

CHARACTER

Makes the Difference



Mack Lyon



SEARCH PROGRAMS

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Topics subject to change without notice

OCTOBER 2 - JOSEPH, A MAN OF INTEGRITY

The youth of America need a real hero. They have had rock-and-rap musicians, drugged athletes and entertainers exalted to the implied places of gods too long. A word most needed nowadays is "integrity."

OCTOBER 9 - MOSES, A MAN OF MEEKNESS

Moses is described in the Scriptures as the meekest man on the earth. Yet he was a great man of God, so much so he was blessed with being one of only two men with Jesus on the Mount at the transfiguration of Jesus. Let's teach meekness.

OCTOBER 16 - BARNABAS, A GOOD MAN

Barnabas is one of only two men whom God describes in His word as "a good man." What an honor to be called of God "a good man!" In our times "goodness" is as of-no-use as Henry Ford's tin-lizzie. Let's restore the value of goodness.

OCTOBER 23 - ELIJAH, A MAN OF COURAGE

Though he never wrote a book of prophecy as did Isaiah and Jeremiah, Elijah is one of the great prophets of Old Testament times. It was his demonstration of courageous boldness in a difficult period of Israel's history that made him great.

OCTOBER 30 - PAUL, A MAN OF CONVICTION

We cannot assume our youth believe it is wrong to kill and steal and cheat, or that they know they should obey their parents. They must be taught that, and see it practiced. They must be taught those things, and the best book for that is the Bible.

"JOSEPH - MAN OF INTEGRITY"

Gen. 39:1-6

We hear a lot of oratory these days about protecting and caring for the children: health-care for every American child; protect and preserve the environment for our children; prevent our children from smoking; higher education for all our children, these and other slogans fill the newspapers and newscasts day after day. We're not saying they're not important, but to paraphrase what Jesus said in another situation, "These things we ought to do, but we ought not to leave undone the things of more relevance and greater importance" --such things as we mentioned awhile ago, self-discipline, integrity, honesty, hygiene, hard work, compassion, responsibility, courage and loyalty. As long as a person performs well on the athletic field, in the arts or entertainment or business or in the political arena, character, what he or she is as a person, really doesn't matter anymore. Thus, the heroes and role-models we offer our youth, are moral sewage. We're sending the wrong message about character, my friend, and we're suffering the consequences in the total collapse of our morality. It is impossible to enforce enough laws to maintain order and prevent chaos under these circumstances. We're on the very brink of anarchy. And the only solution the world has ever found for anarchy is totalitarianism --a dictatorship. That's where we're headed as certainly as nightfall today, unless we can get ourselves turned around.

The best character studies are in the Bible. We're going to begin our series with a study of Joseph, A Man of Integrity. There is more space given in Scripture to Joseph than to any other of the Old Testament characters. You may read the whole story, which we're going to hurriedly review in Genesis chapters 30 to 50.

Joseph is the eleventh of the twelve sons of Jacob or Israel. The Scripture says that because he was the son of Jacob's old age, he was his favorite son. And Jacob made the mistake that many parents make; he showed his favoritism, which resulted in intense jealousy in the brothers. Jealousy is a pernicious evil which, if not checked, will grow and sometimes results even in criminal behavior. Solomon said, "Jealousy enrages a man, And he will not spare in the day of vengeance" (Prov. 6:34). Oh, he is so right about that! Read the newspaper accounts of the murders, attempted murders and other vicious crimes, if you don't think so. And what's even worse is that sometimes these jealous rages are disguised as defenses of truth and right.

Joseph had some dreams which he related to his brothers. In that period of biblical history, God sometimes revealed His will in dreams. Joseph dreamed that he and his brothers were binding sheaves in the field, and lo, his sheaf rose up and stood erect; and their sheaves gathered around and bowed down to his. They interpreted it to mean that someday they would be bowing down to Joseph. And their jealousy was flamed. In another he saw the sun and the moon and eleven stars bowing down to him. This one, too, was interpreted to mean not only they but their father and mother, too, would be bowing down to Joseph. Those dreams turned their jealousy to bitter anger and hatred.

When Joseph was seventeen years old his father sent him to the valley of Hebron to see about the welfare of the brothers and the flock they were pasturing there. When Joseph went he found the brothers in Dothan. When they saw him coming, they plotted among themselves to kill him. They would lie to their father about it, and say a wild beast had slain him. But Rueben, the oldest of them, rescued him from the murder plot. Instead they threw him into a pit to die. But while they were eating, some Ishmaelites came along and they sold Joseph to them. The Ishmaelites took him to Egypt and sold him there to an Egyptian officer of Pharaoh named Potiphar. What a traumatic experience! It

would take awhile to recover from a thing like that --if we could ever recover totally. But Joseph did. And the Bible says, "The Lord was with Joseph, so he became a successful man" and "his master saw that the Lord was with him" (Gen. 39:2,3).

So he made him his personal servant; and overseer over his house, and all that he owned he put in his charge or in his hand, excepting only the food he ate. Joseph was a man of integrity; one to be trusted. Potiphar was a good judge of character, and he saw it in Joseph.

Things were going well for Joseph --and for Potiphar, too. But, the Scripture says that "Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. And it came about after these events that his master's wife looked with desire at Joseph, and she said, Lie with me" (Gen. 39:6, 7). This invitation to an adulterous relationship was a real test of the young man's character. He had no choice in what his brothers did to him, but in this he could choose. In a distant land away from family and among strangers, he needed acceptance, and she offered it. No one would know --just the two of them. What do you think Joseph did? Well, the Bible says, "He refused and said to his master's wife, "With me here, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house, and he has put all that he owns in my charge. There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great evil, and sin against God?" Ah, Joseph's integrity was showing again.

But she didn't take "no" for an answer. Joseph might have said, "What is there about `no' that you don't understand?" Because day after day, she made her offer and day after day he refused to lie with her or be with her (Gen. 39:10). Then verse 11 says, "Now it happened one day that he went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the household was there inside. And she caught him by his garment, saying, Lie with me! And he left his garment in her hand and fled, and went outside. When she saw that he had left his garment in her hand, and had fled outside, she called to the men of her household, and said to them, See, he has brought in a Hebrew to us to make sport of us; he came in to me to lie with me and I screamed. And it came about when he heard that I raised my voice and screamed, that he left his garment beside me and fled and went outside. So she left his garment beside her until his master came home. Then she spoke to him with these words, The Hebrew slave, whom you brought to us, came in to me to make sport of me; and it happened as I raised my voice and screamed, that he left his garment beside me and fled outside. Now it came about when his master heard the words of his wife, which she spoke to him saying, This is what your slave did to me, that his anger burned. So Joseph's master took him and put him into the jail, the place where the king's prisoners were confined; and he was there in the jail. But the Lord was with Joseph" (I read into verse 21).

Well, we may wonder why if God was with Joseph, that He permitted all this evil to come upon him. Why didn't He deliver him from evil? It's a mistaken idea we have, my friend, that when we believe and serve God with all our heart and mind and being, that God will remove all the obstacles, smooth out all the bumps in the road and make our way easy. You see, character is refined in the furnace of trial. That's the reason in the Bible we read, "Consider it all joy my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance" (Jas. 1:2). You see, God is preparing Joseph for a great work, that Joseph knows nothing about at the time. And, when you and I serve God faithfully, and God sees we are good stewards even in the times of trial --seasons of proving --He moves us into places of greater responsibility.

Well, I don't have time to detail the whole story, but by the providence of God Joseph is made governor (we might call him Prime Minister) of Egypt --second only to Pharaoh. Actually he ran the

government. The Pharaoh had found a man of integrity, with whom he could trust all the functions of his government. "Trust," oh that word "trust" is such an important word. It's one of the essential building blocks of good character. Character is more important --oh, much more important than talent. You may find an unusually talented person, but you can't trust him --or her --out your sight. I guess if for comparison, we were looking for an antithesis to good character, we'd find it in Proverbs 6:16-19. There the Bible says, "There are six things which the Lord hates, Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, And hands that shed innocent blood, A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that run rapidly to evil, A false witness who utters lies, And one who spreads strife among brothers." Well, you won't do much with your life if you're running with a crowd like that.

Through all that terrible experience with his brothers, through that ugly episode with Potiphar's wife, and through a very, very discouraging and disappointing experience in the prison, which we didn't have the time to discuss today, Joseph proved himself to be a genuine person --a man of integrity. He is certainly worthy of emulation. He's great role model for our youth. They need to know about Joseph. The Holy Scripture says, "The integrity of the upright will guide them, But the falseness of the treacherous will destroy them" (Prov. 11:3). Surely you see the truthfulness of that verse in the life of Joseph and those jealous brothers.

I keep saying it because it's true, the Lord's way is the best way to live we've ever known. I invite you, I encourage you, I exhort you my friend, to live life the Lord's way. Begin at once by becoming a Christian. Put your faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, turn from your sins in repentance, be immersed into Christ and His death, and being buried with him, rise to walk in newness of life.

Oh, there's something else I must tell you about Joseph. You remember, I mentioned those dreams he had about his brothers and parents bowing down to him. Well, they came true. There came a terrible drought "in all the earth" the Bible says in Genesis 41:53-57, and only in Egypt was there food. (That, by the way, was due to the wisdom which God had given Joseph, and he had prepared Egypt for it.) Well, Jacob (Israel) sent his sons, Joseph's brothers, to Egypt to buy food. And yes, there they bowed themselves before Joseph, just as in the dreams. Of course, they didn't recognize him for awhile --not until Joseph made himself known. That's a fascinating story; you ought to read it before you go to bed tonight. It's in Genesis, chapters 42 to 50. Eventually, the whole family came to Egypt and settled there. They numbered seventy people when they came. With the approval of Pharaoh, Joseph settled them in an excellent area and they prospered and multiplied. Israel died there and the Egyptians wept for him seventy days, and a great company of them went to his burial in the land of Canaan.

"When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, What if Joseph should bear a grudge against us and pay us back in full for all the wrong which we did to him! So, they sent a message to Joseph, saying Your father charged before he died, saying, Thus you shall say to Joseph, Please forgive, I beg you, the transgression of your brothers and their sin, for they did you wrong" (Gen. 50:15-17). These guys haven't learned much yet, have they? Their father hadn't said that at all. And they still were not big enough to come with an apology, themselves; they dreamed up one which was supposed to be from their deceased father. But Joseph was a man of integrity. The Bible says he wept when they came with this tale and said, "Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive. So therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones.

So he comforted them and spoke kindly to them" (Gen. 50:17-21). You see now, don't you, why I chose Joseph as the man of integrity for this series of messages about character?

"MOSES - THE MAN OF MEEKNESS"

Heb. 11:23-28

The subject of our study today is Moses, one of the principal characters --perhaps the principal character-- of the Old Testament. The reason we choose Moses for a lesson about character, is his meekness --or humility. The Bible says of him, "Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth." That's the King James Version. The New King James says, "Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth." The New American Standard Version says, "humble" also (Exodus 12:3).

In his Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, W. E. Vine says of this word which is translated "meek" and "humble," "The meaning...is not readily expressed in English, for the terms meekness, mildness, commonly used, suggest weakness..., whereas [the original word] does nothing of the kind...The common assumption is that when a man is meek it is because he cannot help himself; but the Lord was 'meek' because he had the infinite resources of God at His command. Described negatively," Vine says, "meekness is the opposite to self-assertiveness and self-interest; it is equanimity of spirit that is neither elated nor cast down, simply because it is not occupied with self at all." So, perhaps the best way to define this quality of good character which Moses exemplifies, is to say it's the opposite of self-centeredness. Then, we're talking about the virtue of neither thinking little or great of one's self, but simply not thinking of self at all in the situation at hand.

There's the old proverb that says, "Truly great men, seldom know they are great." It's true. I went to hear a retired elected government official speak one time. He was a person of humble beginnings who rose to very high position in our government. He came near to being President of the United States. He was telling about all the great people it had been his privilege to know. He knew Winston Churchill personally. We're almost envious of him for that, aren't we. He had dined with the Queen of England. He was a close friend of President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry Truman, and -- oh, there were others, several others. The audience was with him all the way. He had everyone hanging on every word --until he said, "I have learned that there is one thing all of us great people have in common." And with that the audience collapsed, totally disintegrated. He was never able to recover. If his life depended on it, I don't think there was a person present who could have told you what that one thing was that they all had in common. That's how suddenly they left him and were ready to go home. Another proverb says, "A person all wrapped up in himself, makes a very small package." Oh yes, character is important; it's more important than what we've done. Zig Ziglar says, "I challenge you to show me one happy self-centered person."

The Scriptures say, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others" (Philippians 2:3-4). And again in Colossians 3:12-13 the Holy Spirit says, "As those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you." The Lord pronounced a blessing on the meek. Do you remember what it was" It's in His great sermon on the mount in Matthew 5:5: "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth."

Moses was a great man because of his meekness. Just as Jesus is in the New Testament, Moses is in the Old Testament, prophet, lawgiver and savior --or deliverer. So great was he that he was one of only two people who were transfigured with Jesus on the mount that day as we read in Matthew 17.

The other, of course, was Elijah. Moses was a man of character; not entirely because of what he did, because he made some grievous mistakes for which he paid dearly, but because he was humble before God. Micah, the Old Testament prophet says, "He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you But to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8).

Moses was born in Egypt in very difficult days for the Hebrew people. They had grown from that seventy people that went down into Egypt in Joseph's day to a vast number. Exodus 1:7 says, "The sons of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly and multiplied, and became exceedingly mighty (numerous), so that the land was filled with them." And a new king arose over Egypt, who didn't know Joseph. Furthermore, he was afraid that since the family of Israel had become so numerous, they might sometime join with an enemy and overthrow Egypt. He made it hard for them. He enslaved them. He even tried to limit their increase by having all the boy babies killed at birth --some were cast into the Nile River.

It was in these days and under these circumstance that Moses was born. When his mother saw he was a goodly child, she hid him for three months, and when she could no longer hide him, she put him in basket covered with pitch and hid him --placed him in the bulrushes where the king's daughter came to bathe. The plan worked and Moses was taken into the king's palace to be reared as the "son of Pharaoh's daughter." Moses was a man of destiny. God needed a man who would lead the children of Israel out of that Egyptian slavery into the land He had promised to their forefathers. Moses was that man.

You notice that in Hebrews 11, from which we read awhile ago, what is sometimes called "God's Hall of Fame," Moses is not remembered for the great deeds done as the king's grandson, or even as the man who did all those miracles in Egypt, or the one who lead the Israelites in that miraculous crossing of the Red Sea, or the one who received the law written on tables of stone by the finger of God and delivered them to the people. He is remembered for the choices he made. And it is character, my friend, that decides our choices.

Being reared in the king's palace as the king's grandson, Moses had every advantage possible in his day. You see Egypt was the world's greatest super-power of that day. Look where that thrust Moses. He had social prestige. He was the king's grandson. He had wealth and all the opportunity and power that goes with it. In those days Egypt was the bread-basket of the world. Ships from every nation came with their money to buy grain produced in the fertile valley irrigated by the Nile River. He had all the advantages of education and training as the king's grandson.

Verse 24 of that passage we read from Hebrews 11 awhile ago says, "...Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter." Hey, he turned it all down! What's the matter with this guy?, the world asks. Or maybe he chose something better? But how can it get any better than that? The next verse says he chose rather --"to endure ill-treatment with the people of God (that bunch of slaves), than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin; --considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; --for he was looking to the reward."

The quality of character that made him great --his meekness, as we defined it earlier --is clearly visible in his courageous decision. He wasn't thinking about himself and his personal gains or losses. What concerned him most was the bitter, agonizing slavery of his own people to the most advanced nation in the world at that time. Someone of a different character might have reasoned that he could do more by working within the system and he would not have suffered such personal loss.

But you see, to a person with character, personal interest and advantage take back seat to the interests of others. And, had he chosen the way that served his personal interest better, he could never have had the experience with God at the burning bush. He could never have enjoyed the forty days with God atop Mount Sinai and heard Him speak with such force and power as to shake the earth. He could never have written the first five books of the Bible, which enlighten the world to this day about the origin of the universe, the beginnings of life, the origin of the human race, and of the coming Savior (Deut. 18:15). These are the rewards, mind you, not the aims, goals or aspirations he had when he made the choice. He chose the difficult task of delivering a very ungrateful, grumbling, complaining company of people out of bondage and leading them to the promised land, and the Lord rewarded him.

And there's something we haven't mentioned yet --it's the reward of eternal life. Yes, Moses still lives. Oh, he'd been dead about fifteen hundred years, when he appeared alive with Elijah and Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration in Matthew 17, and I have no reason at all to believe he has ceased to live on to this day.

Well, from Moses we learn that it's character that determines the choices we make in life. At times all of us, just like Moses did, stand as it were at the fork in the road. We must go to the left or to the right or just sit there till we die. It's what we are, not our talent or education or position, that's the determining influence on the choices we make. How is it with you today, my friend? Have you chosen yet to cast your lot with God and with Christ and with their people, the church? Do you choose heaven or hell today, or are you just sitting there till you die? Oh, I hope I'm speaking to an honest and good heart who will take advantage of the opportunity to repent and be baptized into Jesus Christ today. If we may assist you, please do give us the opportunity, will you?

Well, it isn't meekness or humility alone we learn from Moses; we learn responsibility, too. There are things that some people do, not because they're politically correct or popular, or because they're self-promoting, but simply because a decent, self-respecting person would be compelled from within to do them. There's no doubt Moses felt a responsibility --and a loyalty --to his own people and what they stood for. Despite the fact that he was reared in Pharaoh's house, Jochebed, his mother, when she hid him in the bulrushes that day, had already made arrangements to be his nurse and tutor. Read about it in Exodus two. So, Moses was familiar with the history of his people. He knew all about and believed in those promises God made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob about a land of their own, and their being the progenitors of the One in whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed. That's why he made the choices he did. That's character; it's doing things with no thought of one's self, or the cost to himself, but because it's the only decent and responsible thing to do. "Decency," oh dear, that's an antiquated, old-fashioned, out-dated word. What a shame! Decency: let's reactivate that word; it's a good word and conveys an invaluable concept --one our society needs very desperately.

Margaret Thatcher, the distinguished former Prime Minister of Great Britain, once said, "There is little hope for our countries if the hearts of men and women in democratic societies cannot be touched with a call to something greater than themselves." She's right, absolutely right. Meekness, as we've seen it demonstrated in the life of Moses, humility before God that leads to right choices, responsibility, loyalty --these are vital building blocks of good character. What has happened to them? Why are they no longer respectable traits?

"BARNABAS THE GOOD MAN"
Acts 11:19-26

We've said "character" is not a gift, it's something we're taught --which we learn. So, let's see what we can learn from the Bible today about character. Our lesson will be drawn from a New Testament person named Barnabas, whom God called "a good man." What an honor: to be called of God, "a good man." I think I'm correct in this: There are only two people in all the Bible of whom the Lord says, "He was a good man." Barnabas is one and Joseph of Arimathaea, a rich man, who went to Pilate and begged the body of Jesus to bury in it the tomb he had prepared for his own burial, is the other (Luke 23:50-53).

Well, if I'm right and I'm sure I am, it's obvious that God uses that designation very carefully and sparingly. Therefore, it's extraordinarily meaningful. And, it may have already come to you that this honorable appellation was not Divinely conferred on one of the better-known personalities of the Bible, but one who is there, though not so prominently. His name is mentioned in the Bible only 29 times as compared to Paul's 156 times, Peter's 158 times, Moses' 848 times and David's 1,085 times. So, it was not said of him that "he was a good man" for the prominent place he occupied in biblical history, but for what he was. Again I say, what an honor! When the time comes for my children to lay my body to rest in the grave beside Golda, I hope if they can't say anything more, they can truthfully say, "He was a good man." I'll consider that the greatest honor they can confer on me. Only God could do better, if on judgment day, He might say the same. Of course, that depends more on me than on them, doesn't it?

Oh, I know not everybody feels that way about it, and that many would prefer to be remembered for their great achievements --their "performance" --yeah, that's the buzz-word nowadays, performance --in science or technology or government, or education or medicine or business or industry. And they'd like that to be their legacy. That isn't to say that good people aren't achievers. Barnabas was, but that isn't why he was called of God "a good man." Genius and greatness may be beyond our reach. Most of us can never scale those heights. They are to a large measure, gifts. But any of us can be "good;" we can learn that. It's what we call "character." "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand." So says Psalm 37:23-24.

In recent years "goodness" has become sort of like the man on the Jericho Road of whom Jesus spoke, who had been beaten and robbed and left for dead. Somebody needs to come along and revive "goodness" to respectability. Something is badly wrong with a society that scorns the good and rewards evil! Micah, one of God's prophets in a period of Old Testament history when the nation of Israel had come to about the same moral, ethical and religious condition we have today, said, "The good man is perished out of the earth: and there is none upright among men: they all lie in wait for blood; they hunt every man his brother with a net. That's Micah 7:2. It aptly describes our wanton culture, and it's by our own choice.

But, why would God call Barnabas "a good man?" Let's see; perhaps we can learn from him how to be a person of good character. We're first introduced to him in the fourth chapter of the book of Acts. The church was begun in the second chapter and twice in that chapter it is said that people were added to it. First, in verse 41, there were the three thousand who heard Peter preach, then verse 47 tells us that "The Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved." We also learn from chapter four, verse four that their number continued to increase so that their were five

thousand men in the church (besides the women and youth). Although Barnabas isn't mentioned by name until in the last paragraph of that chapter, he was one of them.

The dynamic beginning and rapid spread of Christianity among the people in Jerusalem caused some problems. You see the Jewish leaders had already decreed that if any of the people confessed that Jesus was Christ, they would be cast out of the synagogue (John 9:22). That meant total isolation from the community. Those who had become Jesus' disciples would be without jobs or business; they'd be cut off from the source of livelihood for themselves and their families. And literally thousands of other Jews were in the city for Pentecost, some of whom were converted to Christ, who remained there permanently, with no source of income. They needed financial assistance and it could come from only one source --those who shared their new-found faith.

"And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own; but all things were common property to them. And with great power the apostles were giving witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales, and lay them at the apostles' feet; and they would be distributed to each as any had need. And Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means, Son of Encouragement), and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles's feet" (Acts 4:32-37).

Let's not make the mistake that some people do, that of thinking that this was a form compulsory socialism; it was not. It was the kind of voluntary love and compassion and benevolence which Jesus had taught, --and still teaches in His word. It was not forcibly "taking from the haves and giving to the have nots," to establish equality. It was those who had, giving aid to those who needed help. And this Cyprian named Joseph, to whom, because of his character, the apostles had given the name Barnabas was among those who did so.

There are two things we learn about Barnabas from that passage, that may very well be why the Lord calls him "a good man." The first is the genuineness of his love for other people, especially those in need. The size of his gift is unimportant. The Bible teaches, "If the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what a man has, not according to what he does not have" (2 Cor. 8:12). What Barnabas had he gave to be used for distribution to the people who needed it. There are still people of his kind living today, ready to help the needy, though probably not as many as there ought to be.

The second possible reason God called Barnabas "a good man," is seen in the name the apostles gave him. "Barnabas" means "encourager." You mean encouraging people is a reflection of good character, like honesty and integrity and loyalty and all those? Yes, that's what I'm saying. There are lots of encouragers in the world; believe me, there are. Ninety-nine and nine-tenths percent of the mail we receive about this program is from encouragers. And we thank God for every person who takes the time to write an encouraging word. I wish it were possible for me to personally reply to every one of them. I feel like I'm being ungrateful because I can't.

The next time we read about Barnabas in the Scriptures is over in the ninth chapter of Acts. Saul of Tarsus, that violent persecutor of the Lord's people kept them in constant fear. He said later that he did many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And he said, "This is just what I did in Jerusalem." And not only did he lock up many of the saints in prison, but when they were being put to death he cast his vote against them. That's what he was doing when he was converted to Christ up in Damascus, Syria. And after his conversion, he began immediately to preach Jesus Christ in the Jewish

synagogues there. And just as immediately he became one of the persecuted. But he escaped from Damascus being lowered in a basket down through an opening in the wall and returned to Jerusalem.

When he arrived in Jerusalem, he tried to associate with the disciples whom he had been persecuting so severely, but they'd would have no part of it. Can you blame them? They were all afraid of him, not believing he had been converted. But, guess what: There was a man there who vouched for him. This man took Saul to the apostles and told them of Saul's conversion and urged his acceptance. Ohhh, he must have been a good man. Well yes, as a matter of fact he was; you see, he was the man of whom the Lord said, "He was a good man." It was Barnabas. But, somehow I get the feeling that none of us is surprised. Yes, Barnabas was an encourager when Saul really needed it.

I saw this little quip the other day which said, "Be gentle, everyone is carrying a load." It reminded me of Barnabas, --"a good man" --a gentle man. "Gentleness" is one of those qualities of character the Bible defines as "fruit of the Spirit" in Galatians 5:22-23.

The next time we read about Barnabas is in the eleventh chapter; that passage we read for our text today. Up until this time the gospel had been preached exclusively to the Jews. Oh yes, Peter had gone to Cornelius the Gentile, and he'd been converted. But the Gentiles as such had not heard the gospel until the events in Antioch described in our text in verses 19 and 20. And a large number of them believed and turned to the Lord. They were converted. Well, the good news reached the church in Jerusalem. When the news of the conversion of the Samaritans came to the ears of the Jerusalem church, they sent two apostles, Peter and John to lay hands on those people and convey upon them miraculous powers (Acts 8:1-24). But this time, when they heard of the conversion of these Gentiles, they sent Barnabas and the Scripture says, "When he had come and witnessed [seen KJV] the grace of God, he rejoiced [was glad, KJV] and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord; for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith. And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord." Yes, Barnabas was "full of the Holy Spirit." He was a good man because he was spiritual. Being "full of the Holy Spirit" or being "filled with the Spirit," didn't mean in those days, what it is believed to mean today. It meant that he was a deeply spiritual man. His focus in life was not on the carnal, material things of life, but constantly and fervently on the things of the Spirit.

And He was full of faith --a man of faith. He believed in the Lord --enough to give his land to His cause. He believed in Saul enough to encourage him and recommend him to the apostles. Later he showed he believed in John Mark enough to stand by him, when even the apostle Paul didn't. We're grateful for people like Barnabas the encourager and thank God for them. Let us pray.

Good character is not a gift; it is taught --and learned. It's built by carefully assembling such virtues as honesty, integrity, truthfulness, trustworthiness, and the qualities we've seen today in the life of one of God's "good men." It's a matter of education.

We put a lot of emphasis on education in these last years of the twentieth century. A good education is an absolute essential to making it in today's world. But, it is not a good education that doesn't teach the principles of good character, such things as honesty, self-discipline, respect for the personal and property rights of others, respect for authority, loyalty, duty, hard work, and you can add more, much more. It is a matter of legitimate concern that Johnny can't read, but it is a matter of greater concern that Johnny doesn't know right from wrong in the simplest matters. Metal detectors on the entrances to our school houses are a sad, sad commentary on our educational system, but even worse on our society. They are not the solution to guns and knives and shootings and killings in our schools. We must develop better character in our children; that's the key that fits that lock. Yes, character education is supposed to begin in the home, that isn't being denied, but the school can't

remain neutral on character. It's impossible. If it isn't teaching good character, it's teaching bad character. And, I'm terribly afraid too much of the modern church's youth educational program is amusement instead of instruction in the word of God. I hope I'm wrong about that, but the evidence seems to support me.

"ELIJAH - A MAN OF COURAGE"
I Kings 18:20-24

Despite the fact that his name is not even to be found in what is sometimes called "God's Hall of Fame" (Hebrews 11), Elijah is one of the greatest prophets, perhaps the greatest prophet of the Old Testament era. Of all them, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah --oh, all the others, only Elijah was blessed with an appearance with the Lord on the Mount of Transfiguration in Matthew 17:1-8. And when Jesus' earthly ministry was drawing swiftly to a close, He came with His disciples into the area of Caesarea Philippi and there asked them, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" They answered, "Some say John the Baptist; others Elijah; but still others Jeremiah, or one of the prophets" (Matt. 16:13-20). It's interesting, Elijah shared enough of the character of Jesus, that some people mistook Jesus for Elijah returned in the flesh. Of course, Malachi had prophesied that Elijah would make an appearance before the great and dreadful day of the Lord (Mal. 4:5), and they were familiar with that prophecy. However Jesus explained that Elijah had fulfilled it, and had come already, and the people had failed to recognize him (Matt. 17:9-13). "Then the disciples understood that He had spoken to them about John the Baptist." So, there were enough similarities in the characters of Elijah and John the Baptist that even the Holy Spirit drew a comparison. Jesus said, "Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist" (Matthew 11:11), and he is the one who had come in the spirit and the power of Elijah to prepare the way of the Lord (Luke 1:17).

Elijah was an oral prophet. I mean he never wrote a book like Isaiah or Jeremiah or the others, but he spoke or preached the word of God truthfully and powerfully, even at great personal suffering and cost. So, as we'll see in a moment, he was an unusually courageous person. He is a superb example of that virtue; that's why we're studying him today. Furthermore, it's interesting to me that when the people were trying to identify Jesus, they mistook Him for Elijah or John the Baptist or Jeremiah, all of whom are recognized for their unusual courage for upholding God's word and will under severest persecution. If anyone thinks Jesus appeared to the people of His day to be a weak-kneed Mr. Milk Toast kind of fellow, let him consider this: that the people who knew Him personally, saw in Him the boldness and the courage they recognized in Elijah, Jeremiah and John the Baptist.

Elijah made his appearance in the Scripture during a very difficult period in the history of the Northern Kingdom. Ahab was king. He was the seventh king of Israel and the Scripture says of him that he reigned twenty-two years and "did evil in the sight of the Lord more than all who were before him. And it came about, as though it had been a trivial thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he married Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went to serve Baal and worshiped him." He even "erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he built in Samaria. And Ahab also made the Asherah (a wooden symbol of a female god --an idol). Thus Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel than all the kings of Israel who were before him" (I Kings 16:29-33). That says a lot because they had had some very wicked kings who had done some very evil things. And old Jeroboam was the granddaddy of all of it. Jeroboam is best known in Scripture as the king "who made Israel to sin." That was his legacy. Ahab is known for evil in his own rights, and the Scripture we read said, as if he considered all that trivial, he up and married that wicked woman --that woman whose very name, Jezebel, has come to mean "wicked woman." A lot of baby girls are named Bible names; Ruth for example, or Naomi or Anna or as my grandmother Jerusha, but you haven't seen many little babies named Jezebel lately, have you? And, if there was any evil old Ahab couldn't think of, Jezebel could, and they did it. It's been said that Ahab became a puppet in her hands.

Well, like leader like people. There are no specific sins mentioned, except the idolatry. We may think a nation's worship is not a major or basic concern to its preservation. But the honest-to-goodness truth of the matter is that the prevention or the perversion of a people's worship is a matter of first priority with God, and has more to do with the deterioration of national character than any other --or any combination of other factors. The first of the Ten Commandments which God gave to Israel was, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." And they'd broken it.

Now in I Kings 17:1 enters Elijah. This is the first time we've heard of him. The religious and moral condition of his country is more than he can bear, and he says to King Ahab, "As the Lord, the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, surely there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word." And when he said that God said to him, "You better get out of here and --go --and hide in the woods. I'll send the ravens to feed you, but you'd better get gone." (That's my paraphrase, of course; you can read it in I Kings 17.) And, Elijah obeyed.

Three years pass and it has not rained. I Kings 18:2 says, "The famine was severe in Samaria." Jezebel (co-king) has had all of God's prophets killed --all she could find --hundreds of them --and there was no nation or kingdom on earth where she and Ahab had not searched for Elijah --to kill him. Finally, at God's command Elijah went to meet Ahab! What courage! And Ahab said, "Is this you, you troubler of Israel? And he said, I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father's house, because you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and you have followed the Baals," and he challenged Ahab and Jezebel and 850 of their prophets of Baal and Asherah to a meeting on Mount Carmel. If you think this is an ecumenical council, he's calling; if you think he's going to smoke the peace-pipe with them; if you think they're going to bury the hatchet; if you think he's going to propose a merger of their two groups on a compromise, Oh, you are mistaken, my friend! This is not a "fellowship," they're going to! You can be on a program with false prophets and not be in "fellowship" with them. Elijah demonstrated that.

Well the day arrived. Ahab had sent a message out to all of Israel and there was a crowd that gathered. And what I read you awhile ago was Elijah's proposal to which all the people said, "That is a good idea." Now I'll read you what happened.

"So Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, Choose one ox for yourselves and prepare it first for you are many, and call on the name of your god, but put no fire under it. Then they took the ox which was given them and they prepared it and called on the name of Baal from morning until noon saying, O Baal, answer us. But there was no voice and no one answered. And they leaped about the altar which they made. And it came about at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, Call out with a loud voice, for he is a god; either he is occupied or gone aside, or is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and needs to be awakened. So they cried with a loud voice and cut themselves according to their custom with swords and lances until the blood gushed out on them. And it came about when midday was past, that they raved until the time of the evening sacrifice; but there was no voice, no one answered and, and no one paid attention.

Then Elijah said to all the people, Come near to me. So all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the Lord which had been torn down. And Elijah took twelve stones according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord had come, saying Israel shall be your name. So with the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord, and he made a trench around the altar, large enough to hold two measures of seed. Then he arranged the wood and cut the ox in pieces and laid it on the wood. And he said fill four pitchers with water and pour it on the burnt offering and on the wood. And he said Do it a second time, and they did it a second time. And he said,

Do it a third time, and they did it a third time. And the water flowed around the altar, and he also filled the trench with water. Then it came about at the time of the evening sacrifice that Elijah the prophet came near and said, O Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, today let it be known that Thou art God in Israel, and that I am Thy servant, and that I have done all these things at Thy word. Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that Thou, O Lord, art God, and that Thou has turned their heart back again. Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, The Lord, He is God; the Lord, He is God." I read from verse 25 to verse 40.

After that, Elijah said to Ahab, "Go up, eat and drink; for there is the sound of the roar of a heavy shower." It's going to rain! While Ahab was eating, Elijah was praying and the rains came! Well, Ahab told his wife what Elijah had done, that he had killed all her prophets, and she was mad! So God told Elijah he had better head for the hills again, and Elijah fled to Beersheba.

Elijah was the kind of person who puts what is right ahead of his own interest or even his personal safety. Courage is not action in the absence of fear, but it is what makes a person resist the wrong and uphold the right in the most threatening and fearful situations. So much preaching nowadays says if you "accept Jesus," the Holy Spirit will come into your life and make life easy for you. He'll make you rich and health and smooth out all the bumps so life will be smooth and simple. That's one reason Christianity is taking such a beating in our secular society. Too many professed Christians are not prepared for a confrontation with the Ahab's of the world, but tolerance and understanding of him and Jezebel and their false prophets. God doesn't promise His disciple a bed of roses, an easy life. Someone must take a stand for right and righteousness and when he does, he need not think the devil will simply lie down and roll over for him. Thank God for the Elijahs.

The hallmark of good character is acknowledgment of God for who He is and not for what He can do for us. Civilizations before us have tried it, but none has ever developed a national character for survival apart from recognition of God. Moral and spiritual truth have their origin in God, and can not prevail in His absence. Without a recognition of God there is no possible way of establishing truth and right, consequently everyone does what is right in his own eyes, and in his best interest. It's true with a person too, but when a nation decides to put God out of its life, the choice is not a vacuum, but the entrance of Jezebel's Baal. That is what happened in America when as a matter of national policy it was determined we should become a secular society --meaning a society without God. It was then that our national character turned bad and has become simply chaos. Elijah's challenge is appropriate for us, too: "How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." The choice is ours to make.

What will you do, my friend? Are you a Christian? Will give God His place in your life? We've all sinned, but we can all be reconciled to God and enjoy peace with Him by faith in Jesus Christ. That's what the Bible story is all about from the beginning of Genesis to the very end of Revelation. Oh, others have tried to spin fantasies about other meanings, but you can read it for yourself. I'm encouraging you to come to Jesus today. Romans 10:9 says "that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved." In Romans 14:11, "(I)t is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.) You can do it now and be saved, or you can wait until judgment day to do it and still be lost. The Lord also wants you to change from a sinful lifestyle to one of righteousness, and that is

called repentance. "God commands all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). He wants you to be baptized into the death of His Son, Jesus Christ and be washed in His blood (Rom. 6:3-4).

"PAUL -- A MAN OF CONVICTION"

In an attempt to restore discipline in the school room, Oklahoma's State Superintendent of Public Instruction is reported in the July 22, 1998 Daily Oklahoman to have said, "We can't assume that students believe you shouldn't kill people, you shouldn't steal or cheat, you should honor your parents and respect the laws of the land." She is right about that. It's assuming too much. There was a time when you could assume those things, but in our present environment of moral relativism, you can't. The newspaper said she "even held up the Bible as a standard for morality." Well, maybe dawn is breaking in some areas.

With the breakdown of the family and lack of moral leadership there; with the quashing of all references to God and the Bible in public education for more than a quarter of a century, and with the persistent pounding away at our boys and girls that nothing is absolutely and always right or wrong, how could they know they shouldn't kill people, steal or cheat, and how could they know they should honor their parents? Is it any wonder that it's impossible to maintain discipline in the public schools -- or order in any other public place?

Character is not a gift, it's taught --and learned, bit by bit. While we're educating our children to be successfully productive in life, we need to be teaching them the principles of good character, too, because character is more important to their well-being than their skills and how to use them. The famous "Unibomber" was said to have been keenly skilled and highly educated in the use of his skills, but apparently he was bankrupt behaviorally. The behavior of human beings cannot be controlled by legislating and enforcing more and more laws. That's the way we're trying to manage our society of violence and fear; we keep enacting more laws, hiring more police and building more prisons; and all the while we're building a police state which none of us really wants. Well, if not that way, then how? The answer is simple: people must be controlled from within --self-controlled. They must want to do the right and shun the wrong. That's character. That requires knowledge of right and wrong. And that in turn demands recognition of right and wrong. Specifically it's what is sometimes called "conviction." I know conviction is as out-dated as the Mom & Pop Corner Grocery, which when you entered they called you by name. It's a relic of a by-gone civilization, but it needs to be and it must be revived. People of conviction are a rare breed.

The apostle Paul is one of finest examples of conviction there is to be found anywhere. We're introduced to him as "Saul" a man from Tarsus in the last paragraph of the seventh chapter of the book of Acts in the New Testament. When we first meet him, he is involved in the stoning to death of Stephen, the first person we know of to be killed for his faith in Christ. The next chapter (chapter 8) opens by saying, "Some devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him. But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house; and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison." And the first words of the ninth chapter say, "Now Saul, still breathing out threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem."

Saul was Jewish, educated in Jewish law, and zealous, Oh so very zealous toward God. He knew about Jesus' ministry, His preaching and miracles, but he didn't believe Jesus was the Messiah who was promised in Old Testament Scriptures. He was convinced Jesus was an imposter and a deceiver. He knew he had been crucified like an uncommonly vicious criminal, but he didn't believe in Jesus as Savior. He was well acquainted with the preaching of the apostles that Jesus was raised from the dead

--resurrected, and seated at the right hand of God in Heaven. But Saul, fully convinced that that kind of teaching was the rankest kind of heresy, was determined with all that in him was, to put a stop to it. You sometimes hear the church today called a "sect (or a cult) everywhere spoken against." Well, that's nothing new; Saul believed that too, many centuries ago, and so did others (Acts 28:22). He was a man of very strong convictions!

Enroute to Damascus to persecute the church further, as he was approaching the city, almost there as a matter of fact, "suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; and he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? And he said, Who art Thou, Lord? And He said, I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, but rise, and enter the city, and it shall be told you what you must do...And Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; and leading him by the hand, they brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank. Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, here am I Lord. And the Lord said to him, Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him, so that he might regain his sight."

Well, after some persuasion Ananias came to Saul. He told him of the conversation he had had with the Lord, and said, "Why do you delay? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name" (the name of the Lord). Saul arose and was baptized immediately, and just as immediately, and just as vigorously as he had once denied and persecuted Jesus, he began preaching Him in the synagogues of the Jews that he was Christ and that He had been raised from the dead. Here is a good and honest hearted person, who, when he learned he was mistaken about his faith and convictions, turned at once to preach what he had before denied. "Conviction" is being convinced.

Saul confessed, "I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And this is just what I did" (Acts 26-8-9). Still, on another occasion he said, "Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day" (Acts 23:1). His life was controlled by an honest heart. That's what it was; he believed and acted on his faith. He was mistaken, but he was honest about it, and honest enough that when he learned better he reversed himself. He turned a hundred eighty degrees. So, you see it was conviction, not prejudice or preconception or bias or bigotry or intolerance. There's a difference between conviction and all that stuff. Those are factors that guide people of low character. A prejudiced, bigoted or intolerant soul won't turn even when he's smothered with evidence of his error.

If you've read the story of Saul's or Paul's conversion and always thought the Lord appeared to him on the Damascus road to save him, you've been mistaken. In relating the event to King Agrippa who was hearing the charges the Jews had brought against him, Paul says the Lord said to him, "Arise and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness..." to the gentiles. God needed a man on whom He could depend, --that's it --a dependable person --to be His apostle to the Gentile nations of the world. He would have to be one of conviction. Saul was that kind of person alright. And he gave his life to that ministry.

He said, "I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish...For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:14-16). He said, "If I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel" (I Cor. 9:16). He said, "I was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher. For this reason I also suffer

these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day" (II Tim. 1:11-12).

He once said, "I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, in order that I may finish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of grace of God" (Acts 20:22-24). At the end he wrote his young friend Timothy, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished he course, I have kept the faith" (II Tim. 1:7). A man of deep conviction.

The word today is not "conviction," but "tolerance." Tolerance sounds like a good word. But it is not a biblical word. It isn't found at all in the "Authorized Version" of the Bible. (You may be able to find it in some modern version somewhere, because, as I said, it's the word of the day and surely someone has managed to get into a version somewhere.) Now the words "forbear," "forbearing," "forbearance" are all Bible words --good words, but they're not equivalent --they're not synonyms for "tolerance." To tolerate is to accept, allow, condone or countenance. But, according to Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, "forbear" as found in Ephesians 4:2 for example, "forbearing one another in love" means to "hold up" or be "supportive" of one another in love. That's the idea, too, in Galatians 6:2: "Bear one another's burden's and so fulfill the law of Christ." Christians are to be supportive of one another despite mistakes, but they're never instructed by the Holy Spirit to be tolerant of evil --that is --to accept, allow, condone or countenance evil. The entire fifth chapter of I Corinthians is a stern rebuke to a church for tolerating the ugly sin of incest among church members. And I Thessalonians 5:21 says, "Examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form [appearance] of evil." And 1 Peter 3:10 says, "He that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: Let him eschew [turn away from] evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue [pursue] it."

I mention all that because tolerance is really the antithesis of conviction. It's the devil's cure for your convictions. A few generous injections of tolerance at your "sensitivity training clinic" will surely cure you of any convictions you have about anything. Tolerance has a good sound; it just sounds like something every body just oughta do. That's the reason it's the politically correct word of this generation. But, it isn't a mark of character. To believe something so strongly, you'd defend it, even if it means suffering mental, emotional or physical abuse for it, that's the quality of character that's called conviction and that's what the apostle Paul exemplifies to us. It's high standards, standing firmly for honesty, integrity, dependability, truthfulness, chastity or purity, faithfulness, and other such values. It's the Lord's way to live and it's the best way mankind has ever known for living with one another in peace and tranquility. It's what Jesus called a light shining in darkness (Matt. 5:14-16).

My friend, are you a Christian with Christian convictions. I implore you to consider Christ and His way for your life now. Perhaps you should have done it a long time ago, but whatever the case that may be with you in that regard, today is the day of your salvation, now is the preferred time. You can't recall the wasted years living in the folly of sin, but you can redeem the time by living for Christ the rest of the way --however short or long that may be. Only He knows. So, I ask you to confess Christ today, turn your life around in repentance and be baptized into Jesus now --today. We'd love to assist you if we can. Let us hear from you, will you? Let us pray.

In my short study of character with you these five Sundays or weeks in July, it's been impossible to say all I've wanted to say, or study all the Bible characters I wanted to study. I would like to do another such series in which we would examine the lives of some women of character found in the

Scriptures. I think I'll do that sometime. You can think of many, Ruth and Esther and Dorcas --and there were others like that woman in Mark 14 who anointed Jesus' head with a very costly ointment or perfume, whose name is not even mentioned, but of whom Jesus said, "She has done what she could." Some of you women might want to write me and nominate some female Bible characters who exemplify some quality you'd like to study. There are lots of them; I'd welcome your nominations. Let me hear from you.