

# faithful friends

FAVORITE STORIES  
OF PEOPLE IN THE BIBLE



MICHAEL & MARCY KELLEHER

 ZONDERkidz

**EDUCATOR GUIDE**



# A Brief Introduction



I wish I could take credit for the title of this book, but like every other page, it was very much a collaborative effort. (A special thank you to the wonderful creative team at Zonderkids!) In the months between when our book went to print and the actual release date, I have come to appreciate the title more and more. It is simple but rich in meaning: Faithful Friends. Even before you read a story, you are invited to reflect on two profound themes of the Bible: faithfulness and friendship.

- What does it mean to be faithful? What does it mean to have faith? What is faith?
- What is friendship? More importantly, what is friendship with God? What does it mean to have a relationship with God? To be a friend of God?

In the paragraphs that follow, I hazard my own answer, but I encourage you to wrestle with, think about, or as one of my former colleagues put "chew on" these questions with your family. I also provide a couple suggestions for you could use the book before you read any of the stories.

## ON FAITH

Faith is a tricky thing to talk about. You can't see it. It's like a feeling (sort of!) but more than just a feeling. Somewhere between an idea and an emotion, but even both of these words fall short. We find it alongside hope and love, the other theological virtues (1 Cor. 13:13), but faith is also its own thing. It has something to do with belief when you don't have proof. Jesus admonishes Thomas, "You believe because you see (i.e. you have proof), but happy are those who don't see and still believe!" (John 20:29). But it is also more than just belief. Faith does not really come alive until it's put into action. Or to put it conversely: faith without works is dead (Jam. 2:17).

I think it's best, then, not to spend too much time trying to define faith but rather to look at it. To see faith in action in all its many forms. After all, this is what the writer of Hebrews does near the end of the book. Chapter 11 starts with a definition of faith that prompts more questions than answers: "Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see." A confidence in something we hope for? A certainty about what we don't see? What does this mean? Instead of offering more specifics, the author immediately catalogues a litany of stories and examples from the Old Testament. Rather than talking about faith, it is put on display; faith in action. We get to read stories of people who were full of faith. Faithful friends.

As we read these stories, two things should happen to us. We both see how they believed but also begin to believe alongside them. The chapter in Hebrews following the catalogue of heroes begins with these words: "Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, [...] let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us" (Hebr. 12:1). In other words, since we have the example of these faithful friends, let us learn to be faithful friends ourselves.

By reading about the faith of Abraham, Moses, Esther, and all the rest, our own faith is energized, shot-through with a jolt of spiritual adrenaline. It's like when you down a cup of Gatorade in the middle of 10K. Remember that with the exception of Christ none of these men or women were

perfect. In fact, some of them made very bad choices, but God chose them anyway. Hopefully, what we will be able to see is that God wants to choose us as well and use as much He used them so we too can show His “mighty deeds” even in little ways and share His unfathomable love with others. Then the chain reaction continues. The faith, hope, and love of others will be energized, and God’s love is passed on from one person to the next like a baton in a relay race or light reflected in a mirror, and the community of God continues to grow and strengthen.

Speaking of the community of God, this brings us to the second theme.

## ON FRIENDSHIP

“There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother” (Prov. 18:24). Many of us have friends that feel as close to us as family. We love them. We spend time with them. We know them as well as we know ourselves. My daughter has a best friend who lives next door, and while I’ve never sat down to do the math, I’m quite confident she’s spent more hours of her life at our neighbors’ house than ours! In reading these stories, I hope you learn a little more about these men and women of faith, and by getting to know them better you become, in a way, friends.

The friendship being offered is not just horizontal (between people) but vertical (with God). *Philia* is the Greek word for friendship; it is also defined as a type of love. In church, we use a lot of different words to talk about our relationship with God: ‘communion,’ ‘relationship,’ ‘grace,’ ‘love,’ but I wonder if we might just as easily add to this list the common, every day, mundane word ‘friendship.’ “Can we be friends with God?” (Andrew Sullivan, *Love Undetectable*, p. 240). The stories in this book are stories of people who were faithful to God. But they weren’t just faithful, they also loved God. They desired, in a sense, friendship with God, which entails all the particularities of friendship: to be close to Him, to talk with Him, to know His will, to want to do His will, to want what He wants.

What’s even more amazing is that God invites us to be friends with Him. He is calling us to friendship. This is the heart of the Gospel message. The good news! “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). There you have in a single verse both friendship and faith. Love and belief. God reaches out in love, and invites us into friendship through the initiation and example of his Son, and all that He asks of us in return is that we believe. That we have faith.

In other words, that we become faithful friends!

## BEFORE YOU READ

### WHO’S WHO

Take a look at the front cover as well as the endpaper in the front and back of the book. The endpaper is the picture that attaches the rest of the book to the cover. You’ll find 14 different characters that will appear again later in the book. Try to guess who’s who before you read any of the stories. Then check to see if you’re right as you read along.

## **BIBLE VERSES**

As a teacher, I've observed that memorization is a skill less practiced than it used to be. I am very grateful to my parents for how much they made me memorize Scripture growing up. Summer church camps were spent learning lengthy passages from the Bible complete with hand motions. Each verse took root, grew, and blossomed just like the sower's seed in Christ's parable. Without a doubt, memorizing the Bible from a young age shaped my own life of faith.

As such, you'll a Bible verse at the beginning of each story. Each verse is supposed to encapsulate and express the central theme of the story. Perhaps, one of the best activities you can do with your children is to read, discuss, and memorize each verse. Think about what the verse means before you read the story. Think about it what it means after you finish. If you challenge your children to memorize every verse, you will be gifting them with a treasure trove "more precious than silver" that they can hold onto for the rest of their lives.

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# Old Testament

## ADAM AND EVE

You are made for love! Stop and think about that. God loves you. The Creator of the Universe, Almighty God loves you! This is an incredible thought! God made the universe, made you, and eventually became a human in order to show love and friendship. So that all of us could become friends with Him. Think of all the ways that you can see God's love for you. How many ways can you think of?



God also loves all of His creation. When we love something, it fills us with joy. Think of all the ways that God gets joy out of his creation. Do you find these things delightful too? How many different animals

can you think of? How many different birds? How about flowers? Or trees? Look at all the variety and differences in God's creation – and it is all so beautiful. As God says, "It is good! Very good!"

Look at the picture. How many different flowers do you see? They should remind you of the variety of God's creation.

Who else do you love? Who else loves you? How do you show love? Do you have a pet that you love? How do you show others that you care for them?

Digging Deeper: Can you find the animal hiding in the tall grass? (A snake) What is Eve holding in her hand? (An apple) Read (or have Mom or Dad) read to you the story of the snake and the fruit, which teaches us the about the importance of obeying God.

## ABEL AND CAIN

Do you have something that is one of your favorite things? A special toy? A pet? Would you be willing to give it away? If we are going to show God that we faithfully love him, then we may have to give up something that is very precious to us. This is the example of Abel.

What are other ways we can give something valuable to God? How can we give our time? (In church and prayer) How can we give our stuff? How can we give our talents and interests?

Since God calls all people to friendship, when we hurt others we are also hurting God. In the Parable of the Sheep and Goats, Jesus reminds us that how we treat others is how we treat Him (See Matt. 25:31-46). When Cain killed Abel, he also hurt his relationship with God, but he never repented; he never apologized. What should we do when we hurt others? What should we do when others hurt us?

When we hurt someone, the first thing we need to do is to say sorry and ask for forgiveness. This shows that we know we did something wrong and we want to make it better. But we also need to apologize to God, because we hurt Him as well.

## NOAH

Many people see the story of Noah as a story of judgement, because God condemns the world and punishes it with a flood. But it is also a story of salvation, of re-creation and reconciliation. Because God loves the world that He made, He makes a way for it (at least some of it) to be saved – even the animals.

Digging Deeper: During the Middle Ages, the main part of the church – where everyone sits – was called the "nave" from the Latin word, navis, which means "ship." Some churches were as big

as ships, and many people could fill the seats. But the church was also like a ship as it sails through the storms of life. The word "nave" comes from the story of Noah's ark. Every time you go to church, it's like you're getting on God's ship. You're agreeing to be rescued by God.

Let's talk about Noah's boat. What's the biggest boat you've ever seen? Or the tallest building? Modern scientists calculate Noah's ark was 144.6 meters long, 24.1 meters wide, and 14.46 meters tall. (By comparison, the Statue of Liberty is 92 meters.)

(There is an interesting article in Smithsonian Magazine online about Noah's ark, all the animals, and how it could have stayed afloat. ([https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/could-noahs-ark-float-theory-yes-180950385/#:~:text=However%2C%20the%20Bible%20is%20clear,\(%E2%80%9Cgopher%20wood%E2%80%9D\)\)](https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/could-noahs-ark-float-theory-yes-180950385/#:~:text=However%2C%20the%20Bible%20is%20clear,(%E2%80%9Cgopher%20wood%E2%80%9D))))

Look at the picture. Do you see the dove? What does it have in its beak? How do you think Noah and his family felt when they saw the branch? How excited do you think they were to get off the boat?

What do you think Noah's boat smelled like with all those animals? (Pee-ew!)

## ABRAHAM

Have you ever moved before? Maybe to a new house? A new city? A new state? Maybe even a new country? What's it like to leave behind everyone you know, your best friends, your neighbors, your favorite restaurants? Then you have to start all over in a strange, new land. That's what it was like for Abraham. At least he had his wife and family with him, and God had promised to watch over him.

Why do you think God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son? What story is that similar to? When else was someone asked to give up something very special? (Abel)

Look at the picture. What part of the story does the picture show? What do you think has just happened? What is about to happen?

Digging Deeper: Ur was one of the oldest cities in the world, inhabited by a people called the Sumerians. The Sumerians were the first civilization to invent writing. They wrote on clay tablets – nothing like the tablet you've probably used! – and used an alphabet called cuneiform, which looked a lot different than the letters we use. Abraham left that all behind to follow God.

Digging Deeper: God promised to make Abraham the "father of many nations." Today, three major religions consider Abraham one of their spiritual fathers: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. What's more, Christianity and Islam are the two most popular, widespread religions in the world. Abraham is indeed a father to many nations!

## SARAH

Look at the picture. What's Sarah holding? What do you think she's getting ready to do?

Have you ever had friends over to your house? What kind of things do you have to do to get ready? Now have you ever had friends come over and you didn't know they were coming? How did Mom and Dad feel about that? What if a complete stranger was coming to your house? What would you do to make them feel welcome?

Making others feel welcome, whether friend or stranger, this is what it means to be hospitable. The Bible tells us "to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it" (Heb. 13:2). Angel or not, every person is made in God's image and deserves to be treated with dignity, respect, and a hospitable heart.





## JACOB

Look at the picture. What kind of job do you think Jacob had based on the picture?

Are you ever a “grabber” around your house or at school? Have you ever grabbed something that didn’t belong to you? Maybe you grabbed something right out of someone else’s hands! A sibling or another student? How did they react? What did you have to do afterwards? What should you do if you take something from someone else without permission?

Why do you think Jacob was afraid of his brother, Esau? What do you think he was afraid he might do to him?

The rest of the story: The day after Jacob wrestled the stranger from God he reunited with his brother, Esau. It was the first time they had seen each other in twenty years, and Jacob was still afraid of him. But he quickly learned he had nothing to fear. The first thing Esau did as soon as he saw Jacob was run up to him, throw his arms around him, and give him a great, big hug!

## JOSEPH

Look at the picture. Does Joseph look like he’s dressed like a Hebrew shepherd (like Jacob, his father, or Abraham, his great-grandfather) or like an Egyptian prince? How long do you think it took him to get used to the new clothes, the new food, the new language, and everything else? Remember Joseph didn’t choose to go to Egypt. He was taken there by slave traders.

Sinful pride is when you think too much about yourself and your abilities; it often means disrespecting others. Sometimes people call it bragging or being cocky. Envy is when you’re not happy at other people’s success. When someone does well, but it makes you upset. At the beginning of the story, do you think Joseph’s brothers were envious of him? Or was Joseph bragging about his dreams and talents a little too much? (Or maybe it was a little bit of both.)

What special talents do you have? How can you use them to bless others and please God – instead of using them to embarrass others or feel like you’re better than everyone else?

How do you think Joseph’s brothers felt after he forgave them? Forgiveness is one of the most powerful acts of the Bible. So many Bible stories are about forgiveness, including the most important of all: Jesus’ act of forgiveness on the cross. How does Joseph’s story illustrate the power of forgiveness?

## MOSES

The story of Moses is a big story. A lot happens. Look at the picture. What do you see happening? What part of the story is this? See if you can tell as you read the story.

When God first called Moses to stand up to Pharaoh and lead His chosen people out of Egypt, Moses argued that he was not able to lead since he was not a good speaker. But God chose him anyway! Have you ever had a time when you felt like you were supposed to do something difficult, something you didn’t feel ready or able to do – but you were called to anyway? Maybe it was standing up to a bully (like Pharaoh!) or taking care of someone in need (like the Hebrews). God can call anyone of us at any time.

Have you ever seen something that made you stop in your tracks? The sun leaking through the clouds? A beautiful flower standing up brightly all by itself? The first snow of winter? These are little tastes of God’s holiness. “Mysteries too marvelous to be understood,” as poet Mary Oliver calls them. Any time you see something like that, just like Moses, stop and look. Take a breath. You are standing on holy ground. Give them your “rich lens of attention.” (Mary Oliver, “Mysteries, Yes”; “Entering the Kingdom”)

Why do you think God told Moses to take off shoes off? Why do you think God called Himself “I AM”? What do you think this name tells us about God and who God is?

Digging Deeper: You can learn more about the story of Moses by reading about the Ten Plagues or memorizing the Ten Commandments. You can even find a helpful activity using your fingers to learn all Ten Commandments.

## AARON

What's it like to help your sibling(s) even when you're not in charge? Do you agree with each other about everything? Or do you sometimes argue about the best way to do a chore? Or who has more chores to do? Or if something's not fair? Do you think Aaron and Moses ever argued with each other?



As high priest, Aaron's job was to help God's people remain holy. "Holy, holy, holy!" is what the angels sing, who dance around God's throne (Isa. 6:3; Rev. 4:8). The Bible even tells us to "be holy just as God is holy." So what does it mean to be holy? Often in the Bible, the holy things or people were whatever had been set apart for God, like the tabernacle, the temple, or the special room called the "holy of holies." To be holy is to be close to God. You might even say friendly with God. The first step of holiness is desiring friendship with God.

Look at the picture. Do you see Aaron's breastplate? It's decorated with twelve special stones to represent the twelve tribes of Israel. Do you see the Ark of the Covenant? It was special golden chest where the Israelites kept the Ten Commandments, Aaron's rod, and a jar of manna (special bread from God), all reminders of God's grace. What two figures perch on top of the ark? (angels or cherubim)

## MIRIAM

Look at the picture. Can you tell what Miriam

is doing? What does she have in her hand? As you read, think about which part of the story the picture is showing: beginning, middle, or end?

Why do you think Pharaoh was hunting for all the Hebrew baby boys? Why did he hate them? Or was he afraid of them? And if so, why?

I'll bet you have chores at your house, little ways that you can help Mom and Dad. Have you ever had to watch out for a younger sibling, a baby brother or sister? It's easy to get distracted when you're doing a chore, but it's important to do the job as best you can. How do you think Miriam felt as she was watching out for baby Moses? Do you think she ever got distracted? Do you think she ever felt afraid?

## JOSHUA

Look the picture. Do you see the Ark of the Covenant? In what other picture have you seen it before? (Aaron) Do you remember what's inside the ark, and what it represents? (Ten Commandments, Aaron's rod, a jar of manna; it represents that God is always with them)

Why do you think God tells Joshua to send the priests and the ark first? What does this show them? (That God is leading the way; that He will go in front of them to protect them)

The story says that Joshua was chosen because he was "faithful and brave". What made Joshua feel brave? Do you think it's easier to be brave when you also trust in God?

Think of all the ways that God has taken care of you and your family. What has He done for you? Do you know God even provided for you even before you were born? God was not just taking care of Joshua but all His people. Joshua reminds the Israelites of all the ways God has taken care of them at the end of the story.

Look at the picture again. Do you see the red ribbon in the window? Why do you think it's there? Let's find out in the next story.



## RAHAB

Look at the picture. What's Rahab holding in her left hand? What's it for? Find out in the story. Also, do you see the red ribbon in her other hand? If you haven't already, turn back a page and find it in the picture of Joshua. We'll see how important it is in Rahab's story.

Do you know what flax is? With your Mom or Dad's help, find a picture of flax online. Flax is a plant used to make linen, and linen is a type of fabric like cotton, wool, or silk. See if you have any linen cloths somewhere in your house.

Why do you think Rahab believed God instead of feeling afraid like the rest of Jericho?

Rahab and her family were saved because she showed kindness to the men. How can you show kindness to the people you meet at church, at school, or anywhere else? When we treat others with kindness, how do you think God will treat us?

## DEBORAH

Like much of history, many leaders and prophets in the Bible were men but not all. God chose several women to preach for Him, to prophesy, to lead others. Deborah is one of them. Her story shows that God can choose women or men alike to perform His mighty deeds.

Why do you think the people trusted Deborah? What kind of disputes do you think they asked her to judge?

Do you think it would be scary to face a chariot in battle? What made Deborah and Barak's plan to defeat the chariots so smart? Why do you think it worked?

Look at the picture. What is Deborah holding in her hand? What part of the story is this?

## GIDEON

The Bible describes the Midianites like a "swarm of locusts." (Jug. 6:5) Locusts are like grasshoppers.

So imagine a swarm of insects – bees, ants, gnats, cicadas! – taking over your whole neighborhood. That's what the Israelites felt like!

Do you think it was good idea for Gideon to test God – twice?



Why was it so hard for Gideon to believe that God would choose him? Why didn't he feel important enough, worthy enough? (He was from a poor family) This story shows that God can choose anyone – rich or poor, young and old, woman or man. It doesn't matter! God can use anyone. All that He asks for is a willing, obedient, and faithful heart.

Look at the picture. What does Gideon have in his hands? What was the torch used for? What was the horn for? You can find out more about the victory of Gideon in Judges 7.

## SAMSON

Look at the picture. What part of the story do you think this is? Where do you think Samson is? What is he about to do?

Why do you think Samson tricked Delilah the first and second time? More importantly, why do you think he told her his secret, even after she shared it the first two times? Was that a good idea?

Besides his hair, what was the secret source of Samson's strength? (The spirit of the Lord)

## RUTH

Look at the picture. What does Ruth have in her shawl? What time of day is it? Why do you think she is gleaning the barley in the dark?

Why do you think Ruth was willing to leave behind her home, her own family, everything she

knew and was comfortable with in order to follow Naomi?

Digging Deeper: The Jewish holiday of Shavuot (also called the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost) celebrates when Moses received

the Ten Commandments and the rest of God's Law. On the second day of this celebration, the entire book of Ruth is read aloud. Many people see this short book of the Bible as a romance: Ruth and Boaz, boy sees girl, they fall in love, get married, and live happily ever after. So what does this story have to do with receiving God's Law? Listen again to Ruth's words to Naomi: "Your people will be my people; your God my God." In other words, your faith, your religion, your law will be mine also. The story of Ruth is the story of an outsider receiving and being welcomed into a new faith.



## HANNAH

Have you ever wanted something really, really badly? Did you even ask God for it? Did you get it? Did it happen? Sometimes we do, and sometimes we don't. Whatever the case, we can trust God knows what's best for us.

Look at the picture. Can you tell where Hannah is standing? What building is behind her? It is the temple at Shiloh. Not the same as the large temple Solomon will build in Jerusalem. The Shiloh temple was most likely just a tent.

Digging Deeper: Hannah named her baby Samuel, because she asked the Lord for a child and God listened. (1 Sam. 1:20). The name Samuel means, "God has listened." His name reminds us that God answers prayer.

## SAMUEL

Have you ever had one of those nights when you couldn't sleep? It feels like every little noise is keeping you awake! What if that is God trying to tell you something? Maybe next time try to be very quiet and still, and see what God is saying in your heart.

What would you say if God was trying to say something to you? Remember Eli's advice: "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." How can you be a servant of the Lord?

Look at the picture. Do you see Samuel's sleeping mat? Where have you seen that fabric before? (Hint: look at the previous story)

Digging Deeper: Samuel was such a mighty prophet that there are two books in the Bible named after him: 1st and 2nd Samuel. These books tell the story of the early kings of Israel: Saul, David, and Solomon.

## DAVID

The best way to get to know David is to read the Psalms. Probably the most favorite is Psalm 23, which begins with the verse, "The Lord is my shepherd." It's a great Psalm to memorize.



The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures:

He leads me beside still waters.

He restores my soul.

He leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil: for thou art with me;

Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Thou prepares a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:

thou anoints my head with oil; my cup runs over.

Surely, goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:

And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.  
(Based off the KJV)

As a shepherd boy, David was used to keeping his sheep safe from bears and lions. How do you think this helped him when he met Goliath?

Different accounts give different heights for Goliath. One story says he was "four cubits and a span." This estimates to be six feet and nine inches. Another that he was "six cubits and a span," which would be almost ten feet tall! Have you ever met anyone this tall? How tall is the tallest person you know? Were they over six feet? Over six feet and a half? Over nine?!!!

Some churches still use oil to anoint people. Anointing with oil is a special way to show God's presence. It is a sign of the Holy Spirit and strengthening. Some Christians call this practice "Confirmation." The Bible also talks about the seven Gifts of the Spirit: wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, and the fear of the Lord (Isaiah 11:1-2); as well as the Fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). These are good lists to learn to see how the Holy Spirit works in our lives.

Look at the picture. How many river stones do you count? Why do you think David chose only five stones to use against Goliath?

## SOLOMON

Look at the picture. Do you see the building in the background? That's the temple that Solomon built for the Lord. It's going to appear in later pictures, so keep a look out for it.

What's prettiest church you've ever seen? What's the prettiest building you've ever seen? The Bible says that Solomon was the richest king in all the earth (1 Kings 10:23). And the temple was his crowning achievement. Just imagine how beautiful it must have looked!

Digging Deeper: The temple was the most important building in Jerusalem, in all of Israel, but it was destroyed by the Babylonians in 587/6 BC. The Persian king Cyrus allowed Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple, led by Zerubbabel and Nehemiah. During the time of the Maccabees, the temple had to be cleansed and rededicated. This historical event is celebrated today by the Jewish holiday, Hanukkah. The temple also housed the Ark of the Covenant. Do you remember what that was? Look back at the stories of Aaron and Joshua if you need.

When God asks Solomon what he wants more than anything else in the world, he asks for wisdom. But what is wisdom? What do you think of when you think of a wise person? For the medieval theologian Hildegard of Bingen, God's wisdom goes hand in hand with compassion. "When you compassionately touch and cleanse the wounds of others [ ` ], when you meet simple, honest people with kindness [ ` ], then I [Divine Love/Wisdom] am united to you in loving friendship." ("Letter to Eberhard")

## ELIJAH AND ELISHA

Look at the picture. Do you know which one is Elijah, and which is Elisha? (Elisha is the bald one holding the cloak that Elijah left behind.)

Why do you think Queen Jezebel was so upset about the contest? Why do you think she wanted to arrest Elijah? Do you think she wanted to keep worshipping her false god even after her priests lost?





Have you ever made the wrong choice again even after you were shown the right one? Why do we sometimes do that?

Elijah's cloak is also called his mantle. Even though it was a simple brown cloth, it was very special to Elisha, because it was the thing left behind. It represented Elijah's authority, power, and calling, and even the Spirit of God. The mantle was also like a family heirloom. Is there an heirloom in your family? A special object that has been passed down from a grandparent or even great-grandparent? It may be a special shirt, a hat, a teacup, or even a pot? What makes this thing so special?

You've probably seen someone wearing a sports jersey with their favorite athlete's name on it, or perhaps you like to wear a jersey yourself? Why do people do that? Do you think we want to be like our heroes (even sports heroes)? Elisha certainly wanted to be like Elijah and carry on his mission. Do you think he felt the same way as he wore Elijah's mantle?

## JONAH

Why do you think Jonah didn't want to go to Nineveh right away? Do you think he was afraid of them? Or do you he didn't like them? (Or maybe both?)



What does it mean to repent? Look ahead in the stories. John the Baptist (Jesus' cousin) and many of the prophets use the word "repent" a lot. To repent means to change your heart. Metanoia is the Greek word. Why did God want the Ninevites to change? What He want them to do differently? Do you need to repent of anything? In what ways do you think you need to improve? To be better?

When the Ninevites repented of their sins, the Bible says they "fasted and prayed" to show their hearts were changed. Even today many Christians like to

make a practice of fasting and praying as a sign of continual change and growth. To fast means to give something up. Normally, it's a good thing, but you're giving up voluntarily. Many people fast from their favorite foods like chocolate, chips, candy, etc. Sometimes they give up eating any food for a whole day or even multiple days. Sometimes people fast from a favorite pastime: video games, phone-screen time, social media, etc. Think of something you could fast from to show that your heart is changing.

## HULDAH

There are many people who know a lot about the Bible but have still never heard of Huldah. (I hadn't before writing this book!) In Judaism, she is counted as one of the seven prophetesses in the Hebrew Bible: Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Huldah, Abigail, and Esther. These amazing women were faithful friends and showed God's work in their lives.

Look at the picture. Do you see what Huldah is holding in her hand? What do you think it's supposed to be? (A scroll; the Torah.) Who else held a scroll? (Solomon, because he desired wisdom and loved the Law of God.)

Do you know what a treasury is? Normally, it's a place to keep gold safe. How do you think the Torah ended up in the treasury?

In the United States, the Constitution is the law of the land. Imagine if the Constitution and all the copies of the Constitution suddenly disappeared. Lost. No one had any idea where they were. How would our government know how to operate or what it was supposed to do? Now imagine how excited everyone would feel to rediscover a copy of the Constitution.

Or what if all of our Bibles suddenly disappeared? How would we know what to do? How would we know God's will? What would we feel when a Bible was eventually found? That's what it must have felt like to find the Torah buried deep in the vaults of the temple treasury.

## SHADRACH, MESHACH, AND ABEDNEGO

To be a faithful friend means to be a friend full of faith. Full of trust. Think about how much faith Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego showed. How much they trusted God! Even if they were thrown in the fiery furnace they were confident that God would save them. (And He did!)

When they were thrown into the furnace, a fourth person appeared. Who do you think was in the fire with them? Some theologians think it was an angel; some think it was Jesus – what do you think?

## DANIEL

Do you know where Daniel lived? He did not live in Israel but far away in Babylon (Persia). Look at a map to see how far from Jerusalem he lived.



Why do you think Daniel chose to face Jerusalem whenever he prayed? What special building was in Jerusalem? Do you think he wanted other people to see him when he prayed? Why do you think he prayed so publicly? Do you think ever felt embarrassed or scared of other people seeing him? Why or why not?

You may have seen a statue of Francis of Assisi, who lived in the Middle Ages. Many people like to keep statues of him in their gardens or posing as a birdbath, because of how much he loved animals. Francis famously said, "Preach the gospel and if necessary use words." What do you think this means? After his release from the lion's den, Daniel did not tell the king to change the laws, but the king changed them anyway. He was inspired by Daniel's deeds (his courage to pray) more than his words. To do the right thing in the right way is always good – for us as well as God.

## EZRA

Look at the picture. Can you find the chest of gold? Do you see the building in the background? What is it? (The temple) In what other pictures did you see this building? (Solomon, Huldah)

This is a good chance to review what we've learned about the temple, since it was the most important building in Jerusalem or all of Israel. Who built the original Temple? (Solomon) What was discovered in the temple treasury? (The Torah) Who rebuilt the temple? (Zerubbabel and Nehemiah) What Jewish holiday celebrates its rededication? (Hanukah)

"The gracious hand of God is on everyone who looks for Him." What does it mean to be gracious? How has God been gracious to you and your family? What other faithful friends was God gracious too?

## ESTHER

At the start of the story, was King Xerxes a good king? Why or why not?

What is your favorite thing about the picture of Esther? Can you tell what she's holding in her



hand? Do you think she looks beautiful enough to be a queen?

Why do you think Haman did not like the Jews? Is it right or wrong to dislike someone because of where they're from, their religion, the color of their skin, or for anything that makes them different? It's good to remember that the very things that make us different are also what make us special!

By the end of the story does King Xerxes seem like a bad king or a good king (or at least a better king)? How did he become better? How did Esther help him to become a better king?

# New Testament

## JESUS

Look at the picture of Jesus. Do you see the wounds on His hands and feet? Can you tell where He is? What is beneath His feet? What do you think is happening in the picture? What part of the story is being shown? (Answer: Jesus ascends into heaven.)

Digging Deeper: This story is heavily based on what we believe about Jesus from the Nicene Creed. The Creed is an important summary of doctrines about God and facts about Jesus. Here is what it says about Jesus:

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made.

For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried, and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.

He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end.

Take some time to discuss what the Nicene Creed teaches about Jesus. You could even set a goal to memorize the whole thing.

## MARY

When the angel first appeared to Mary, what do you think she felt? Do you think he startled her? What do you think the angel looked like?

Look at the picture. It looks like many of the pictures you might see at Christmas time. It's a picture of the Nativity, the birth of Jesus. How many things do you recognize from other pictures of the Nativity? Who or what is missing that you've seen in other Nativity pictures? What's your favorite thing about the picture?



Have you ever taken care of a baby before? What do you think it was like to take care of baby Jesus, especially knowing that he was God's only-begotten son?

## JOSEPH

The Bible says, "Joseph was a just man." What does it mean to be just? What is justice? Think of a time when you showed justice and fairness to others.

What lessons do you think "Joseph the Just" taught Jesus?

Look at the picture. Can you guess what each of Joseph's tools does? Do you know what each one is called? Try to find out if you don't.





## ZECHARIAH AND ELIZABETH

Find the scroll in the picture. Can you read what it says? Do you know what happened right after Zechariah wrote these words? You'll find out in the story.

Why do you think Zechariah had a hard time believing the angel?

What Old Testament story is similar to the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth? (Answer: Abraham and Sarah.)

## JOHN THE BAPTIST

We call him John the Baptist, because he baptized people. Do you know what it means to baptize? Have you been baptized? If so, do you remember when? Ask your Mom and Dad about your baptism.

Do you see the grasshopper in the picture? Do you know why it's there? Another name for grasshoppers is "locust". Listen to the story to find out what locusts have to do with John the Baptist.

Do you see the shell? What do you think it's for? What would John do with it?



What kind of shirt is John the Baptist wearing? Does it look comfortable? Is it something you would want to wear in the desert? The Bible says that he wore rough, unwoven "camel's hair". This probably felt a lot like putting

on an itchy wool sweater. Now imagine wearing that in the middle of summer in the desert – ugh!

## JOHN

Do you have a best friend? What's their name? How do you show your best friend that you love

them? How does your best friend show love to you?

Look at the picture. What kind of job is John doing? In the Bible, Jesus told John, "I will make you fishers of men." What do you think this means?

How many fish do you see in John's net?



Do you see the clouds in the sky? What do you think is about to happen?

## MARY AND MARTHA

Look at the picture. Which woman do you think is Mary and which one is Martha? How can you tell?

Jesus said that Mary chose what was best. What do you think He was talking about? What did she choose? How did she make the best choice compared to her sister?

## LAZARUS

What do you think it felt like for Lazarus to come back to life? What do you think was the first thing he saw after they unwrapped his face? What were Mary and Martha probably thinking and feeling this whole time?



The story of Lazarus contains the shortest verse in the Bible: "Jesus wept." Jesus cried. In other words, Jesus showed His feelings. He was sad. Did you know Jesus showed other feelings as well? He

was often happy and full of joy and peace. Once he got angry and threw the money-changers out of the temple (See Mark 11). In the garden of Gethsemane before he was arrested, he felt heartache and distress (See Luke 22). Jesus felt all the things that make us human, all of our feelings and emotions.

## ZACCHAEUS

Why didn't Zacchaeus' neighbors like him? Do you know what a tax collector does? They collect people's taxes, which is the money that people owe the government. Most people do not like to pay taxes. So guess how they feel about tax collectors?

Do you think Zacchaeus looks rich in this picture? Why or why not?

When was the last time you climbed a tree? Now when was the last time your Mom or Dad climbed a tree? Why don't adults climb trees when they get older?

Can you imagine a little man in fancy clothes like Zacchaeus trying to climb a tree without anyone to help him? Do you think that would have been embarrassing for him? Have you ever done something embarrassing, and everyone laughed at you? How did that make you feel? Did you have anyone there to make you feel better? Make you feel loved? What would Jesus do if saw someone embarrassed?

## THE ROMAN CENTURION

Besides the Roman centurion, who is this story about? Who is the man being crucified? (Answer: Jesus!) How can you tell?

Even though he wasn't one of Jesus'



disciples or a Jew, the centurion recognized there was something special about Jesus. What made Jesus different from the other criminals? What do you think the centurion saw in Him?

## MARY MAGDALENE

Look at the picture of Mary Magdalene. Can you tell where she is? What's behind her?

Jesus could have appeared first to any of his twelve disciples, but he didn't. He chose to appear to Mary Magdalene. She was the first witness. Why do you think Jesus picked her?



An apostle is someone who shares the good news about Jesus with others. The most familiar apostles are the twelve men Jesus chose to follow him – Peter, James, John, Thomas, and the rest – also known as the Twelve Disciples. Mary Magdalene is also called an apostle sometimes, the "Apostle to the Apostles." Based on her story, how do you think she got this name?

## THOMAS

Why do you think Thomas had a hard time believing that Jesus rose from the dead? What do you think you would have done back then? Would you have questioned and doubted like Thomas? Or believed right away?

Digging deeper: Did you know that Thomas' prayer ("My Lord and my God") is a common, easy-to-remember prayer that many Christians say at communion? Any time we have doubts or worries we can say to Jesus the same words as Thomas, "My Lord and my God."

At the end of the story, Jesus said, "Blessed are those who do not see but still believe." Do you realize that includes you? You and I didn't live

back then; we didn't see Jesus face to face. But we still believe. That means Jesus has promised a special blessing for us!



## PETER

Why do you think Jesus gave Peter a new name, and why did He choose the name "Peter" ("Rock")?

Have you ever watched a building being built from the ground up? What's

the first step? (Answer: building the foundation, usually poured concrete.) The foundation is what keeps the building together. A solid foundation will make a building steady and secure so it won't collapse. Jesus says that Peter is the "rock" upon which He builds his church. What do you think this means? What made Peter like a rock for the church?

Why do you think Jesus chose Peter? Even after all the mistakes Peter made, Jesus still chose him. What made him special? Can anyone be a rock for Jesus? Can anyone be an important building block in Jesus' church?

## STEPHEN

Do you think the people in charge of the church cared more about teaching and preaching or taking care of people? (Or maybe both?)

You've probably seen a statue of Francis of Assisi, who lived in the Middle Ages. Many people like to keep statues of him in their



gardens or posing as a birdbath, because of how much he loved animals. He famously said, "Preach the gospel and if necessary use words." What do you think this means? As a deacon, how would Stephen have preached the gospel even without saying a word?

## PAUL

Do you know how many books are in the Bible? How many books are in the New Testament? (Answer: 27 in the New Testament.) Now how many of those books were written by Paul?

(Hint: Besides the Timothys and Titus, they're all the books that end with "ans.") (Answer: almost half; at least 13.)

Dig deeper: Saul and Paul look and sound a lot alike. So what makes them different? Saul was a Jewish name, but Paul was Roman. An apostle is someone who shares the good news about Jesus with others. Paul is often called the "Apostle to the Gentiles," because he was the main person to share the good news about Jesus with Gentiles, which are all people who are not Jews (Romans, Greeks, etc.). As such, Paul helped make Christianity a unique religion, separate and distinct from Judaism.

On a map of the Mediterranean Sea, try to find as many of the cities that Paul wrote letters to. This should help you see how far and wide Paul travelled. To learn more about Paul, read the book of Acts, especially the second half (chapters 9 through 28). It's all about the travels and preaching of Paul.







## ABOUT THE BOOK:

Charming and whimsical handmade doll photographs illustrate the stories of over 40 men and women of the Bible in this one-of-a kind Bible storybook.

Bring some cozy charm to your child's room and a touch of whimsy to story time, with this beautiful keepsake book of characters from the Bible. This accessible collection includes both familiar and lesser-known figures like Noah, Joseph, Esther, John the Baptist, Miriam, and many more. Each story is told in a short, easy-to-understand passage and accompanied by a photograph of a handcrafted doll, specially made to capture both the character and themes of the story.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



**Marcy Kelleher** lives in Toledo, Ohio with her husband, Michael, and their seven children. She works from home as a doll maker and enjoys talking about literature with anyone who will listen and pretending she has a green thumb. She especially enjoys outings to Toledo's beautiful park trails with Michael and their children, attempting to be a read-aloud family, and never missing Friday night movie nights.



**Michael Kelleher** lives in Toledo, Ohio with his wife, Marcy, and their seven children. He works at a classical school and enjoys telling his children what to do in song and translating obscure Latin texts. He especially enjoys outings to Toledo's beautiful park trails with Marcy and their children, attempting to be a read-aloud family, and never missing Friday night movie nights.