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Bestselling Author of *12 Ordinary Men* and *12 Extraordinary Women*

40

Experiencing God's Grace Through the
Bible's Most Compelling Characters

LIVES

IN

40

DAYS



A PDF COMPANION TO THE AUDIOBOOK

40 Lives in 40 Days

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1 Simon Peter

What should we make of the name Jesus chose for Peter?

What do we learn from the fact that Jesus did not reject Peter despite his brashness?

Which of his characteristics contributed to making Peter a good leader? How are you cultivating those traits in your own life?

2 Andrew

Which single trait best characterizes Andrew?

What does Andrew's first instinct, upon coming to Christ, tell us about his priorities? How do you reflect the same priorities in your own life?

Do you judge your service to the Lord with the same judgment Andrew used? Why or why not? Choose a few specific areas in which you could adjust your thinking.

3 James

Explain the nickname Jesus gave James and John.

What was right in James and John's suggestion regarding the Samaritans? What was wrong?

What does James's martyrdom tell us about his character? How should and shouldn't you emulate what you see there?

John

What made the difference in John's character from his youth to his old age? How are you seeing the same maturation process in your own life?

What did John devote his life to? How do you manifest sharing the same passion?

Explain the nature of intemperance and imbalance—and their dangers. In what areas of your own life do you see this tendency?

5 Philip

Name the many ways, even in this short profile, we see Christ showing grace to Philip. How do you see Him doing the same in your own life?

How do we see Philip's greatest strengths being also his greatest liabilities? How successful are you at frankly assessing yourself along the same lines?

What was Philip's greatest need? Why was this deficiency no barrier to Christ's choosing him?

Nathanael

*How did Christ summarize Nathanael's character?
Could He say the same of you? Why or why not?*

What made Nathanael a true Israelite?

*Consider both Nathanael's hypocritical prejudice
and his guilelessness. What did Christ do with
both? How does that relate to the basis on which
Nathanael was justified as truly righteous?*

7 Matthew

Why were tax collectors so hated by their own countrymen?

What was Matthew's response upon hearing Christ's call? How is your heart responding to His ongoing call to faithfulness? Reflect on what Matthew knew he was giving up compared to what he was gaining.

Even before his conversion, where did Matthew seek the Messiah? How did this preparation benefit him after salvation? As a believer, how do you demonstrate at least the same diligence?

8 Thomas

Fill out the details of Thomas's specific tendency toward pessimism. What positive traits did he manifest at the same time?

Explain how Jesus' delay in reaching Bethany was an act of love.

Meditate on Thomas's famous confession. When was the last time you were so struck with the truth of Christ that you were prompted to confess the same?

9 James the Less

What can we make of James's comparative obscurity?

What made James truly great?

*What does James's lack of eminence tell you
about how God chooses to work?*

10

Simon the Zealot

What did Simon originally hope the Messiah's manner of coming would be like?

Consider Simon and Matthew's unity in Christ. How have you seen the same sort of reconciliation in your own life and congregation? Can you think of someone you need to pursue reconciliation with?

Can you identify any areas of misdirected zeal in your life? How can you better align your passions with God's?

11

Judas

Contemplate the twelve apostles' diversity of personalities and backgrounds. How is this reflected in your own experience among Christ's people?

What does Jesus' response to Judas's question tell us about how God deals with us?

How did Christ transform Judas's hope? How does this give you hope?

12

Judas Iscariot

What drew Judas to Christ? In examining your own motives, do you find any kinship within them to Judas's? Why or why not?

Explain the difference between the remorse Judas experienced and true repentance—for instance, as pictured by the remorse the apostle Peter experienced. Which is more familiar to your own heart?

How does even Judas Iscariot's life remain an encouragement? Examine it in regard to God's sovereignty.

13

Eve

Name the traits Scripture gives us in showing how Eve was the pinnacle of feminine excellence. Do you look to the same standards in your own estimation of what constitutes an exemplary woman? What have you added or removed, and why?

Contemplate the role of partial truths in the story of the fall of mankind. What implications can you draw from that reflection for your own life?

How do we see Eve's faith in God's promise by her proceeding to fulfill God's designated role for her, even after the devastation of the Fall? Consider how you respond immediately after you sin.

14

Sarah

Put yourself in Sarah's position, bearing in mind all her cultural and historical context. When are you tempted not to trust the Lord and instead to take matters into your own hands? Do you more consistently make excuses for this attitude or repent of it?

How well are you doing entrusting your desires to the Lord and waiting on His timing for you? How does Sarah's history encourage you, both positively and negatively, to that end?

*What does Hebrews 11:11 tell us about Sarah?
Memorize verses 11 and 12 as weapons against
your own moments of wavering.*

15

Rahab

Despite her personal history and lingering instinct to lie, what does Scripture focus on and commend Rahab for (cf. Heb. 11:31)?

Meditate on the grace of God that made Rahab truly extraordinary. How do you see the same grace functioning in yourself?

How does Rahab's narrative instruct us on how we should biblically view our own sinful pasts?

16

Ruth

List the main characteristics of Ruth you can glean from the text of Ruth chapters 1-4. How are you pursuing the same virtues?

How is Ruth a symbol of every believer? Of you specifically?

List the ways Boaz's traits and actions resemble Christ.

17 Hannah

How does the biblical text show Hannah's depth of devotion to God? What attitudes and practices in her life evidence that?

What made Hannah's frustration drive her nearer to rather than further from God? Can you say the same for yourself? Why or why not?

What can we learn from Hannah's example of prayer? Use Scripture to support your answers.

18 Mary of Nazareth

Reflect on the maturity that Mary's replies to the angel Gabriel and her hymn of praise exhibit. How are you cultivating the same mature faith in your own heart, and in the hearts of young believers in your life?

Meditate on the grace and courage Mary exhibited at Christ's crucifixion even as the experience was as a sword piercing her soul (Luke 2:35). What enabled her to endure such circumstances?

Consider Mary's humble adoration of Jesus over a lifetime of knowing Him. Do you, having the still fuller revelation of His glory, live with as much devotion to Him? Why or why not?

19

Anna

What gave Anna the certainty and expectation of the Messiah? How did the same diligence manifest itself in the ministry that characterized her life and identity?

Explain how Anna was a living reminder of God's faithfulness to His covenant people, Israel.

How does the text communicate to us Anna's joy at encountering Christ? How do you exhibit the same joy in how you speak of Him to others?

20 The Samaritan Woman

Explain why it was so situationally unlikely that Jesus should speak with the Samaritan woman at all. Reflect on some of your recent interactions to answer the following question: Are you content to abide by societal or natural expectations, or do you apply Jesus' standards in deciding who to speak to, and when and why?

How did the Samaritan woman respond to the revelation of who Jesus is? How does that tie directly into her legacy among all who believe?

In as many ways as you can, enumerate how the Samaritan woman's encounter with Jesus exhibits God's grace in salvation.

21

Mary of Bethany

*Examine Mary's act of worship, as recorded in John 12.
What was her primary motivation in performing it?*

*What was Mary's mindset in the famous incident
Luke 10 records? Defend your answer from the text.
Can you say you've shared her focus in your recent
encounters with God's Word? Why or why not?*

*Is Luke 10 setting worship and service at odds
with each other? What made the difference in the
sisters' acts of devotion to Christ?*

22 Martha of Bethany

Wasn't Martha simply fulfilling her God-given role of service to the Lord by focusing on the practical matters of hospitality? Give a biblical perspective on what was happening in that situation.

How often do you find yourself sinning even while doing something for the Lord? How do you respond in such circumstances?

Explain how Martha's heart issue here was fundamentally pride. Then look at how graciously Jesus treats her. Examine your own heart, and repent of your own unnoticed or unacknowledged pride, knowing that He will likewise be merciful to you.

23 Mary Magdalene

Your own history of rescue in salvation may not be as dramatic as Mary Magdalene's, but you were no less loosed from bondage to darkness and freed into devotion to Christ than she. How does your life reflect the same gratitude Mary's did?

List the markers in Mary's life of her devotion to God. Could someone do the same for your own life?

Meditate on the honor Christ gave Mary in appearing to her first, after His resurrection. What enabled her to recognize Him at last? How do those facts echo the way any believer comes to recognize the Son of God?

24 Lydia

List some details that the text of Acts 16 gives to indicate that Lydia's conversion was genuine. What does her conversion have in common with the others we've studied up until now? With your own?

How did Lydia's new faith affect those the Lord had placed immediately around her? How are you finding the same to be true for yourself?

What is so remarkable about Lydia's hospitality—what does it speak to in her character, and what did the Lord use it to accomplish? How are you employing your own resources to similar effect?

25

Enoch

The earliest chapters of the Bible give rich meaning to the concept of walking with the Lord. Fill out that picture to explain it explicitly by referencing the New Testament (e.g., John 8:12; Romans 6:1-4; Ephesians 4:1ff.; Philippians 3:15-17; Colossians 2:6ff.).

What does Hebrews 11:5-6 reveal was the basis of Enoch's intimacy with the true and living God? What does that tell you about how God has always saved His chosen people?

Explain how faith is the substance of the redeemed life.

26

Joseph

Joseph's life exhibits an almost unrivaled faith in God's sovereignty. Do you struggle to trust God's revelation, rather than your circumstances, to order and interpret your life? How in this area can you be more like Joseph?

Would you have successfully resisted the temptation for revenge against the brothers who sold you into slavery? Why or why not? What enabled Joseph to do just that?

How differently would you have lived in the past if you'd believed that God sovereignly ordained every twist and turn of your life? How can you begin living like that now?

27

Miriam

Though only a young girl in Exodus 2, Miriam was pivotal to God's plan of deliverance for His people. How else have you seen God use the humble and overlooked things to forward His plan of redemption?

When have you had to wait long periods, even decades of suffering, for the fruition of your hopes? Contemplate Miriam and all Israel's experience in Egypt; how does Scripture tell you to interpret how the Lord is working here?

In the face of the tragedies visited on the Egyptians, why is Miriam's leading public exultation, as recorded in Exodus 15, laudable?

28

Gideon

Summarize Gideon's character. Why does he still merit mention in Hebrews 11?

Recall specific instances when God was gracious to you despite your own weak faith, and praise Him for His goodness.

Consider how far the Lord went to demonstrate to His people why, against incredible odds, they should be courageous. Have you taken this lesson to heart better than Israel did? Why or why not?

29

Samson

In what ways was Samson mighty? In what ways was he feeble? Frankly assess your own life along the same lines.

Does Samson's narrative condone his disdainful disregard for the Lord's clear commands? Why or why not?

Why, despite its obvious tragic elements, is Samson's story not merely a tragedy? Who is its true hero?

30 Jonathan

Why was Jonathan's raid on the Philistine garrison not foolhardiness, but faith? How do you know that is true from the text?

Scripture's narrative indicates that Jonathan could have served Israel as a valorous, wise, and faithful king. Reflect on his humble submission to the Lord's plan.

Do you think you could have embraced God's plan with as much joy and loyalty as Jonathan did, given all that was on the line? When have you faced such tests of faith in your own life, and how have you succeeded or failed?

31 Jonah

Give examples from the text that demonstrate Jonah's attitude toward God. Considering the same record and Hebrews 12:6, what can we conclude about God's attitude toward Jonah?

What is the through line of Jonah's story—what do we learn about man's nature versus God's nature?

What does the book of Jonah tell us about how God chooses to advance the gospel?

32

Esther

How was Mordecai's famous statement in Esther 4:13-14 a true expression of faith versus merely a threat or wishful thinking (cf. Isa. 11:11-12)?

How do you tend to see the privileges God has given you as primarily for your own benefit? How can you be more purposeful about using them in service of God's people and purposes?

Reflect on your own situation, however humble or exalted. Identify at least three ways you can uniquely honor God's sovereignty in it by being bold for His glory.

33 John the Baptist

John the Baptist exhibited none of the usual markers of greatness. Can you explain the Lord's statement about him in the first half of Matthew 11:11?

What made John "more than a prophet" (Matt. 11:9)?

Especially given the above considerations, how can we make sense of the conclusion of Jesus' statement in Matthew 11:11, that "he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than [John]"? What kind of greatness does God care about?

James, the Brother of Our Lord

How do we see God's grace to James despite a lifetime (until mature adulthood) of his rejecting the Messiah?

Consider how far the Lord has brought you in Christ. List some of the fruit of His grace in your life that you never could have imagined possessing before your salvation.

How have you been putting feet to your faith lately, as James so helpfully outlines in his epistle?

35

Mark

How are you tempted to make excuses for your failures (youth, hardship, etc.)?

How does Scripture encourage us with the record of John Mark's failings?

What can we deduce is commendable about the decade in which Scripture tells us nothing of Mark's doings? How does this instruct you in how you should respond to your own failings?

36

Onesimus

Review some of the elements of Onesimus's life that make his conversion so remarkable. How do these show you the depth and strength of God's grace?

Is your identity with Christ compelling you to make right some issue from your past? How can you do it with the courage and obedient conviction that Onesimus exemplified?

How does the testimony of Onesimus's life help you worship the Lord better?

37

Paul

How did God choose to save the apostle Paul? In what ways does Paul's conversion parallel your own salvation?

Consider all Paul was able to accomplish for the gospel's spread, even before modern conveniences existed to aid him in that. How are you using the means God has given you to extend the gospel's reach?

What guarded Paul from discouragement? How are you applying the same attitude in your life?

38 The Prodigal Son

What parallels do you see between your own attitudes and those of the prodigal son at the parable's beginning?

Reexamine the son's planned speech upon returning home. Does your heart reflect the same estimation of your standing before God? Why or why not?

What does Jesus' characterization of the father in His parable tell you about God's disposition toward undeserving sinners?

39 The Elder Brother

What does the Scripture text tell us is the elder son's nature and personality?

Explain why Jesus' narrative does not support that the elder son is merely a true believer caught off guard by his father's generosity.

Identify how the elder son's grasp of truth was deficient. What about his grasp of love? What parallels to his faulty perspectives do you see prevalent in the world today?

40 Jesus

Explain what it means to identify Jesus as Lord.

Give examples of how Jesus is the fullness of God's expression.

How do you know you have responded to Christ's invitation to receive salvation?
