OF ISRAEL FROM 1205-1165 BC

At Barak's advance, the LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots and army by the sword, and Sisera got down from his chariot and fled on foot. Judges 4:15 (NIV)

**READ:** Judges 4-5

After the children of Israel took hold of the Promised Land they had no central government system. So, in times of crisis, God raised up judges as leaders for the people. The people usually fell into trouble due to their own apostasy, which brought on punishment from God. They would cry to the Lord to rescue them and he would raise up a judge to help them. Barak became a significant part of Israel's history during the period of the judges when he was summoned by Deborah, a prophet, to lead volunteers against the forces of Jabin, king of the Canaanites. Israel had been brought into bondage as one of a series of punishments Yahweh had inflicted upon his people because they had abandoned Him for idolatry. When this punishment got really bad, and in response to national repentance, a deliverer would be raised up and become a judge. When Deborah summoned him to leadership, Barak flatly refused to lead the people unless she agreed to accompany him into battle. Barak led the people to destroy their enemies; this victory is celebrated by Deborah's song in Judges 5.

GIDEON

JUDGE OF ISRAEL FROM 1158-1118 BC

When the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, he said, "The LORD is with you, mighty warrior." Judges 6:12 (NIV)

**READ:** Judges 6-7

During the period of the judges, God raised up individuals to help the Israelites through difficult circumstances. At this time Israel was without a formal leader and they were unorganized and not unified which left them open to oppression by neighboring tribes. They repeatedly fell into sin and idolatry after which God gave them over to their enemies for a period of time. God raised up Gideon as a judge of Israel at the time when the Midianites were oppressing the Israelites. This was in response to their cry for help. God called Gideon while he was threshing wheat covertly in order to hide it from the Midianites who would steal it. When he was told that he would deliver Israel he asked for proof to validate the message. One of the first things that Gideon did was pull down the altar of Baal which caused the townspeople to want to put him to death. Gideon's father came to his rescue by saying, "If Baal really is a god, he can defend himself." Eventually the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples joined forces and set up camp in the valley. The Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon and he gathered the people to join him in fighting. Once again Gideon asks for a sign to help in the difficult job ahead. One night he left a fleece of wool on the threshing floor, asking for dew on the fleece but not on the ground. On the following morning it was as he had requested. The next night he asked for the reverse, so he found the fleece dry and the ground wet with dew. Then Gideon and his army of 32,000 men set up camp. The Lord made it clear that the victory was His and not the result of superior Israelite might so he requested Gideon to send back those trembling with fear causing 22,000 to return home leaving only 10,000. But the Lord said this was still too many so He set up a test based on drinking water leaving only 300 to stay and fight with the rest being sent home. The Lord encouraged Gideon by causing him to overhear a man relating his dream to a friend foretelling the defeat of Midian at the hand of Gideon. God gave them the strategy of using trumpets, torches and smashed jars to frighten their foes who fought amongst themselves and fled. It was God's victory! The writer of Hebrews includes Gideon as one of the heroes of the faith (Heb. 11:32) as he learned to trust God with the impossible.

JEPHTHAH JUDGE OF ISRAEL FROM 1052-1046 BC

Then the Spirit of the LORD came on Jephthah. He crossed Gilead and Manasseh, passed through Mizpah of Gilead, and from there he advanced against the Ammonites. Judges 11:29 (NIV)

 **READ:** Judges 11:1-12:7

The pattern of the book of Judges is cyclical. The people of Israel lapse into idolatry and disobedience leading to God's punishment at the hand of the surrounding nations who oppress them. This is followed by their repentance of sins and crying out for forgiveness and deliverance. God then sends a judge through whom He gave victory over the enemy's oppression. The story of Jephthah comes after the Israelites had experienced oppression and suffering by Ammon. After they confessed that they had forsaken God to worship Baal, the leaders of Gilead asked Jephthah to be their commander so they could fight the Ammonites. It is important to note that these same leaders had run Jephthah out of town and refused to give him an inheritance because his mother was a prostitute and not the wife of his father. After an exchange of indictments between Jephthah and the Ammonite chief (v. 12-28), the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah and he went into battle. As he marched toward his foes he made a stupid vow to sacrifice whoever came out of his house to meet him when he returned from the triumph. The Lord gave him victory in battle as he devastated twenty towns and subdued Ammon. Unfortunately, his daughter was the one to come out to meet him but he was determined to keep his promise to the Lord (a mistake, perhaps hoping that God would spare her like he did Isaac). In spite of his shortcomings and disreputable birth, Jephthah emerges from these chapters as a man of faith who overcame the disadvantages of his childhood and was chosen by God to lead God's people in their time of need. The Word of God honors him as the Spirit saw fit to include him in the heroes of the faith in Hebrews 11.

SAMSON JUDGE OF ISRAEL FROM 1001-981 BC

He will take the lead in delivering Israel from the hands of the Philistines. Judges 13:5b (NIV)

 **READ:** Judges 13-16

Samson was born during the period of the judges during the time when Israel's most formidable enemies were the Philistines, who God had used to oppress Israel because of their evil deeds. Even before he was born, Samson was designated as a Nazirite which required him to abstain from wine or other fermented drink, refrain from cutting the hair and not become impure by touching dead things (see Num. 6:1-21). This boy was to be completely consecrated to God. His birth was announced to his barren mother by the angel of the Lord showing the significance of what this man would do. Unfortunately, Samson's life was the story of his breaking the Nazirite vow as he violated the prohibitions, climaxing with the cutting of his hair by Delilah. The first violation came when he touched the lion's carcass (14:8-9). He also violated God's laws by spending the night with a prostitute (16:1). The cutting of his hair by Delilah broke his Nazirite vow once again and left him deprived of strength. Samson was made captive of the Philistines, his eyes were put out and he was put in prison. While in prison, his hair began to grow again and his death came with his final heroic deed. As the people celebrated his capture with pagan worship, Samson was called out of prison to be mocked before them. They stood him between two pillars where Samson prayed for strength once again and he pushed the pillars over causing the collapse of the temple killing many more people when he died than when he lived. When we look at Samson's life we see a figure with very little similarity to other judges. He resembled them only in that he was possessed of the Spirit, but his exploits were always individual. He was not a national leader; in fact, he often

was avenging his own personal wrongs on the Philistines. We must be careful in drawing too many religious parallels from his life as most of his actions should not be imitated by believers but rather avoided. Samson broke his Nazirite vow and disobeyed God. His life was a negative example of tragedy yet he was listed with the heroes of the faith in Hebrews 11:32 as the the Lord used him to defeat the Philistines.

SAMUEL JUDGE AND PROPHET FROM 1050-980 BC

I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who will do according to what is in my heart and mind. I will firmly establish his priestly house, and they will minister before my anointed one always. 1 Samuel 2:35 (NIV)



READ: 1 Samuel 1, 3, 12

The last Israelite leader before the monarchy was Samuel who served as a judge, priest and prophet. Samuel's parents were God-fearing Israelites who annually went to worship at the tabernacle. Hannah, his mother, was barren and made it a matter of prayer that she might have a son. As an act of dedication she offered her son to God and brought him to the tabernacle as a child to live there, returning annually to supply him with clothes, leaving him to be reared by Eli the priest. Eli had failed to teach his sons the fear of God and consequently they violated the laws of sacrifice precipitating God's judgment on them. Samuel would be the godly leader that God was raising up as evidenced by his divine call (1 Sam. 3:1-18) and subsequent establishment as prophet in the land of Israel. At this time the religion of the Israelites had declined to extreme lows as they brought the Ark of the Covenant into battle with them and it was captured by the Philistines and remained there for 20 years. During these years Samuel taught throughout Israel, challenging the people to turn from idolatry. His ministry encouraged the people to turn to a wholehearted love relationship with the Lord. When the Israelites confronted Samuel with the request for a king, Samuel was greatly disturbed but was divinely assured that they were rejecting God and not him (1 Sam. 8:7). Reluctantly Samuel consented to their plea for a king and anointed Saul as king as directed by God. Samuel then outlined the ways of the kingdom (1 Sam. 10:25) reminding the king that he was subject to the laws that God had given Moses. Continuing to warn the people of the dangers of diminishing their attitude of wholehearted devotion to God (1 Sam. 11-12), Samuel faithfully served in his capacity as priest and prophet. He also reminded Saul of his failures and of his responsibilities, even reprimanding him if necessary on the importance of obedience over sacrifice telling him that he had forfeited his kingdom. When Saul and Samuel parted, Samuel was divinely commissioned to anoint David as king of Israel. Although Samuel served as a judge and priest, he made his largest contribution to Israel as a prophet. This man responded to God's call and through his prophetic ministry served his generation faithfully as a man of great prayer and intercession. He ranks high among the outstanding leaders of the nation of Israel.

DAVID KING OF ISRAEL FROM 981-942 BC

After removing Saul, he made David their king. God testified concerning him: 'I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.' Acts 13:22 (NIV)



READ: 1 Samuel 16, 24; 2 Samuel 7; 1 Kings 2:1-12

When God determined to reject Saul as the king of Israel, he sent Samuel with oil to anoint another. God showed Samuel that he should not look at the outside but rather look at the heart and choose the successor to the throne from Jesse's sons. David was the youngest son and his father didn't even think it necessary to bring him before Samuel as he was off

tending the sheep. Samuel questioned Jesse and eventually found David, anointing him with oil. The Holy Spirit came upon David mightily and left Saul, leaving Saul agitated and moody. Saul then called David in to play the harp for him to sooth him. At first Saul loved David and made him his armor bearer but as David became more popular with the people for his great feats in battle, Saul became jealous. David's popularity started when he defeated Goliath with a small stone and his slingshot. Soon Saul tried to kill David so David fled. As Saul's fear of David grew, David's popularity with the people also grew leading him to spend many years as a fugitive. During this time David learned many important things as he grew in character and was tested by God. It is clear that David held no grudge against Saul as he wrote a beautiful lamentation over the memory of Saul after he died.

It was shortly after Saul's death that David went up to Hebron and was appointed king over Judah. One of Saul's sons took the throne over the rest of Israel and the two houses were at war with each other. Saul's house weakened while David's increased in strength until David became firmly established as king over all of Israel. David then captured the city of Jerusalem and conquered many of Israel's enemies. Although David was a great leader he was not without sin. He lusted after Bathsheba who became pregnant. Since she was married to another man he arranged to have that man murdered. God did not overlook these actions and sent Nathan the prophet to shed some light on his actions. Unlike Saul, David could see his own faults and was repentant although the consequences for his actions plagued his house. The sins of his past caused great grieve for David as one of his sons raped his half-sister and another son, Absalom plotted revenge which included the murder of the perpetrator. This same son plotted to overthrow David and take over the throne causing David to flee Jerusalem. David is also known for moving the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem which included a grand celebration. During this time he established rules for the proper worship of God. David was not content for the ark to remain in a tent. He desired to build a permanent structure however the Lord would not permit David to do this, and through Nathan the prophet told David that not he but his son would build God's house (2 Sam. 7:1-29). David made preparations for the building of Solomon's temple and established the order for the temple service including appointing chiefs and tribes to oversee the treasury. He publically announced that Solomon should be his successor, giving instructions to him on how to build the temple. In his last days, he charged Solomon to be strong and keep the law of God. David, a man of faith, was handpicked by God to lead the people and God's promise of peace to David's seed forever was established through Christ.

SOLOMON KING OF ISRAEL FROM 941-901 BC

So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours? 1 Kings 3:9 (NIV)

 **READ:** 2 Chronicles 1; 1 Kings 8, 11:1-13

Solomon was the son of David, the third king of Israel. Saul and David were born from the common people and grew up among everyday people in the villages and countryside but Solomon was born into the palace at Jerusalem and grew up alongside men of power. He was well educated and never knew poverty or hunger but he did witness the rebellion and violent deaths of several of his older brothers. At the end of David's life he left Solomon a united kingdom. Solomon was not the obvious heir to the throne as he was not David's oldest son yet David named him to succeed him as king as the Lord had indicated to him. A significant spiritual experience occurred in Solomon's life when he was worshipping at Gibeon when God appeared to him by means of a dream. God asked him what he wanted from Him and Solomon asked for wisdom from God so he could rule his people properly and justly. He could have asked for wealth and for political and military conquests but instead he saw his need for God's wisdom to rule well. God was pleased

and granted Solomon's request and also granted him wealth and fame. The only condition was that Solomon was to live according to God's commands. So, Solomon began his reign committed to God with the blessing of God upon him. During Solomon's reign Israel experienced an improvement of living conditions and economy. Solomon determined that only the best was good enough for God's house and gathered craftsmen to work on the temple. While the temple was being built Solomon also built an elaborate palace. Solomon also made many trade considerations which were closely tied to political alliances with surrounding nations. Upon the completion of the temple there was an elaborate ceremony and celebration. The Ark of the Covenant was transferred to the temple by the priests while numerous sacrifices were being offered. Solomon then dedicated the temple to God. God then appeared to Solomon again expressing His acceptance of the temple and also laying out a clear-cut condition that obedience to the laws of God was essential to the fulfillment of the divine promise to David about the continuity of the throne. To be obedient would mean God's abandonment of the temple, and the people to destruction and to captivity. Under Solomon Israel experienced peace and prosperity for the first time. For the first time the people had a place to worship in the capital city and the influence of the priests became more powerful. The temple gave the people a sense of national pride and of security. As great as times were, Solomon's reign was not without blemish. His wisdom was profound but it possessed serious flaws. The administrative structure of Solomon's government lacked adequate checks and balances which make it easy for his leaders to wipe-out mistakes and suffocate dissent. There were also no proper checks on government spending, taxation policies, trade policies or foreign affairs. Each of these areas became out of control therefore when he died chaos broke out in every area. Also, under Solomon's rule there were also the beginnings of a spiritual decline as many of his political alliances accumulated a total of 700 wives and 300 concubines which was in conflict with the law of God. Solomon allowed his pagan wives to worship their pagan gods leading God to appear to him a third time rebuking him saying that in his son's day the kingdom would be torn apart. These pagan shrines plagued Israel until they were destroyed centuries later by Josiah.

ELIJAH PROPHET FROM 826-823 BC

Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. James 5:17 (NIV)



READ: 1 Kings 17-19; 2 Kings 2:1-18

Following Solomon's death the kingdom was divided into two; the kingdom of Israel (Northern) and the kingdom of Judah (Southern). Solomon's son, Rehoboam precipitated the separation of the north.

Elijah was sent by God as a prophet to the Northern Kingdom of Israel during the reign of King Ahab, a wicked ruler. The northern kingdom had fallen into sin through foreign cultural and religious influences as well as foreign conquest. Jezebel, Ahab's foreign wife, brought with her and encouraged the worship of Baal and other forms of idolatry. This was condemned by the prophet Elijah who forcefully opposed these sinful ways. Elijah is often viewed as a wilderness dweller and a man of great endurance with unhesitating devotion to the Lord which made him a bold spokesman for what is right. The biblical account introduces Elijah with a sudden appearance before king Ahab to which he declared that there would be neither dew nor rain except at the prophet's word. He then followed the Lord's guidance and hid himself by a brook and was divinely fed by ravens and eventually was cared for by a widow. When the widow's son became ill and died, he took the boy to his room, prayed and life returned to the boy. After three rainless years Elijah presented himself before Ahab and challenging him to bring to Mount Carmel the 450 prophets of

Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah who ate at Jezebel's table. Elijah then proposed a test to determine who the true God was. The prophets would prepare a meat offering and Elijah was to do the same; the god who consumed the offering with fire would be the True God. The efforts of the pagan prophets were futile and Elijah mocked them. Finally, he prepared his altar, instructed the people to pour 12 jars of water on it and prayed to God who answered with fire from heaven. The offering was consumed as well as the wood, altar and even the dust and water around the altar. He then commanded that the false prophets be seized and killed so they were put to death. Then he announced that a great rain would fall. After an experience with God while he was hiding from Jezebel the Lord spoke to him and revealed himself to Elijah in a "gentle whisper". The Lord told him to anoint Elisha as his successor in the prophetic office. When the time came for Elijah to be taken up to heaven he asked Elisha what he wanted as a favor from him and Elisha replied that he wanted a double portion. As they were walking and talking a chariot of fire and horses appeared and separated the two of them and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. When he returned to the company of the prophets of Jericho, they recognized that the spirit of Elijah was resting on Elisha.

ELISHA PROPHET FROM 823-765 BC

When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?" "Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit," Elisha replied.

2 Kings 2:9 (NIV)



READ: 2 Kings 4-6:23; 13:14-23

Elisha was ordained for ministry by Elijah and was anointed as his successor. He primarily served the northern kingdom for the latter reign of king Ahab into the rule of king Joash. His ministry was vast including serving the schools of prophets, helping the needy, performing miracles, giving advice to the king, and acting as a spokesman for God. This man of God was given the ability to perform many miracles such as increasing the widow's oil, raising the dead, causing a poisonous pot of food to become harmless and multiplying loaves and grain. Elisha was a great man of faith who was filled with the Spirit of God. Never in his life did he tremble before any ruler, nor did anyone intimidate him. Yet he was an ordinary man who was a plowing a yoke of oxen at the time of his call. He learned from Elijah through serving him as Joshua had assisted Moses. It has been said that the miraculous works of Elisha are double the number performed by Elijah signifying that he had been given a double portion of the spirit of Elijah. On many occasions when the Arameans and the Israelites were at war, Elisha saved the Israelite king by warning him of the location of the Aramean army. In one instance the Arameans attempted to capture him but the Lord protected him with chariots of fire. When the Lord struck the soldiers blind, Elisha brought them to Samaria, where they recovered their sight. Elisha then advised the king to make a great feast for them and they were released. Even when on his death bed (2 Kings 13) he advised the king and gave a symbolic prophecy that king Joash would defeat the Arameans. Even after his death a miracle is attributed to Elisha – a corpse was hastily thrown into his grave and it came back to life when it touched his body. Elijah gives us a great example of a life of faith and obedience to God. His example encourages us to diligently serve the Lord in whatever capacity He is calling us to.

ISAIAH PROPHET FROM 676-617 BC

So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Isaiah 41:10 (NIV)



READ: Isaiah 36-37

The kingdom of Judah, the southern kingdom, experienced prosperity under the reign of king Uzziah. It was the year that Uzziah died that Isaiah the prophet received his call into ministry. His ministry continued through the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, having the length of over 60 years. These were turbulent times in Judah's history as they were heavily attacked while at the same time the northern kingdom was under siege and eventually was taken captive by the Assyrians. Isaiah warned Judah that her sin would bring captivity at the hands of Babylon. Although captivity was years away, Isaiah assumes the demise of Judah and predicts the restoration of the people from captivity. He names Cyrus the Persian as the one who would ultimately allow the Jews to return home decades before he even reigned. Throughout his ministry Isaiah revealed God's judgement and salvation as the "Holy One of Israel" who must punish his rebellious people but will afterward redeem them. God will ultimately have compassion on his people and rescue them from both political and spiritual oppression. Isaiah had the status to take an active part in the events of his land and in some cases, to guide them. His relationship with the kings gave him access to the palace but also did not prevent him from speaking for the common people who were being victimized by the corruption of the ruling class. He often spoke of justice and upholding the rights of the orphan and widow. Isaiah was probably one of the most political of the prophets in the face of the Assyrian threats as he counseled the leadership to make moral changes. He knew that the mighty Assyria was a tool in God's hands which God used to punish the sins of Jerusalem. Isaiah worked closely with king Hezekiah to make many religious reforms and Isaiah supported him during the difficult moments of the Assyrian siege (Isaiah 36-37). Isaiah was a highly educated man as seen by his writings which have had great influence over the centuries. The New Testament alludes to his writings over 250 times and quotes it at least 50 times. He wrote many prophecies of the birth of Christ and his second coming. Many of his writings in the book of Isaiah are used in studying the End Times.

JEREMIAH PROPHET FROM 547-C. 480 BC

This is what the LORD says: "STAND AT THE CROSSROADS AND LOOK; ASK FOR THE ANCIENT PATHS, ASK WHERE THE GOOD WAY IS, AND WALK IN IT, AND YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. BUT YOU SAID, 'WE WILL NOT WALK IN IT.' JEREMIAH 6:16 (NIV)



READ: Jeremiah 2, 27, 52

The rise and fall of the kingdom of Judah was directly related to their devotion to God. The kings would prosper when they walked in the ways of God and they would suffer when they were rebellious. During the time of the kings, God sent prophets to warn the king and the people to return to the Lord and follow His ways. These prophets often spoke of coming judgment as well as the possibility of restoration. Jeremiah began prophesying in Judah halfway through the reign of Josiah in the kingdom of Judah until the kingdom fell under the rule of Zedekiah. Jeremiah's messages were timely and directly related to the prevailing conditions of the political, social and religious life of the people. Portraying the sinful conditions existing in Judah, Jeremiah pointed out the problem – their love and devotion toward God was lacking. They had forsaken God and had ignored His laws and instead had turned to idolatry. Fear, reverence, respect and

love for God were missing. Jeremiah warned the people that the Northern Kingdom had been taken into captivity because of their sin and God's judgement was near because they too had forsaken Him. Because of their evil actions they would be taken into captivity including the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. The message so gripped him that he was moved to deep compassion for his people. Jeremiah realized that his message of punishment was because they had forsaken the law of God and had been disobedient. Devastation, death, destruction and exile was imminent. Jeremiah lived through one of the most difficult experiences that any prophet faced in his ministry. The kingdom was disintegrating as eventually the Babylonians began their final siege on Jerusalem under the rule of Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah informed king Zedekiah that the city would fall. Neither the people nor the king was interested in listening to the message of Jeremiah. During this time Jeremiah was beaten and imprisoned and announced safety for those who surrendered to the Babylonians. He made it clear that surrender meant preservation of life whereas rebellion would bring the capture of the king and the loss of the city. Eventually the city was taken by the Babylonians but they released Jeremiah and showed kindness to him, even allowing him to choose the place of his residence. Most scholars believe that Jeremiah lived out the rest of his life in Egypt, still seeking to turn the people towards God. There is no record of how he died.

DANIEL PROPHET FROM 524-C. 450 BC

Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before. Daniel 6:10 (NIV)

 **READ:** Daniel 1, 2, 5, 6

Daniel was born into an unidentified family in Judea and was selected among the first of the Jewish captives taken to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar. For a three year period Daniel was instructed in all the traditions of the Babylonians in preparation for service to the king. Yet in spite of all this he remained true to his Jewish heritage. Therefore, when he and his friends were offered royal food and drink they declined since these foods violated the Levitical laws. God honored them by giving them outstanding learning abilities and Daniel was given the ability to experience visions and interpret dreams. When Nebuchadnezzar received a vivid dream that disturbed him, Daniel was called upon to interpret the dream requiring both courage and tact. Daniel served in the Babylonian court as a statesman his entire life including during the reign of Belshazzar who became confused when a mysterious hand wrote a message on a wall during one of his parties. Daniel was summoned to the court and asked to explain the message, which was one of destruction and continued in office during the reign of Darius. During his reign a royal edict was made that prohibited all prayers or petitions except those addressed to the king. Daniel would not comply and was thrown into a den of lions for breaking the law. God intervened to save his servant. Daniel continued to function as a government official through the Persian rise to power over the Babylonians under Cyrus. During his life Daniel received many visions of the end times which are recorded in Daniel 7-12. It seems probable that Daniel died well over the age of 80 leaving behind a life of inspiring faith through the exercise of courage when confronted with mortal danger. He lived a life of wholehearted devotion to God in a pagan society and set an example of persistence in prayer.

EZEKIEL PROPHET FROM 512-492 BC

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. Ezekiel 36:26 (NIV)



READ: Ezekiel 3:16-4:17; 34

Ezekiel was a prophet during the Babylonian exile of Judah and was among those taken into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar. He grew up in Jerusalem and may have started working as a priest when his life was interrupted as he was taken with the other captives to Babylon. It was when he was there among the exiles that he received his call to be a prophet. He was married, lived in a house of his own and along with his fellow exiles, had a relatively free existence. Ezekiel was a man of broad knowledge, not only of his own national traditions but also with general matters of culture. More than any other prophet he was directed to involve himself personally in the divine word by acting it out in prophetic symbolism. He was to draw a plan of besieged Jerusalem on a brick, lay prostrate on one side and then on the other side for days and shave himself with a sword and divide the hair. These dramatic symbolic acts enhanced the effectiveness of his message. The first seven years of his ministry saw him faithfully telling the people words of divine judgment: Jerusalem would fall and they would not experience early release. He encouraged the exiles to live at peace with God during their exile. One of the prophetic signs he was to obey was to not mourn the death of his wife as the people were not to mourn openly for Jerusalem. Ezekiel also wrote of judgements to seven nations and that God's wrath was coming for them too. Once the exiles received the news of Jerusalem's fall Ezekiel's messages from the Lord turned to hope. They would experience revival, restoration and a glorious future as the redeemed and perfected kingdom of God.

EZRA SCRIBE FROM 454-433 BC

Ezra came up from Babylon. He was a teacher well versed in the Law of Moses, which the LORD, the God of Israel, had given. The king had granted him everything he asked, for the hand of the LORD his God was on him. Ezra 7:6 (NIV)



READ: Ezra 8:15-10:17

Ezra was one of the most prominent leaders after the exile who led many people back to Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity was over. He did not return with the original group of exiles who accompanied Zerubbabel when the decree was written by Cyrus that the Jews could return to their land and build their temple but remained in Babylon. Instead he organized a second migration of Jews to return to their homeland. Ezra was a teacher and scribe who had good understanding of the laws of Moses and had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the Lord and to teaching its decrees. Upon his arrival in Jerusalem he found that the Jewish community was broken down spiritually and there was much intermarriage with pagan peoples. Even the High priest, who everyone looked to for spiritual leadership, had sons who married non-Jewish women. Ezra also found that the Sabbath rules were not being followed. He took his concerns to the Lord in prayer with confession, fasting and weeping. His holy response to the sin of the people brought the rest of the people to their knees in confession. The people renewed their covenant with God and saw that there was still hope. Even after this Ezra continued to pray, fast and mourn over the unfaithfulness of the exiles. The people responded with obedience and were willing to have their sin dealt with.

NEHEMIAH LEADER FROM 420-406 BC

Let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's family, have committed against you.

Nehemiah 1:6 (NIV)

 **READ:** Nehemiah 1-2, 6:15-7:4; 12:27-13:3

Nehemiah was a prominent Jew who rose to very high office under the Persian emperor as cupbearer to the king. When he heard about the situation in Jerusalem with the walls broken down he wept, prayed and fasted before God. He approached the king with a very somber disposition and asked to be allowed to take a leave of absence to go to his homeland and help build the Temple. Mentioning this to the king was extremely brave because if the king did not like an idea then you could be beheaded. Nehemiah took a great risk by asking to go. Fortunately, the king agreed and also gave him an army contingent and materials to help with the work. Upon arrival in Jerusalem Nehemiah encouraged the rebuilding of the walls, quickly the people joined him. The people worked tirelessly even though their enemies were mocking them. Nehemiah organized them into family units capable of defending themselves as they continued to work on fixing the wall. Their work paid off and after only 52 days the job was complete bringing a new sense of hope. Nehemiah's decisions show wisdom and forethought and his actions are marked with determination and courage. He rallied the people to rebuild the walls and all sections of the community responded favourably. When attacked and mocked he led the people with the knowledge of the assurance of Divine help. Nehemiah consistently led from a place of prayer and action. He kept good watch over the project and saw it to completion. After the walls were sufficiently in place steps were taken to reorient the Jews according to the Word of God. They were made familiar with the laws of Moses, the temple service was re-established and national purity was restored. Through Nehemiah's life we see the fear of God in his heart which took precedence over the fear of man.

MALACHI PROPHET C. 420

"I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty. Malachi 3:1 (NIV)

 **READ:** Malachi 1-4

Spurred on by the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah the returned exiles finished building the Temple and were strengthened spiritually. Unfortunately, the people fell back into their old ways as they ignored tithes, broke the Sabbath, intermarried with foreigners and the priesthood had become corrupt. Several of these sins are mentioned in Malachi, the last prophet of the Old Testament era. The people were discouraged. The glorious return of the splendor of Israel had not yet been realized, God had not returned to dwell in the Temple and the people doubted God's love and were losing hope. So they no longer took the law seriously causing their worship to become corrupt. The priests were not observing the Law of Moses and were offering blemished and diseased animals in worship and had gone further in their indifference by offering polluted bread before the Lord. Malachi rebukes their disobedience, their doubt of God's love and the faithlessness of the priests. He warns that God will come as a "refiner's fire". The children of Israel exist for God to work out His purposes through them therefore they were not completely destroyed. Only through repentance and reformation will they again experience God's blessing. Those who honor the Lord will be spared when He comes to judge. Malachi warns the people that the dreadful day of the Lord is coming and that the righteous will rejoice at it and the wicked

will be trampled down. Important in Malachi's message was his insistence that the first step toward a proper relationship with God was true repentance. He also prophesied of a forerunner of the coming of the Lord who would offer a disobedient people the last chance of repentance before the onset of Divine judgement. Jesus regarded this forerunner to be John the Baptist.

THE MACCABEES 167-160 BC

For out of Jerusalem will come a remnant, and out of Mount Zion a band of survivors. "The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this. 2 Kings 19:31 (NIV)



READ: Romans 11

We have already seen the breakdown of the Kingdom Israel into the Northern and Southern kingdoms and how each fell into the hands of their oppressors. The Northern Kingdom fell to Assyria and was never re-established whereas the Southern Kingdom was taken into captivity to Babylon. The Babylonians fell to the Persians, who were conquered by the Greek who under the leadership of Antiochus IV killed, plundered and destroyed Jerusalem. He blasphemed the temple and heavily persecuted the Jews, many of which refused to comply and were tortured and killed. The nation of Israel and their religion were in danger of extinction. Mattathias was a priest who refused to offer sacrifice to a pagan god and started a revolt against the officer who ordered the sacrifice. He and his sons (known as the Maccabees) fled to the hills and after his death his son Judas defeated their oppressors and re-established the Jewish religious practices. Pagan elements were removed from the Temple and the altar was rebuilt and rededicated. The Jewish people had their religious freedoms back. Eventually Judea came under the control of the Romans. The independence that the Maccabees so bravely won only lasted eighty years yet we can see the hand of God upon His people this entire time. God has always preserved a remnant. Even though His children experienced captivity and exile and were persecuted and suffered much, He would fulfill His promise to Abraham that all the families of the earth shall be blessed through his seed, the coming Messiah!

JOHN THE BAPTIST PROPHET C. 20'S AD

A voice of one calling: "In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Isaiah 40:3 (NIV)



READ: Luke 1, Matthew 3, 11:1-19; 14:1-12

During the time when Rome controlled the region of Judea, Herod rebuilt much of the city of Jerusalem including its walls and the Temple. This was the Temple that was often visited by Jesus and his disciples which He warned would soon be destroyed. Herod's son, Herod Antipas, would put John the Baptist to death. John the Baptist was the son of the priest Zechariah and Elizabeth, who was barren. He was born approximately six months before the birth of Jesus and spent most of his youth in obscurity until he received a divine call to the prophetic vocation and entered upon a public ministry. John was a forerunner of Christ. Jesus regarded him as the second Elijah sent by God in accordance with ancient prophecies and he is the link between the Old Testament and the New Testament. His message was simple, "repent, the long awaited kingdom of heaven is near". John's role was clear – he was to prepare a way for the Lord's coming. When John came on the scene clothed in a cloak of camel's hair and eating locusts and wild honey. People flocked to hear his message as he proclaimed to all the need to repent, to change their attitudes resulting in a significant alteration of life. Repentance and faith is to be accompanied with a serious attempt to reform one's life. A genuine experience of grace must reveal itself in spiritual fruit – it was not enough to be a Jew, repentance was a prerequisite to entering the

Messianic kingdom. John's ministry set in motion the divine events in which the Messiah would be revealed to Israel and to the world.

STEPHEN MARTYRED FOR THE LORD 34 AD

But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. Acts 7:55 (NIV)

 **READ:** Acts 6-8:3

After the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, the disciples returned to Jerusalem and joined together constantly in prayer. When the day of Pentecost came, they were filled with the Holy Spirit and many witnesses were saved. This was the beginning of the church age! The early church experienced rapid growth and with that came growing pains. When the Grecian Jews complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food seven men were set apart for this serving ministry, including Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit. Stephen was a man full of God's grace and power and he did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. Stephen did not hesitate to preach his views causing some of the members of the synagogue to argue with him and accuse him of blasphemy. They seized Stephen and accused him of making radical and revolutionary statements concerning the temple and the law. There was an element of truth in the charge as Stephen stayed true to the Gospel of Jesus which threatened the Jews religion. Stephen defended himself by explaining that he could never go back to the types and shadows of Jewish religion when he now had a relationship with a Person. In simplicity and confidence he spoke and was an effective witness to the Gospel. To Stephen, Jesus was the natural outcome of the Old Testament revelations. The council was filled with rage! They stoned him as a blasphemer. The effect of Stephen's death was tremendous. The persecution that followed scattered the church but the believers prevailed in spreading the Gospel and what looked like a defeat turned into victory and growth. Stephen's noble witness and forgiveness of his enemies served as foundational for the growth of the church and the eventual conversion of Saul.

THE APOSTLE PAUL C. 5-67 AD

But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. Acts 9:15 (NIV)

 **READ:** Acts 9

We are first introduced to Paul by his previous name, Saul. This was the man who looked upon and approved of the murder of Stephen. Paul was a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin and was born a Roman citizen. Undoubtedly Paul was immersed as a boy in the Scripture and taught the Jewish traditions. When he met Jesus on the road to Damascus he converted to Christianity. Paul made three long missionary journeys throughout the Roman Empire, planting churches, preaching the gospel and giving strength and encouragement to the early church. Even though Paul was proud of his Jewish heritage he preached that the gospel was for the Gentile as well. He personally wrote 13 of the 27 books of the Old Testament under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Paul is generally considered one of the most important figures of the Apostolic Age and one of the best leaders of all times. He founded and ministered to multiple churches and his leadership and influenced can still be seen in the church today. Paul was completely and totally dedicated to Christ and his missional work. His epistles are deeply rooted in theology, worship and pastoral life. His influence on the spread of Christianity is magnificent.

JAMES THE GREAT MARTYRED FOR THE LORD, 44 AD **READ:** Matthew 4:21-22; Matthew 20:20-28; Acts 12:1-2

Ten years after the martyrdom of Stephen, the apostle James was beheaded in Jerusalem. James and his brother John were two peas in a pod; rarely do they appear separately in the gospels. They showed great faith from the beginning, for when Jesus called them out of their fishing boat, they *immediately* left their father and their livelihood. Perhaps they got their boldness from their mother, who unashamedly asks Jesus to reserve esteemed spots for her sons in heaven. Jesus asks them a hard question which they answer flippantly, not knowing the depth of what they are submitting themselves to. History tells us just how the Apostle James drank the cup of our Lord. In 44 AD, King Herod Agrippa sought to stop the spread of Christianity by attacking church leaders. James was arrested on the accusation of one man who, when he saw the joy and extraordinary courage of the apostle, surrendered himself to Jesus and begged James' forgiveness. Declaring himself a Christian, James' accuser was arrested as well. Together, he and James bent their heads to the sword. With the joy of the resurrection set before him, James did indeed share Christ's cup.

JAMES THE LESS MARTYRED FOR THE LORD, 63 AD **READ:** Mark 3:20-21; James 5:7-20

James was Jesus' younger brother, and his ministry and martyrdom is a great testimony to the truthfulness of Jesus Christ as our Saviour. When the enemy plants doubts about the reliability of the Bible and the deity of Christ, we can think of James and be so encouraged! While Jesus was ministering here on earth, James and the rest of the family thought Jesus was out of his mind – imagine, your own brother claiming to be one with God! What in the world could make a brother believe his own brother were the Saviour of the world? Only an encounter with the risen Lord! After Jesus rose from the dead, James saw and believed. He became the leader of the church in Jerusalem. We read the book of James and we see a man of deep faith, of perseverance and one with a great urgency for righteousness. When we hear how he was martyred, we see that he was a man of integrity who lived out the words he spoke.

When the scribes and Pharisees urged James to renounce Jesus from atop the pinnacle of the temple, James proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah instead. In anger, they pushed him off the roof. The fall broke his legs but did not kill him and so as James prayed, the crowd took up stones and clubs, crushing his skull with their final blows. Perseverance had indeed finished its work and James died a mature believer (James 1:4), receiving the blessing that he himself had penned: *"Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who trust in Him."* (James 1:12)

THE APOSTLE PETER MARTYRED FOR THE LORD 65 AD **READ:** John 6:66-69; John 21:15-19; 1 Peter 4:12-19; 2 Peter 1:3-11

It was to Peter and his brother, Andrew, who Jesus said, "Come, and I will make you fishers of men." This appealed to Peter, who loved action and adventure. Peter was a firecracker. He spoke and acted quickly, often at the expense of common sense and wisdom. At least this is the Peter we see throughout most of the gospels. His immaturity got him into some trouble, but he also had a wonderful childlike faith. Peter was the first to proclaim Jesus as the Son of God, but also the first to defend Jesus as if He were just an ordinary man in need of defense! Yet it was this young man whom Jesus chose to be in His inner

circle – to disciple most closely – and though we don't see much maturity in Peter within the four gospels, a changed man is evident in the book of Acts. Peter's encounter with the resurrected Jesus as described by John was a key point in the discipleship process. Over fish and a fire, Jesus revealed the unchanging nature of His love and mercy to Peter, reinstating him to ministry while also alluding to the reality of the suffering that would come in Peter's life.

In the book of Acts, we see an emboldened Peter preaching and healing in the name of Jesus, and thousands coming to Christ as a result. The rest of Acts, and Peter's own letters, reveal the deep maturing work that God did in his heart over the years. His two letters describe a man of unwavering commitment to Jesus who preaches obedience and the reality of suffering and the reward that is to be found in heaven. Having experience firsthand the kindness and compassion of Jesus, Peter was willing to follow Him to the death. After years of serving the new Christian church, Peter journeyed to Rome where Emperor Nero sought to have him killed. Urged by the Roman believers to flee, Peter escaped the city, but on the road out, he had a vision of Jesus walking the other way, back into the city. Upon asking Jesus where He was going, the Lord responded "I've come to be crucified again." Peter knew this was Jesus telling him to return and face Nero. Peter was crucified in Rome. History tells us that he felt unworthy to be hung in the same position as the Lord, and so requested to be crucified upside-down. Peter knew where his hope lay. In this he could, in his own words, *"greatly rejoice, though now for a little while [he would] suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These [had] come so that [his] faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – [could] be proved genuine and [could] result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed."* (1 Peter 1:6-7)

THE APOSTLE JOHN DIED C. 100 AD

 **READ:** John 21:20-25; Acts 4


The Apostle John was the youngest of the twelve and was affectionately known as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." John was one of the three guys in Jesus' inner circle. He, James and Peter were given privilege to witness miracles that the other nine did not get to see. John was passionate about the Lord from the get-go, and, along with his brother James, was nicknamed a "son of thunder". John underwent much persecution during the years of the early church and witnessed many miracles alongside his suffering.

In his conversation with Peter on the beach, Jesus said something about John's death from which a rumour began. News spread among the believers that John would never die. Though this is not what Jesus meant, John's death *was* unique among the disciples. Like the others, John suffered his allotment of beatings and imprisonments, but always returned to ministry as boldly as ever. Finally, the Roman Emperor decided to finish John off once and for all and called for him to be thrown into a cauldron of boiling oil. But like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace, John sat, worshipping the Lord, completely unscathed! No persecution could kill him, so he was finally exiled to the Island of Patmos. It was here where the Lord appeared to him in vivid visions, describing the events of the last days, which John wrote down as the Book of Revelation. After two years, John was brought back to Ephesus where he underwent more persecution, including being forced to drink poison, but these tortures could not kill him either. He was the only apostle to die an old man's death. He was truly a faithful servant of the Lord, willing to bear any weight for His Saviour; and for this we know he has received an eternal weight of glory.

POLYCARP MARTYRED FOR THE LORD C. 156 AD **READ:** 1 Samuel 15:22; Philippians 1:20-21

Polycarp was the Bishop of Smyrna – a church leader who, tradition says, studied under the Apostle John. That left Polycarp the last living link to Jesus' disciples. Thus he served the Lord during a very transitional time between first- and second-generation Christians. Polycarp was a man of faith who, like the martyrs before him, held unswervingly to Jesus in suffering – he could not *not* stand firm for the Lord!

At the time, the Romans deified the Emperor. They believed he was divine. The Christians were seen as “atheists” because they refused to acknowledge the Emperor’s divinity, nor would they perform pagan sacrifices, offer incense or join in the Roman festivals. So when 86-year old Polycarp was dragged into the arena on the day of his martyrdom, the pagan crowd was thirsty for his blood. The proconsul wanted to show him mercy and encouraged him to renounce his Christianity and swear by Caesar. But Polycarp knew the words of Jesus: *“whoever denies Me before men, I also will deny before My Father who is in heaven.”* (Matthew 10:33) His response was simple, yet profound: “Eighty-six years have I served Him, and He never did me any wrong. How can I blaspheme my king who has saved me?” When it was determined that Polycarp would not renounce his faith, he was burned at the stake. But tradition tells us something miraculous: Polycarp’s body would not burn! Rather it was as though he was gold being refined in a fire, and the smell was not of burning flesh, but of spices. Finally the executioner ran him through with a sword and the blood poured so much that it quenched the fire. Polycarp was happy to die for the One who had died for him.

SAINT PATRICK c. 387-460 **READ:** John 1:1-18; 2 Corinthians 3:17-18

Before Patrick, Ireland was a pagan nation, spiritually controlled by the Druids. Little is known about the Druid practices, though they did include sorcery and human sacrifice. They had quite a high level of control in the country, being exempt from taxes and holding the power to deem people as social outcasts through excommunication. It was into this dark land that God called Patrick, though unwillingly at first. At sixteen the Britain-born Patrick was captured by the Irish and sold to be a herdsman. It was here where his parents' faith became his own. Later he would recognize his captivity as God’s merciful hand on his life, giving him an opportunity to commit himself to Christ. After six years, Patrick had a dream in which he was told that his ship would soon be ready. Escaping his master, he made his way to the sea and got a job on a ship. The next few years of Patrick’s life are not known for certain, but he did eventually return to his homeland. It was here where he had another dream – this time he saw a man carrying a bag of letters. As he read them, it was as if Patrick heard all of the voices of Ireland pleading with him to come back to their land. The Lord was calling him to bring the gospel to those who had enslaved him. In faith, Patrick made the trip back, this time as a slave to Christ. His years as a slave in the country had prepared him, for he knew how to work with the people. Patrick is accredited to the Christianization of Ireland in the years that followed, bringing the truth of Christ throughout the nation, starting hundreds of churches and baptising thousands into the faith. Jesus is the light of the world. In proclaiming Christ to the Irish people, Patrick brought the light of Christ into the darkness of Ireland – and because of His faith and obedience, an entire nation came to its knees.

FRANCIS OF ASSISI 1182-1226**READ:** Matthew 10:9-10; Matthew 25:31-46

When Francis of Assisi read the verses in Matthew 10, he knew God's specific calling for his life and devoted himself to a life of poverty. As the son of a wealthy cloth merchant, Francis came from affluence and was all set up for a rich future. After a year spent as a prisoner of war, Francis abandoned the recklessness of his youth and began to question the true value of the wealth he was destined for. He became a Christian and responded to God's calling on his life by abandoning his wealth. This decision would forever estrange him from his father who could not understand Francis's actions.

Francis was a man of peace and compassion – a Medieval mother Theresa. He despised wealth and denied himself everyday comforts like sleep and rich food. He formed a monastic order – a precise way of living for others who desired to renounce their wealth. He and his followers sought to emulate the life and suffering of Christ. Unlike many monks, they were active in their communities, preaching to the people and ministering to the down-and-out.

Francis responded in faith to what God asked of him. He trusted in the Lord as his provider, also recognizing that there was not much in life that he needed. A story is told of Francis when he came across a leper. Lepers were disgusting to him, but when he saw this leper, he saw the face of Jesus and knew that the Lord was asking him to touch this man. Francis kissed him and gave him the money he had. Francis was able to take steps of faith in both the small and the big. Surely his life is a testament to these words: *“And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.”* (Matthew 19:29-30)

JOHN WYCLIFFE 1328-1384**READ:** Psalm 119

Wycliffe was a forerunner of the Reformation that would officially begin 133 years after his death. He saw clearly some of the corruption that existed in the Roman Catholic Church at the time. His studies of the Scriptures lead him to firm opinions on the matters of the church's wealth and power, the sale of indulgences, the worship of saints and the authority of the pope – and Wycliffe was not afraid to share these opinions. This freedom of speech got him into trouble and in 1377 his writings were banned.

Above all, John Wycliffe was a man who loved God's Word. It was by it that he came to his theological conclusions, and it was by it that he proclaimed that the pope and the church were *second* in authority – the first authority was Scripture itself. John also believed strongly that God's Word should be available to all people. Moses received the Law in his own tongue and the disciples heard it in theirs, and he believed that the men and women of his day should have the same privilege. At the time, the Scriptures were in Latin, making it virtually impossible for anyone other than the clergy or highly learned to study them. And so Wycliffe began the very first English translation of the Bible. He died before it was finished, but a friend took up his work, and his supporters illegally distributed it throughout the country. 31 years after his death, Wycliffe was officially excommunicated from the church, his bones dug up and burned. Though they tried to dishonour his memory, he will be honoured in the Kingdom of heaven.

MARTIN LUTHER 1483-1546 **READ:** Romans 5

God calls His people to stand up boldly for truth. Martin Luther rose to the call. Luther is perhaps the most well-known figure of Christian history, being the recognized instigator of the Reformation. The Reformation was a time in history when many men and women stepped up in order to initiate change, particularly in the Catholic Church. Corruption in the Church was rampant – one particular perversion was the selling of indulgences, basically church leaders selling the forgiveness of sins. As in Wycliffe’s day, the Bible was still illegal for the common layperson to read. The church was on a quest for wealth and power and was hurting many ignorant people in its wake. This and many other things disturbed Luther who compiled a list of 95 corrections that needed to be made in the church and nailed it to the door of the church in Wittenberg. His actions were not well-received. He was eventually deemed a heretic and excommunicated from the Catholic Church.

Martin Luther was not a perfect man. While his theology was very scriptural on some points, he was very off on others, such as his hatred towards the Jews. He experienced much demonic opposition and struggled under the weight of his own sin and weaknesses. But God spoke to him, rekindling the good news that man is saved by *grace, through faith* and not by works. This was a remarkable truth next to the indoctrination of the Catholic Church which taught people to *buy* forgiveness! In his courage to stand up for the truth of salvation, Martin Luther set off the first domino in a line that has continued through the ages. *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.”* (Ephesians 2:9)

MENNO SIMONS 1496-1561 **READ:** 1 Corinthians 3:10-17

One group that came out of the Reformation were the Anabaptists. Considered too radical by many, including Martin Luther, the Anabaptists sought further reform in the Catholic Church. They desired to see the church return to the body described in the early years of Christianity – a group united under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Anabaptists spoke out against Catholic doctrines and practices like transubstantiation (the belief that, when taken, the communion bread and wine become the literal body and blood of Christ) and infant baptism, declaring these things unscriptural. The group of “fanatics” experienced much persecution for their stance.

Menno Simons was a Catholic priest who was ordained for two years before finally opening his Bible. What he found disturbed him. Though he taught the doctrine of transubstantiation, he did not sense it to be true, and when he finally read his Bible, did not find it to be supported by Scripture. The same was the case with infant baptism. He became very committed to the Word, and though he grew in wariness towards Catholic doctrine, continued in his position as a priest. Though he was inwardly starting to agree with the Anabaptists, he opted for the comfort of Catholicism. Finally he could take it no longer. He repented of his double-mindedness and taught Anabaptist doctrine from his pulpit for nine months before finally leaving the church and joining the Anabaptist movement.

Menno Simons became one of the key leaders of the movement, and his name eventually came to represent the Anabaptist people: Mennonites. Simons took the Bible very literally and proclaimed his views boldly, claiming the words of Paul: *“For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.”* He and his family lived in constant danger as they devoted themselves to the circulation of Anabaptist beliefs.

Romans 14:23 says that “*everything that does not come from faith is sin.*” Menno Simons could not continue in his profession as a Catholic priest, no matter the comfort it offered. He knew the Spirit was convicting him to step out in faith and he followed in obedience, leaving the safety of Catholicism to join with those who were scorned for their beliefs. He joyfully embraced his Christian calling to suffer for Christ.

GALILEO 1564-1642



READ: Psalm 19; 2 Timothy 2:15

Galileo was neither a missionary, nor a monk, nor a martyr. He was an astronomer. Galileo was a sky-studying scientist and a Catholic. Today, Christians in science look to his example as they stand firmly for the existence of God and the accuracy of the Bible in an increasingly hostile environment. So many today try to disprove God and the created world through scientific reasoning. But when we go back to the founding fathers of science, we see many individuals who loved science *and* Scripture, and who sought to glorify God through their studies.

Ironically, however, Galileo was *not* esteemed by the church in his day. In fact, the church put him under house arrest for the last nine years of his life. Galileo’s study of the sky had confirmed Copernicus’s theory that the earth revolved around the sun – up until this time, the accepted view was that the earth was the centre of the universe and that all the other celestial bodies revolved around her. The Catholic Church took Galileo’s views as a threat to the Scriptures, which they believed affirmed that the earth was fixed in the sky.

Galileo was not without his faults. He fathered three children out of wedlock with a woman whom he never married. But Galileo was a staunch believer in the inerrancy of Scripture – he believed the Bible to be the absolute, true word of God. Though he knew the Bible to be a book about salvation and theology and not a scientific textbook, He knew God as Creator and therefore knew there could be nothing scientifically *inaccurate* in the Scriptures. This sets him and many other fathers of modern science apart from those in later years. Charles Darwin, for example (the father of the evolutionary theory), was taught that the Bible was good for *moral* principles but was wrong on matters of science. This infiltrated his worldview so that he looked at the world apart from the God of the Bible. Galileo knew that the Bible and nature, both finding their source in God, could not contradict each other. With this worldview, he used his God-given mind and genius to discover the mysteries of the universe. In some of the last words he penned, we see him as a man of faith who used well what God had given him: “*To the Lord; whom I worship and thank; that governs the heavens with His eyelid to Him I return tired, but full of living.*”

JOHN BUNYAN 1628-1688



READ: 1 Timothy 1:12-17

Not to be confused with the man with the big blue ox (*Paul Bunyan*), John Bunyan was the author of one of the most significant works of religious English literature. A poor man, he married an equally poor woman who came into the marriage with nothing but two religious books. These books would have a powerful impact on John who eventually came to repent of his sin and accept Christ, even becoming a minister. But when Charles II restored England to Anglicism in 1660, John was no longer legally allowed to preach. He did, and spent 12 years in prison as a result. He would have been released had he promised not to preach, but he would do no such thing. Instead he preached to his fellow inmates.

John wrote at least nine books during those years, spending the last four on his greatest work, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. The story is an allegory of the Christian life, and was a picture

of Bunyan's own conversion to the Lord. John struggled with the guilt of his sin in his early Christian life, thus the journey of the book's main character, Christian, was dear to John's heart. He understood well the words he penned: *"He that lives in sin, and looks for happiness hereafter, is like him that soweth cockle and thinks to fill his barn with wheat or barley."* John Bunyan was a man of deep convictions and immeasurable talent, spurred by the grace he had received from the Father.

GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL 1685-1759

 **READ:** Psalm 98

Across the centuries, many have judged the arts (music, theatre, film) as a type of "Satan's playground". The art world is indeed an interesting place and is sadly one where the sacred is often desecrated. Much is done in the name of "art" that would be deemed "public indecency" anywhere else. Yet creativity is a blessed wonder sprung from our Lord who Himself is the very Source of creativity. "And God *said...*" begins the mystery of our universe. And so it is no wonder that throughout history, He has placed gifted and godly men and women in positions of artistic influence.

George Frideric Handel was once such individual. Beginning music lessons at age 9, he wrote his first composition by age 12. He loved to write operas, which was unfortunate, since they were going out of style. By 1737 his opera company was bankrupt and he was dealing with health problems. It was at this time that he developed a love for oratorios. Unlike operas, oratorios were Biblical stories and were performed without the flamboyance of costume and scenery. Ironically, the church was outraged with Handel, revolted at the idea of common people performing God's Word, and in a theatre no less! But Handel continued with his compositions, though depressed and frustrated by the kickback he received. Handel loved the Lord and found great pleasure in working with two of God's creations – Scripture and music. He loved to set the Word of God to rhythm and sound. In 1741, Handel was asked by a friend to compose the music to a libretto the friend had written – a combination of Biblical and religious texts outlining the work of Christ. Handel worked feverishly, completing the composition – 260 pages – in only 24 days! The result was what has become one of the best-known musical works of the western world: Handel's *Messiah*. The oratorio poignantly examines the life of Christ, from the prophecies of Isaiah, to the resurrection. To quote the most well-loved portion: *"Hallelujah: for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth. (Re 19:6) The kingdom of this world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever. (Re 11:15) King of Kings, and Lord of Lords. (Re 19:16) Hallelujah!"*

Handel was an artist. He did what he loved, and God used Him to create a musical masterpiece that illustrated the masterpiece of Scripture – the redemption of mankind through Jesus Christ. It is only through men and women like this that we will gain back ground that the enemy has stolen in the realm of creativity.

JOHN WESLEY 1703-1791

CHARLES WESLEY 1707-1788

 **READ:** 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

The early 18th C to the late 19th C spanned a period of spiritual revival known as the Great Awakenings. Through the preaching of godly men and women, the Spirit moved, bringing heartfelt revival across America. John and his brother Charles were key players in the First Great Awakening of the 1730s and 40s, though their impact would come from afar. The brothers were born and raised in England, and aside from a few months on missions in British America, remained there throughout their lives. However they greatly influenced the movement through their teaching and development of Methodism.

While attending Oxford, both boys got serious in their faith and started a “Holy Club” – a small group providing encouragement and accountability for those who sought to live a holy life. Their methods to holy living (fasting, abstaining from amusements, weekly communion, small groups, etc.) gained them the name “Methodists” by those who ridiculed them. Holiness was the focus of their teaching. Both had an intense desire for spiritual perfection, and so they sought to do good works as the Bible commanded and to experience the sanctification spoken of in the scriptures. The Wesleys were radical because they took their responsibility as Christians very seriously in a time when the church was full of apathy and immorality. Their focus on personal holiness, repentance, the possibility of sanctification, and evangelism paved the way for revival – and a great revival it would be! Psalm 45:7 seems a fitting verse in memory of these men: *“You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.”*

GEORGE WHITEFIELD 1714-1770



READ: Romans 12

George Whitefield was America’s first cultural hero. By 1750, virtually every man woman and child in America had heard him speak, and other than royalty, he was perhaps the only name that all colonial Americans would have recognized.

Whitefield was born and raised in England and met John and Charles Wesley while attending Oxford. He quickly joined their Holy Club and even took on leadership when the brothers went to America. George was an unparalleled communicator who knew how to get beyond the head and touch the heart. He loved the stage and knew how to captivate any audience, bringing passion to his messages through tears, body language and emotion. Whitefield had a lasting impression on American religion. He felt called to New England and came over on a number of preaching tours throughout his life, traveling from place to place, and captivating crowds with his passionate preaching. He was not a man to waste time. He arose at four each morning and lay down at ten. He travelled constantly and preached multiple times a day, sometimes up to 60 hours in a week, and is said to have taught 30,000 sermons by the time he died.

Whitefield wasn’t perfect – his ministry lacked a method of discipleship, leaving some of his hearers floundering after he moved on. His marriage also lacked intimacy and care. He was afraid of marriage and when he did finally marry, he spent most of his time away from his wife, leaving her feeling lonely and rejected. Nonetheless, George Whitfield had a lasting impression on American religion. Though he was deemed a Methodist preacher, his message was non-denominational – anyone and everyone came to hear him speak and be impacted. The vitality and emotion that he brought to the pulpit set the stage for centuries of evangelists, pastors and youth pastors who would seek to minister in his footsteps. Whitefield embodied Romans 12:11 *“Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.”*

JONATHAN EDWARDS 1703-1758



READ: 1 John 4

Like the Wesleys and George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards was a vital part of the First Great Awakening, and the only key leader born and raised in America. As a young boy, Edwards was captivated by the sovereignty of God – it was meditating on this quality that brought him to fully commit to Christ. Edwards was serious and studious. He longed to see vibrant Christian community – people of real faith and of unity of heart and mind. He was neither theatrical nor emotional, but preached with inward intensity and delivered

convincing arguments, spellbinding crowds in his own way. Also unlike Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards was not a travelling preacher; rather he was committed to shepherding one church body.

Though he was a sound preacher, Jonathan Edwards is known for his study and writings, which earned him the name “America’s Greatest Theologian”. He wrote much on theology and on the sovereignty of God. The church throughout the years has benefited greatly from his paper: “*Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God*”. Edwards had witnessed a fair bit of revival in his day, but also witnessed many of those “revived” falling back into old habits shortly thereafter. So he sought to discover how to tell if revival had indeed taken place, information which has been a great source to revivalists over the years. Over the course of his life, Edwards wrote a total of 1200 sermons and he was responsible for 50,000 being awakened to faith in Christianity.

Jonathan Edwards was a man of integrity – a quality that requires great faith. He was a loving husband, a committed father, and a faithful missionary for the work of the Lord.

JOHN NEWTON 1725-1807

 **READ:** Romans 6

“Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now I’m found, was blind but now I see.”

The one who penned these words did so with humble thanksgiving. John Newton was that wretch. He spent years running from the God whom his mother had loved, only to take her from him at age 7. He was a man of arrogance and rebellion, immoral to the core. He sought to sin and to bring others into perdition with him. He defied authority, and neither lashing nor imprisonment could curb his wickedness. He was forced to join the royal navy, which he hated, and finally convinced his superiors to discharge him to a slave ship.

Over the course of time, John came to captain is own slaver. He was a blasphemous man, and known for it. But the sovereign Lord had greater purpose for John Newton. During one voyage, such a storm hit the ship, that all were certain they were destined for a watery grave. In the height of the storm, however, Newton called out “Lord, have mercy on us!” and the storm miraculously subsided. Upon reflection in his cabin, Newton saw clearly the hand of God on the ship and finally surrendered his will to the Lord right then and there.

It took a few years, but John did come to realize the sinfulness of the slave trade and abandoned it immediately. He lived forever with regret for those years, and painfully shared his experiences with William Wilberforce in hopes of helping him in his mission to abolish slavery.

Because of the grace he had received, John Newton was willing to sell himself to the Lord. He died to sin and was made alive in righteousness. So many have been impacted by his life and the famous hymn he penned. God gave sight to the blind eyes of John Newton, and through Newton’s song and testimony, the Spirit has cured the blindness of countless men and women. John Newton’s life is testimony to the sweet redemption of Jesus, that *“while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*

WILLIAM WILBERFORCE 1759-1833

 **READ:** James 2:14-26

William Wilberforce was a true marketplace leader. It was John Newton, the redeemed slave trader, who, after William became a Christian at age 25, encouraged him to stay in politics. Newton believed William could be used for God’s purposes in parliament.

William Wilberforce's conversion changed him. He joined a group of Christians called the Clapham Sect and became quite concerned with societal reform. It was the late 18th C and society was in dire need of improvement. The upper class was small but rich while the poor were getting poorer. Orphans filled the streets and the factories, alcoholism was rampant, and many were starving and in debt. Blasphemy, profanity and immoral conduct were the norm and William Wilberforce sought to eradicate such behaviour.

But William's main focus was the abolition of slavery, and he used his position in parliament to this end. This was no small feat! The economy of 18th C Europe was largely dependent upon the slave trade and most people thought it would be impossible to abolish slavery if only for that reason. William Wilberforce was one of the few who were willing to fight for what was right, regardless of its economical affect. William fought for the justice of slaves for 20 years, and though he and his bill received incredible opposition, in 1807 Britain saw the abolition of the slave trade when his bill finally passed in parliament. Though this bill brought an end to trafficking, those in slavery were still bound to their masters. William continued to fight for the freedom of all slaves in Britain, even after he retired from Parliament. William Wilberforce died in July of 1833 without seeing the fruit of his labour. But it was only one month later that the House of Commons voted to free all slaves and eradicate slavery for good!

William Wilberforce is a striking example to Christians today of how to stand boldly for truth even when it is lonely. Like the men and women of Hebrews 11, he walked in faithful obedience even though it seemed his work was in vain, and even though he never saw the outcome he longed for. He joins the great cloud of witnesses spurring us on from heaven to stand boldly for the name of Christ.

ELIZABETH FRY 1780-1845



READ: Proverbs 31

The chapter in Proverbs describes well some of the women in 18th and 19th C England, one in particular being Elizabeth Fry. As a young woman, Elizabeth read the works of Enlightenment writers and political philosophers and identified herself as having no religion. However, when she met a certain Quaker man, she had a great sense of God's presence and returned to her Quaker roots, becoming serious in her faith.

The prisons at this time were overflowing. Many people were there for the simple "crimes" of poverty and debt. Even women and children filled the prisons, with those who stole a loaf of bread in a cell alongside hardened criminals. Prisons were there to punish, not reform, and conditions were horrible. Elizabeth Fry, with her newfound faith, was eager to bring the compassion of Christ to the imprisoned. She married at age 20 and would go on to bear 11 children. But like the woman of Proverbs 31, she balanced shrewdly her home and ministry, mothering her children, taking care of her home, and working hard to improve prison conditions in Newgate Prison. By 1817, Elizabeth had formed a team of women who would go into the prisons and minister to the women there, reading the Bible to them, educating them about hygiene, and teaching them practical tasks like sewing that would later help them to earn a living. Through Elizabeth's advocacy men and women were housed separately, inmates were given pay for work, women were guarded by female guards, and prisoners were housed according to their crimes. Elizabeth fought for reform within prisons and as result, Newgate became a model prison throughout Britain. Elizabeth's testimony also helped to pass the Prison Reform Act of 1823. She was a trailblazer for organizations who would come after her, characterizing prisoner reform through social work and evangelism.

CHARLES FINNEY 1792-1875 **READ:** Mark 11:20-26; John 14:9-14


As a result of the American Revolution, the thirteen British colonies had become the new United States of America. As settlers spread across the country, immorality was on the rise and Christianity on the decline. The country was again in need of spiritual revival. The 1790s-1840s saw great outpourings of the Holy Spirit as spiritual revival spread across the new nation – a Second Great Awakening.

Charles Finney was one of the movers and shakers of this awakening, earning himself the title as the “Father of American Revivalism”. Finney was a lawyer who left his trade and moved his legal logic and courtroom skill to the pulpit, with compelling and persuasive sermons. He wasn’t in favour of theatrical emotion, but sought to bring people to a place of excitement knowing it was only *then* that they would act on what they had heard.

Charles Finney sought to bring God’s Word to the common man and to include the common man in his ministry. This was American revivalism – everyone included in the evangelism and discipleship of the saved. Finney enacted “new measures” which made his revivals very successful: he held all-night prayer meetings, allowed women to pray publically, allowed emotional responses in his meetings, and designated an “anxious bench” where any sinner could come to receive prayer during a revival meeting.

Finney came on the evangelical scene with a new approach. He advocated that God has given all man the opportunity and ability to choose for himself if he will follow God or reject Him. This brought a new sense of responsibility and passion to people of America as they sought to actually *do something* about their sin.

Charles Finney was also known as a man of great faith – a faith that allowed him to pray with power. Not prosperity driven, name-it-and-claim-it prayers of “faith,” but bold prayers aligned to God’s will through His promised Word. A story is told of a drought in Finney’s residence of Oberlin, Ohio. One Sunday, Finney awoke and felt the urge to pray for rain before his congregation. (Some say he even brought an umbrella to church that morning!) In front of his congregation, he humbly but boldly asked the Lord to send rain before the end of the service. Within the hour, the rumble of thunder was heard and soon there was an outpouring of rain that the land had not received in months! Charles Finney was a man immersed in Scripture and diligent in prayer, listening to God and seeking His will. He loved the Lord and sought to obey God’s command. Because of these things, he could pray and preach in faith and much fruit was seen in his life and ministry as a result.

GEORGE MUELLER 1805-1898 **READ:** Philippians 4:4-20

Back in England, George Mueller was another social activist working hard towards societal change, particularly among the orphaned children of London. Throughout his lifetime he would help over 10,000 orphans, and through his legacy would come to be known as a man of great faith. But faith-filled and Christ-like were not always words to describe George Mueller. As a young Bible school student, he loved to gamble, swear and drink, and enjoyed a pastime of mocking Christians. However, after attending a Bible study where he saw people who genuinely loved Jesus, George Mueller gave his life to the Lord.

Mueller is well known as a man of faith, a quality that characterized him immediately upon his commitment to Christ. Of course, faith is a requirement for salvation and a relationship with the Lord – “*for you have been saved by grace through faith”* and “*without faith it is impossible to please God*” – but George Mueller’s faith was like that of the heroes of

Scripture; he held an unyielding trust in the Lord which enabled him to walk a life of obedience and accomplishment in God's kingdom.

George was put to the test right away. When hearing that his son wanted to go into the ministry, George's father refused to pay for the remainder of his schooling. George, confident that he was obeying God and that God could provide, presented his need to the Lord in prayer. Not an hour later there was a knock at the door and George had a job offer that would pay his way through college! Later, when George was offered a preaching position, he refused to take a salary, trusting God to meet his needs and that of his family. Experiences like these became the norm in George's life. When he had a need, he presented it to His heavenly Father, and his Father always provided enough.

Eventually God opened George Mueller's eyes to the cry of the orphans in London. George saw the children in the street and knew the Lord was calling him to start an orphanage. Like always, he prayed for his needs: a building, furniture, workers and overseers, food and clothing, and like always, God provided. George never knew how God would step in, and there were many times when he had to step out in faith and obedience trusting God to come through. There are stories told of 300 children waiting in the dining room for their breakfast in an orphanage of empty cupboards. But they sat there waiting in expectation because George Mueller knew that God would provide food for His children. And it just so happened that a baker and a milkman showed up at the door with breakfast!

When George Mueller's orphans were old enough to leave his orphanage, it is said that he placed a Bible in the child's right hand, and a coin in the left. George would tell him that if he held on to what was in his *right* hand, God would always make sure there would be something in his *left*. In our busy, materialistic and wealth-oriented society, there is so much we can learn from this great man of faith.

HARRIET BEECHER STOWE 1811-1896



READ: Psalm 9

Harriet Beecher was born the seventh of eight children who were expected to do something significant in the world. Her brothers were all ministers, some of the most famous of their time. One sister was a pioneer for women's education and another founded the National Women's Suffrage Association. Harriet had the gift of writing and felt it was her place to write books.

As a devout Christian and a woman of patriotism, Harriet felt deep sorrow over slavery in the United States. This was increased when she married Calvin Stowe, an avid abolitionist of the slave trade. Together they were involved with the Underground Railroad – a network of people willing to house slaves who were escaping to freedom. When the Fugitive Slave Law was enacted in 1850, making it illegal to help slaves on the run, Harriet could not keep quiet. Bound to her commitment to Christ and certain of the judgement of God, she wrote what would become one of the most influential pieces of literature of all time. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was published in 1852, a story illustrating the life of African-American slaves. The little novel spread across the nation, awakening many to the injustice of slavery and causing uproar in the south where slavery was rampant. The Civil War soon began and when she met President Abraham Lincoln shortly after, he greeted her saying, "so you are the little woman who wrote the book that started this great war."

Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote books because she loved to write, and she had the gift. It was her career and her passion. She wrote as ideas came, but when she saw the injustice of slavery so commonplace in society, she knew she was called to write something of intent. When describing why she wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, she said: "I wrote what I did because as a woman, as a mother, I was oppressed and broken-hearted with the sorrows

and injustice I saw, because as a Christian I felt the dishonor to Christianity - because as a lover of my county, I trembled at the coming day of wrath.” Harriet possessed a deep fear of the Lord, knowing that God would judge her nation for its injustices to the oppressed. She recognized her Christian duty, that feeling bad was not enough, and she used her pen to speak for those who had no voice. Her impact was astronomical.

FANNY CROSBY 1820-1915

 **READ:** Psalm 1

At age 8, Fanny penned the following verse:

*Oh, what a happy soul I am,
Though I cannot see!
I am resolved that in this world
Contented I will be.

How many blessings I enjoy
That other people don't,
To weep and sigh because I'm blind
I cannot, and I won't!*

From a young age Fanny Crosby put her trust fully in her Lord Jesus. She was blinded at six weeks old due to a maltreatment given by a quack pretending to be a certified doctor. But the injustice never deterred her and she was known to be glad and contented in her blindness. When anyone showed pity at her situation, she declared the joy she felt in knowing that the first face she would ever behold would be that of her Saviour.

Fanny was a gifted writer and spent much time writing poetry. She also worked avidly to memorize Scripture and as a child could recite from memory the Pentateuch, the Gospels, Proverbs, Song of Solomon and many of the Psalms. She loved God and His Word and her greatest joy was to write hymns, setting her words to music, be it her own compositions or the music of others. Over the course of her life, Fanny wrote over 9000 hymns! She wrote so many that she used a variety of pen names so that hymnals would not be full of “Fanny Crosby” hymns.

Fanny’s life was not without troubles. She and her husband lost their only child at infancy, and, though they were always friends, the couple lived much of their married life in separation. Still, Fanny was a woman who found joy in the Lord. Though she made enough money to live in comfort, she chose to live in the slums of the Lower East Side of Manhattan. She had a heart for the poor and spent much time working with rescue missions.

Fanny Crosby left a great legacy through the written word. Her hymns have drawn countless of people to the foot of the cross and to the feet of Jesus.

*All the way my Savior leads me;
What have I to ask beside?
Can I doubt His tender mercy,
Who through life has been my guide?*

HORATIO SPAFFORD 1828-1888**READ:** Psalm 46

The Spafford's story is one of God's sovereignty and goodness amid grave trial. Horatio Spafford and his wife Anna were God-fearing people with the gift of hospitality. With a successful Chicago law practice and a fair amount of real estate investments, they were fairly well-off and lived comfortably with their 5 children. They loved the Lord and used their resources and influence to aid social reform activists and evangelists in their city.

But hard times were in store for the Spaffords, who would receive a test of faith like that of Job. When their only son was just four years old he died of scarlet fever. The following year, in 1871, the Great Chicago Fire destroyed much of Horatio Spafford's real estate. But as people whose treasure was stored up in heaven, they reached out in love and care to help those who had lost much more than them; the fire had left 90,000 homeless.

When Anna Spafford's health began to fail in 1873, the couple decided to take their four daughters and spend some time in Europe where D. L. Moody was conducting an evangelical campaign. Last minute business, however, required Horatio to stay home, and so he sent his wife and daughters ahead of him to Europe. Horatio Spafford would not see his daughters again. Tragically, their steamer was struck by a sailing ship, sinking in only 12 minutes and taking his four daughters with it. The telegram Spafford received from Anna read: "saved alone." While sailing abroad to collect his wife, the captain informed him when they were near the place where his daughters drowned. After seeing it, Spafford returned to his cabin to compose his response to this tragedy. It would become one of the best-loved and heartfelt hymns of all time. The words of this hymn resound as a testament to the faith of Horatio Spafford.

*When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say,
It is well, it is well, with my soul.*

*It is well, with my soul,
It is well, with my soul,
It is well, it is well, with my soul.*

*Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.
(refrain)*

*My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!
(refrain)*

*And Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight,
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend,
Even so, it is well with my soul.*

*It is well, with my soul,
It is well, with my soul,
It is well, it is well, with my soul.*

WILLIAM & CATHERINE BOOTH W: 1829-1912 & C: 1829-1890 **READ:** Isaiah 61

William and Catherine Booth were a dynamic duo for the Lord. While William was born into poverty, Catherine was born into a comfortable Christian home. Both came to develop strong personal relationships with the Lord and sought to see others experience the same. They met and married in expectation of a life of ministry.

Catharine advocated strongly for women in ministry. She was bold in her beliefs that the Apostle Paul's words about women had been too long taken out of context. She believed that women had the ability and the heavenly right to preach the Word of God. William supported her, and when Catharine finally did get a chance to preach, her listeners were mesmerized. She was blazing a new trail for women on the pastoral frontier.

England's lower class society was in disarray; neither the Church of England nor the Methodists had a strategy to bring the gospel to the poor. The homeless and the hoodlum had no one offering them the Bread of life. William and Catherine had a heart for the downtrodden, and together they lived among the poor, reaching out to those caught in drunkenness, violence, prostitution and homelessness. They met the people's needs and preached the gospel of Christ. Eventually they would establish the famous Salvation Army. Through this mission, they continued to reach out to the needs of the demoralized while incorporating military organization like uniforms, officers and marching bands. The Salvation Army officers paraded through the streets, singing, preaching and drawing people into the mission where they could experience the love of God.

Many knew and were impacted by William and Catherine Booth. When William died in 1912, 40,000 attended his funeral. Even the queen was there. He and Catherine had spent their lives for the gospel, and went on to receive their reward.

HUDSON TAYLOR 1832-1905 **READ:** Matthew 6

Today the underground church movement in China is the fastest growing church movement in history. Hudson Taylor was the man largely responsible for bringing the gospel message to the Chinese people.

Taylor accepted Christ as a teenager and very soon felt called to be a missionary in China. He studied medicine, sought to learn Mandarin, and trained himself to rely on the providence of God. At age 21 he set sail for China.

Hudson Taylor forged a new trail for missionaries. Unlike other missionary organizations, it was never his goal to westernize the Chinese by forcing them to trade their Chinese heritage for the gospel. Rather, he was burdened for the hearts of the Chinese people and longed for them to know Christ. His approach was radical. Immediately upon his arrival, Hudson abandoned his English attire and dressed himself like the Chinese. He wanted to learn the language, embrace the culture and tell the people about the good news of Jesus. Eventually he would establish the China Inland Mission with the goal to bring the gospel where it had never been before. He and his missionaries left the comfort of the cities and journeyed inland to bring the gospel to every province of China.

Taylor was a strict leader. He had learned early on that God would provide all he needed, and so anyone who wanted to volunteer with China Inland Mission could not expect to be paid a salary; the missionary would rely on God for support. Like Hudson, the missionaries were also required to dress as the Chinese people. Hudson was innovative in that he allowed women – single or married – to join his mission, something that he was criticized

for. But the need was so great! Hudson Taylor worked endlessly and expected the same of his missionaries. He wanted people who were willing to leave the comforts of western society for the discomfort of the mission field.

When Hudson Taylor had a need, he asked God for it. When he asked for 24 missionaries to take the gospel inland, God provided. When in 1881 he asked for 70 missionaries by the end of 1884, God provided 76. When he asked for 100 by 1887, he had 102! God used Hudson Taylor and China Inland Mission to get the good news of Christ to the people of China, an accomplishment that has had colossal effect on the worldwide church.

D. L. MOODY 1837-1899



READ: John 15:1-17

God can do extraordinary things out of ordinary people. Dwight Lyman Moody's life was a testament to that. As one of 9 children being raised by a widowed mother, Moody never received more than a 5th grade education, and was never encouraged to read his Bible. He never went to college or seminary or joined the clergy. Still, he had high hopes and sought to make lots of money when he grew up. But after becoming a Christian at age 18, Moody realized there was more to life than wealth. He was known to be optimistic, outgoing, confident and energetic, and probably could have become a wealthy businessman! But God had a different calling for D. L. Moody. God led him to get involved with the poor immigrants of Chicago, and so Moody entered the inner city mission field. He worked with the YMCA and eventually started his own church. But the Chicago fire would change everything. Both his church and the YMCA succumbed to the flames.

Moody felt led to begin revival campaigns, and travelled through different cities and towns preaching the gospel. God had gotten a hold of him in a new way: though social work was well and good, it was the gospel people needed and evangelism was Moody's calling. He led many crusades and pioneered new techniques for evangelism. He would also go on to establish seminaries for boys and girls which would provide Bible-centred education. Eventually one of these seminaries in Chicago would come to be known as the Moody Bible Institute, which continues to educate students in the Word of God.

Not only was Moody a dynamic speaker and a passionate evangelist, but he was a good man and a great father. He was a man busy with the Lord's work, and wasn't ashamed if the Lord's work meant a weekend with the family. He loved to spend time with his wife and three children, pretending with them and pulling pranks together. D. L. Moody was an ordinary man who was willing to do the work God called him to do with energy and joy. If we are faithful in the little things, like this man, God will give us greater responsibility. *He* can do the extraordinary.

AMY CARMICHAEL 1867-1951



READ: Isaiah 49

As a young woman, Amy Carmichael felt a strong rebuke from the Lord that would set the stage for her life as a missionary. She and her brother were helping an old beggar woman walk down the street when Amy was overcome with embarrassment that she was being seen with such a woman. Amy heard a voice say: "Gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay and straw – the fire will test what sort of work each has done. If the foundation survives, he will receive the reward." Later she found these words in her Bible. Knowing her heart had been wrong while helping the old woman, she repented before the Lord and promised to follow His leading in her life. This began God's call on Amy's life.

Amy began to help the poor and needy, living among them while she ministered. But she soon felt a strong calling to go somewhere as a missionary. She didn't know where, but through circumstances, God eventually directed her to India. There, like Hudson Taylor in China, Amy Carmichael donned an Indian sari and even stained her skin with dark coffee in hopes of better fitting in with the local people.

It was common for unwanted little girls to be given to the Hindu temples where they would spend their lives as temple prostitutes. The girls were considered "married to the gods" and thus had no rights. Abuse was common and sexual exploitation was their very purpose. When Amy met Preena, a temple runaway seeking protection, she knew why God had called her to India. She began to take in girls like Preena, providing a place of sanctuary for them in the little village of Dohnavur. She would travel miles on foot for the possibility of saving just one child. At Dohnavur, a community of love and protection developed that still exists today.

Despite lifelong health problems, Amy Carmichael worked fervently for the Lord. She understood how to take up her cross. In fact, a young woman considering the mission field once sent Amy a letter asking "What is missionary life like?" Amy's reply was simple, yet profound: "Missionary life is simply a chance to die."

WILLIAM SEYMOUR 1870-1922


 **READ:** Acts 2:1-21

William Seymour's ardent pursuit of the Spirit ignited a fire that continues to blaze throughout the worldwide church. His desperation for the Holy Spirit and subsequent gifts opened the door for Pentecostalism and invited the Holy Spirit back into the Christian body.

The son of slaves, Seymour was a first-generation freed African American who had to attend Bible studies in the hallway because he wasn't allowed in the classroom. He learned from Charles Parham about the baptism of the Spirit and the gift of tongues. Seymour wasn't a gifted speaker nor did he have exceptional social skills. He had never received the gift of tongues, but began to preach that it should be a part of every believer's experience.

Seymour and a group of like-minded individuals began to meet regularly, praying to be filled with the Spirit and to receive the gift of tongues. Soon it began to happen. People in the group were receiving the gift, praying and singing in tongues they had never known. The group moved to a building on Azusa Street, Los Angeles, and the Azusa Street Revival was born. News spread and people came from all around to pray and receive. Within five months, 13,000 had come through the doors of the mission. There was very little structure to the meetings; they were loud and energetic "as the Spirit moved." Over the next few years, people would continue to come from all over to experience what was happening at Azusa, and from there, Pentecostalism spread out across the world.

The movement was not without its problems. Many churches disassociated themselves from what was happening at Azusa. Rifts were formed, accusations put forth, some even called the whole thing "demonic." Nevertheless, God started something at Azusa Street. For so long, the Holy Spirit and His gifts had been pushed out of the church. April 9, 1906 (the start of the revival) marked a new beginning and an opening of hearts to the power of God's Spirit.

CORRIE TEN BOOM 1892-1983 **READ:** Philippians 3:1 – 4:1

Corrie ten Boom has been honoured by the nation of Israel as one of the Righteous Among the Nations – a non-Jew who risked his/her life to save Jews during the Holocaust. Corrie ten Boom was born and raised in Holland. Her family could have avoided the mess of the Holocaust; like so many Europeans, they could have turned a blind eye to Hitler’s lawlessness in exchange for safety and security, but they chose to obey God over man. Corrie’s family were Christians. As an avid reader of the Old Testament, Corrie’s dad embraced the Jewish people as God’s chosen and so when Hitler’s plan to exterminate the Jews became evident, he couldn’t help but take a stand. The family covertly built a secret room behind Corrie’s bedroom wall – a space 30 inches deep that often held up to seven Jewish escapees at a time. While working in her father’s watch shop, Corrie became a networker, finding other families who were willing to risk their lives to save God’s people. It is estimated that 800 Jews were protected due to the work of the ten Booms and other families.

But the ten Boom family was sold out to the authorities, and the gestapo raided their house on February 28, 1944. Everyone present in the house was arrested, except for the six people hiding in the secret room who were never discovered. Eventually all were released but Corrie, her sister Betsie, and her father. These three were imprisoned. Corrie’s father died within 10 days of incarceration while she and Betsie went on to spend ten months in the inhumanity of Hitler’s concentration camps. But as terrible as life was, they continued to cling to God and spent their time sharing the love of Christ with their fellow inmates. Corrie was released in December 1944, just weeks after her sister died in Ravensbruck Concentration Camp.

As a Holocaust survivor, Corrie’s experiences had a profound impact on her. They taught her that *“there is no pit so deep that God’s love is not deeper still”*. After she was reunited with her surviving family members, Corrie ten Boom embarked on a 32-year worldwide ministry to over 60 countries where she testified to thousands about the love of Jesus Christ. After one speaking engagement where she preached a message on forgiveness, she was met face-to-face with one of the cruelest Nazi guards she had known from Ravensbruck. He was so blessed by her message and stretched out his hand to shake hers. She was flooded with memories and felt no love, but when she finally grasped his hand in hers, she was filled with such an overwhelming sense of God’s love for the man. This example shows the deep dependence Corrie had on her Saviour, and the deep humility she had learned from Him. A righteous one who lived her life by faith, she walked in obedience to her Lord right up to the cross. She shared in the suffering of Christ and will certainly share in His resurrection.

C. S. LEWIS 1898-1963 **READ:** 1 Corinthians 2:6-16

Clive Staples Lewis, called “Jack” by friends and family, was one of the greatest writers of his time, and one of the greatest Christian apologists in all history. He abandoned his Protestant upbringing for atheism as a teenager and honed his literary skills under the tutelage of a brilliant mind, W. T. Kirkpatrick. He attended Oxford and set himself to become a poet.

While at Oxford, Lewis became friends with a number of Christians. Various experiences revealing the emptiness of a material world opened him to the idea of God and eventually he came to accept Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Jack’s conversion changed him, and he

began to pour his mental brilliance and literary abilities into apologetic writings – defenses for the truth and reliability of Christianity. During WWII, his voice was perhaps the most recognized second only to Winston Churchill. In a time when many Christians were indifferent to the *moral* battle going on, Lewis broadcasted a BBC miniseries about the Christian life. These programs would form the basis for one of Lewis's greatest apologetic works, *Mere Christianity*. His writings were honest and to-the-point.

Lewis was an intellectual – a man of the mind – and one who loved the imagination. This is evident in his works like *The Screwtape Letters* which presents a series of letters written from an experienced demon to his young nephew, a junior tempter, and, of course, *The Chronicles of Narnia* – Lewis presented the majestic truth of the gospel through an allegory of make-believe and adventure. In a world where so many have sold their imaginations for cheap thrills, C. S. Lewis used his for the glory of God, and generations of adults and children are thanking him for it. His writings reveal a man possessing a fear of the Lord and a passion for truth.

“Safe? ... Who said anything about safe? ‘Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King, I tell you.” – C. S. Lewis; *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*

DIETRICH BONHOEFFER 1906-1945

 **READ:** Mark 8:31-38

Hitler's rise to power was all-encompassing. He sought to purify the motherland and to seize control of the European world. He ruled with a smooth tongue and an iron fist. We know him to be a monster responsible for the brutal killing of 6 million Jews, but to many Germans, his message was one of hope and unity, particularly after the shame and loss of WWI. The promise of German pride caused many to turn a blind eye to the atrocities happening behind barbed wire. There were some, however, who took a stand.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a Lutheran pastor when Hitler came to power in the early 1930s. Hitler's ideas were seeping into the church at the time, and both the Lutheran and Catholic churches were falling prey. Hitler was a sensation, the people in a frenzy over him. Some church leaders began to declare him a second Christ! And so Dietrich Bonhoeffer, along with about a third of the Protestant clergy formed the Confessing Church – a church that stood boldly against the work of Adolf Hitler.

During the subsequent years, Bonhoeffer wrote his famous, *The Cost of Discipleship* – a book rejecting apathy and cheap grace and emphasizing repentance and sacrifice. After he was banned from preaching, he began teaching at an underground Bible school until it was shut down by the authorities. Bonhoeffer had tried to take a peaceful stand against Hitler through sound moral teaching, but it was not enough; he became involved with various plots to kill Hitler, though none were successful. He was an extremely brave man, even joining the German secret service as a double agent, using his connections to help Jews escape oppression. In April 1943 Bonhoeffer was caught. After spending two years in prison he was transferred to the Buchenwald concentration camp, and then on to an extermination camp where he was hung on April 9, 1945, only weeks before Germany surrendered.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a man who chose to follow Christ whatever the cost. As a Christian, he could not stand idly by in the face of pure evil. His efforts were an embodiment of Jesus' promise to Peter: *“on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”* Nothing can destroy God's church, and through men and women of faith, like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, there will always be a faithful remnant of God's people, willing to obey Him no matter the cost.

RICHARD WRUMBRAND 1909-2001**READ:** 2 Corinthians 6:3-10

In the mid-1940s as WWII was coming to a close, Communism was engulfing Romania. Richard Wrumbrand and his wife Sabina were Romanian Jews who were led to Christ by an old Jewish carpenter in the late 1930s. They committed their lives wholeheartedly to the Lord's work and Richard became a pastor. In 1945, 4000 religious leaders were called together to swear their loyalty to the new communist party. In doing so, many pastors stood up and denied their Lord, claiming that Christianity was fundamentally cohesive with Communism. Sabina could not stand it and urged her husband to "stand up and wash away this shame from the face of Christ." Richard did so, and his allegiance to the Lamb cost him 8 years of torturous imprisonment. He was mercilessly tortured for preaching the gospel, but Jesus strengthened Him and gave him a heart of love and forgiveness for his persecutors.

God poured out his love on Richard and Sabina Wrumbrand, burdening their hearts with passion for those trapped in Communism. Though warned, Richard continued to preach after his release, earning him five more years in prison. Sabina, also, would spend three years as a prisoner for the gospel.

Richard and Sabina would eventually move to the United States; friends and family raised money to pay off the government to let them escape. And from America, they continued to reach out to Communists until the regime was overthrown in the early 90's. The Wrumbrands started the ministry *The Voice for the Martyrs* dedicating themselves to serving the persecuted church worldwide, reaching out to persecuted believers and praying for the brokenness and redemption of those who persecute God's people in hopes that Sauls may become Pauls and more will come to know the love of Jesus Christ.

BILLY GRAHAM BORN 1918**READ:** Romans 10

William Franklin Graham Jr. was born in 1918 to Christian parents in Charlotte, North Carolina and grew up to become the world's most famous evangelist. He surrendered his life to the Lord at age 16 and went onto graduate from Wheaton College where he met and married his wife, Ruth Bell.

Billy, as he liked to be known, was called to the Lord's work. He knew this for certain, even if he didn't have a specific long term vision. Between 1944 and 1950 he pastored a First Baptist Church in Illinois, took over the Christian radio program *Songs in the Night*, acted as president of Northwestern Bible College in Minneapolis, worked as a full-time evangelist for Youth for Christ, started the *Hour of Decision* weekly radio program, and founded the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. His ministry really took off in 1949 while conducting a tent-revival in Los Angeles. The famous newspaper publisher, William Randolph Hearst, liked Graham and sent a telegraph to his newspaper editors: "Puff Graham". Billy was plastered all over the papers and the revival tent overflowed.

Over 100 million people have heard Billy Graham preach in person. He has touched the lives of millions more through the avenue of media. Through crusades and invitations, Billy Graham has preached all over the world and millions have come to accept Christ as their personal Saviour in response to his messages. He has been a friend and spiritual advisor to multiple presidents and has addressed the United States in times of peril. He was of the first to hold integrated revivals in the 1950s, inviting blacks and whites alike and even partnering with Martin Luther King Jr. He unashamedly used the media to spread the gospel message, desiring to use all means possible to bring the good news of Christ to the

peoples of the world. He was a man of incredible integrity. Early on in his ministry, he and the men on his team committed to financial and moral accountability, taking responsibility for ministry funds and committing to never be alone with women other than their own wives. Unlike so many other media-lit evangelists of the past century, Billy Graham stands irreproachable in his conduct. Nearing age 95, Billy Graham continues to be hailed as the greatest evangelist of our times. Meanwhile, having run the race and fought the fight, he waits patiently for the Lord to call him home.

JACKIE PULLINGER BORN 1944

 **READ:** Matthew 10

Jackie Pullinger felt God call her to be a missionary at the age of 5. Though she wasn't quite sure what that meant, nor was she thrilled with the idea, she accepted that it would be her lot in life. As a young adult she recommitted herself to the Lord and immediately felt a burden for the lost. She was convinced that *she* had eternal life, but what about all those poor, lost souls who didn't know Jesus? And so she set off to share Jesus wherever she could.

Jackie heard God saying "go", but was rejected by the missionary society for being too young. She was given the advice from a minister to buy a boat ticket and set sail until God told her to get off. And so, like Abraham, she responded to God's urging and set off without a destination in mind, trusting that God would direct her feet. She understood that her role was to obey, not to force a calling, and so she embraced her adventure and decided that if she was to sail around the world only to talk to one sailor about Jesus, it would be worth it.

But God wouldn't let her get around the world. He stopped her in Hong Kong and brought her to the walled city of Kowloon. She didn't know when she entered it, but the walled city was a lawless place, a city abandoned by police and not subject to any jurisdiction. Run by Chinese gangs, it was one of the world's largest opium production centres full of gangs, drugs and prostitution. Jackie was overwhelmed with love for the people of the city and began teaching children, eventually starting a youth club where God used her powerfully to minister to those caught in the destructive lifestyle of gangs and drug addiction.

When ministry was difficult and seemed unfruitful, Jackie immersed herself in God's Word and prayer. During one prayer time, God gave her the gift of tongues. She felt uncomfortable and so she left it alone for an entire year until someone told her "The Scripture says if you pray in tongues you will be built up spiritually. It doesn't say you will feel built up." Jackie started exercising her gift and saw an immediate change in her ministry. God was leading her to people who were ready to hear the gospel and lives began to change. Jackie learned the wonderful benefit of the gift of tongues: "The problem is, most of us have got an agenda, and we say, 'This is what I want to do, dear Lord, please bless me.' ... But when you pray in tongues it's the opposite way round. It's, 'Dear Lord, You've got an agenda, and I'd like to play the part You want me to play in it.'"

To Jackie, being a Christian is very simple: follow what God says and share Jesus wherever you can.

BROTHER YUN BORN 1958**READ:** Matthew 5:1-12; 2 Timothy 3:10-4:8

Brother Yun is a Chinese Christian instrumental in the development of the Chinese house church movement. In China, Christianity is carefully screened. The government-controlled Three Self Church is the only legal form of Christianity. Everything within this organization is monitored very closely; the government sees true Christianity as a political threat.

This really is not new. Following in Jesus' footsteps, the men and women killed for their faith in the New Testament and throughout history have always died as "enemies of the state." We know them to be noble martyrs for the Lord, but their countrymen and government have seen them as political and societal threats.

Brother Yun knows the One he loves. His biography speaks of miracle after miracle as God has been consistently faithful to him and his family, providing comfort, encouragement, deliverance, and the salvation of many souls. Brother Yun learned early on that the Christian life was more than a feeling; His commitment to Christ required faith and allegiance. As a young believer he fasted and prayed until God gave him a Bible. After quickly memorizing the book of Matthew, God lead him miraculously to various villages to recite the gospel message. The Spirit would move powerfully as all the listeners would fall on their knees in tears, repenting of their sins. Brother Yun is not afraid to preach the repentance of sins, or to tell people they need Jesus. His commitment to Jesus and to the church in China has deemed him, like the apostles, an enemy of the state. He has experienced years of imprisonment and intense torture for the sake of Christ, but has remained faithful because God is faithful. Life has never been easy for Brother Yun, his wife, Deling, and their two children, but they, like the men and women of Hebrews 11 regard themselves as foreigners on this earth, and look forward *"to the city with foundations, whose Architect and Builder is God."*

Brother Yun is one of many persecuted believers alive today. Many have gone before him and now stand in the great cloud of witnesses. They are ones of whom the world was not worthy. And we know that they have been received by the Lord and commended for their faith. And Christ will come again in glory to establish His everlasting kingdom. Together with those who have gone before us, we, with unveiled faces, will receive our inheritance, the salvation of our souls!

"Though you have not seen Him, you love Him; and even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls." 1 Peter 1:8

YOUR FAITH STORY**READ:** 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; Colossians 1:7-23

Biographies are inspiring. Hearing the stories of godly men and women who have gone before us activates us to live a life worthy of the Lord that we may please Him in all we do by bearing much fruit! But heroes of the faith are not limited to those mentioned in this booklet. Over the course of creation, millions have walked faithfully before the Lord. Together we will form the great multitude glimpsed by the Apostle John: *"After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: 'Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.'"* (Revelation 7:9-10)



Heroes of the Faith

Scripture and Christian history are full of faith heroes - men and women who stepped out in obedience when God said "go". Those who have gone before us stand as a great cloud of witnesses spurring us onward in the faith. Their testimony urges us to spend our lives for the One who spent His life for our salvation. May your faith be built as you read their stories.

Hebrews 12:1-2a (NIV)

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfector of our faith..."



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