





Men of
the **Bible**

THE ONE YEAR[®]

365 MEDITATIONS ON

**THE CHARACTER OF MEN
AND THEIR CONNECTION
TO THE LIVING GOD**

James Stuart Bell



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The One Year Men of the Bible: 365 Meditations on the Character of Men and Their Connection to the Living God

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To my father, James S. Bell Sr.,
who has a lot in common with the
godly men of the Bible.

Introduction

*When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers—
the moon and the stars you set in place—
what are mere mortals that you should think about them,
human beings that you should care for them?*

PSALM 8:3-4

King David, who wrote Psalm 8, sat in wonder as he considered God's awesome, vast creation. He marveled that a God of such surpassing greatness would give even a fleeting thought to the daily life of a man such as himself.

Yet David knew God well enough to understand that he *is* concerned about every aspect of our lives, large and small. He reveled in the love, compassion, provision, and protection that God poured out on him daily.

Have you ever wondered whether God *really* thinks about you personally, and if so, what he thinks? The Bible teaches that God doesn't just think about us as humans in general, but as *individuals*. He cares *deeply* about each of us and works tirelessly—sometimes behind the scenes—to mold, love, correct, and provide for us.

As we'll see in the pages of this devotional, God cares passionately about men. The Bible is filled with stories of both God's interactions with men and their interactions with one another. Some of these stories are about positive examples of godly living, such as Abraham, Gideon, David, Simon Peter, the apostle Paul, and, of course, Jesus. Other stories aren't pleasant because they are about the consequences of men's failures and sins. All these accounts have been recorded in the Bible to inspire, teach, warn, and illustrate how to live—and how *not* to live.

Although the focus of this devotional is on the *men* of the Bible, and the devotions are written primarily from a male perspective, the principles also apply to female readers, though perhaps not in the same ways.

As you read the daily entries in this book, you'll get to know these men in new ways. You will look into their hearts and minds and understand what made them tick. You will see how they responded to God and how God related to them.

God recorded these stories in his written Word because he wants more than anything for us to get to know him at a deeper level. There is no better way to do that than to see how God has interacted with the men whose stories he included in the Bible.

As you read this book, you will find out what pleases God, what grieves and angers him, what caused him to move on behalf of the men of the Bible, and what will invite him to move on your behalf today.

As you spend your daily time with God, take a few minutes to read the stories in this book and the personal applications that follow. Think about the context of each man's life and the role he played in God's plans. Then prayerfully ask yourself, *What has this man's story taught me about my own place in God's plans?*

You may learn more than you expect about God and how he desires to relate to you.

January 1

Trusting Obedience

ABRAHAM

“Take your son, your only son—yes, Isaac, whom you love so much—and go to the land of Moriah. Go and sacrifice him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains, which I will show you.” GENESIS 22:2

Have you ever faced a situation in which you knew that God was calling you to do something very specific—such as change your job, move to another community, or make a daunting personal sacrifice—but instead of immediately stepping out in obedience, you waited to see what he would do next?

Abraham, the father of the Jewish race, once faced a situation in which delayed obedience must have seemed very tempting. God had given him a command that made little sense from a human perspective: “Take your son, your only son—yes, Isaac, whom you love so much—and go . . . sacrifice him as a burnt offering.”

What was Abraham to do?

We don't know what Abraham thought or prayed as he and Isaac made their way to Moriah, and we can only imagine what he felt. It was bad enough to face the loss of a child, but this was the son that God had promised and given to him in such a miraculous way. God had commanded him to sacrifice the boy as if he were just a goat or a sheep. It must have seemed like a horrifying negation of everything that God had promised.

Abraham didn't know that God's shocking instruction to sacrifice Isaac was a test of his willingness to obey all the Lord's commands—even those that appeared to make little sense. Abraham's obedience opened the door to all the blessings God had promised him. In choosing obedience—even with fear and trembling—Abraham took a huge step toward the high calling of God in his life.

The path to divine blessedness in your family, your career, and your ministry is your willingness to obey God's commands whether or not they make sense to you.

What “commands” is God putting on your heart today?

How will you respond?

January 2

It's All about Jesus

JOHN THE BAPTIST

"He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less."

JOHN 3:30

Race-car driver Dale Earnhardt Jr. caught the attention of NASCAR fans worldwide when he said, "I believe I'm the best driver out there. You have to think that way." Some thought that Earnhardt's comment was cocky and self-aggrandizing; others thought it was the attitude *any* successful driver would need.

Either way, Earnhardt's words echo a perspective shared by many professional athletes who have yet to learn the difference between healthy self-respect and harmful self-worship.

It's hard to imagine such words coming out of John the Baptist's mouth. Even when given the perfect opportunity, he shunned self-advancement. He attracted big crowds through his powerful preaching, but he remained humble. Instead of pointing to himself as *Numero Uno*, he pointed to Jesus and said, "This is the one I was talking about when I said, 'Someone is coming after me who is far greater than I am, for he existed long before me'" (John 1:15).

For John, it was all about Jesus.

John avoided the trap of self-glorification. He knew that he was just God's messenger. When a crowd eagerly sought to know if John was the Messiah, he deferred to Jesus. "Someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I'm not even worthy to be his slave and untie the straps of his sandals" (Luke 3:16).

John's humble stance was not a ploy to build a personal following. It was so real that John encouraged his own disciples to follow Jesus. The day after he baptized Jesus, John pointed two of his disciples to him. "Look," he exclaimed. "There is the Lamb of God!" (John 1:36).

Are you a humble person? When given the chance, do you gladly defer to Jesus and let him shine, or do you feel tempted to share the spotlight? Humility may be scarce today, but it is a jewel in the crown of righteousness.

It's all about Jesus!

January 3

Excuses, Excuses

ADAM

“Who told you that you were naked?” the LORD God asked. “Have you eaten from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat?” The man replied, “It was the woman you gave me who gave me the fruit, and I ate it.” GENESIS 3:11-12

Following the release of photographs depicting the shocking abuse of Iraqi prisoners of war, former secretary of defense Donald Rumsfeld told the Senate Armed Services Committee, “These events occurred on my watch. As secretary of defense, I am accountable for them. I take full responsibility.”

Though Rumsfeld’s words did little to quiet his critics, many observers found them refreshing because they demonstrated an uncommon willingness to take responsibility for the deplorable environment he had allowed to develop.

Every failure seems to attract a corresponding excuse. The murderer says, “I’m really not a bad person,” or the embezzling CEO insists, “I didn’t know,” but excuse making is nothing new. It goes as far back as the dawn of human history when Adam began making excuses for his willful disobedience.

When God uncovered Adam’s sin, the man offered a “sort of” admission: “Well . . . it was the woman . . . the woman *you* gave me, I might add. She gave me the fruit, and . . . well . . . yeah, I guess I ate it. But I mean, look at her, Lord! I mean c’mon! I’m only human!”

Excuses! Excuses!

Adam led the blame-shifting parade that so many of us have marched in ever since, faulting God and others for our own shortcomings. What would have happened if Adam had owned up to his failure? We’ll never know.

The far more relevant question is whether we will own up to ours.

When you sin or err in any way, you need to come clean with God without offering alibis or excuses as Adam did. That’s the way to receive God’s forgiveness and restoration.

January 4

The High Cost of Envy

CAIN

One day Cain suggested to his brother, "Let's go out into the fields." And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother, Abel, and killed him.

GENESIS 4: 8

Fans of the NBA's Los Angeles Lakers found their 2002 celebration of yet another championship tempered when the well-publicized friction between superstars Shaquille O'Neal and Kobe Bryant sharply escalated. Despite their three league championships together, the two players simply could not get along.

Each colossal ego wanted to establish the Lakers as "his team," and both men refused to back down. When the dust finally settled, what had looked like a long-term dynasty abruptly fell apart. The team traded away O'Neal, and since then, the Lakers have not come close to recapturing their championship form.

Take a bow, envy and jealousy.

The Bible introduces us to the destructive power of envy in the person of Cain, who murdered his brother Abel. When God accepted Abel's sacrifice and rejected Cain's, the latter flew into a murderous rage.

Cain didn't kill Abel on a whim. He let feelings of envy and jealousy build up until he had devised a scheme for taking the life of his brother, who had done him no wrong. Cain and his entire family paid a heavy price for his envy.

Unfortunately, a little bit of Cain lives in every man. Think about the twinge of anger you feel when someone you believe is less qualified gets promoted ahead of you. What about the surge of jealousy that erupts when you hear a friend praise a business rival? That's envy at work, and it needs to be confronted, rejected, and crucified.

You can overcome envy, jealousy, and the anger and frustration that always follow by learning to be content with what God has given you and where he has placed you.

Combat envy by consciously choosing to rejoice with others. Envy has no room to take root in the soil of genuine joy!

January 5

Standing Out in the Crowd

NOAH

The LORD said, "I will wipe this human race I have created from the face of the earth. Yes, and I will destroy every living thing—all the people, the large animals, the small animals that scurry along the ground, and even the birds of the sky. I am sorry I ever made them." But Noah found favor with the LORD. GENESIS 6:7-8

Cynthia Cooper and Sherron Watkins made the term *whistle-blower* a household word a few years ago when they exposed massive financial scandals within WorldCom and Enron. Whistle-blowers make themselves vulnerable to persecution and opposition, particularly from those who have something to hide.

They are nonetheless willing to stand out in a crowd for what they know is right.

Noah stood out that way. His contemporaries had become so corrupt that God expressed great sorrow over having ever made them. Their constant sin so offended God that he decided to destroy the world and every living thing.

Noah was the exception.

Noah's uniquely righteous life set him apart in a world made crooked by sin. No doubt Noah found it tempting to conform to the world around him—as all of us do—but somehow he remained true to God and his righteous standards.

When you build your life on God and live by his standards, you *will* stand out in a crowd. You might feel the sting of ridicule and persecution, but you will be in good company! Like Noah, you will find favor with God and enjoy his blessings.

Forces in this world will always try to conform you to their corrupt images. You will find favor with the Lord by choosing to stand out in the crowd because of your desire to identify with Christ and live by his standards.

January 6

Overcoming Fear

NEHEMIAH

During the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes' reign, I was serving the king his wine. I had never before appeared sad in his presence. So the king asked me, "Why are you looking so sad? You don't look sick to me. You must be deeply troubled." Then I was terrified, but I replied, "Long live the king! How can I not be sad? For the city where my ancestors are buried is in ruins, and the gates have been destroyed by fire." NEHEMIAH 2:1-3

Following a fateful bombing mission over Japan during World War II, the B-25 of U.S. Army Staff Sergeant Jacob DeShazer crash-landed in China. Enemy soldiers quickly captured and imprisoned him, then tortured him for the remainder of the war. Despite his brutal treatment, DeShazer did what most would find unthinkable. For three decades following the war, he was a Christian missionary in Japan.

Perhaps the greatest enemy of faith is the fear that takes our attention away from God and places it on whatever we perceive as a threat. Jacob DeShazer was able to minister effectively to his former captors because he had the faith to overcome his fears. His faith empowered him to look past his brutal mistreatment to what God had called him to do.

Centuries before, Nehemiah faced a similar challenge. As he served the most powerful king of his time, the Persian ruler Artaxerxes, he had to maintain a sunny disposition at all times so his personal problems would not disturb the king. Failure could result in severe consequences, so when the king asked Nehemiah, "Why are you looking so sad?" this godly man had every reason to be afraid.

Because of his love for God, Nehemiah spoke his heart and revealed his troubles. The king could have punished him, but instead he reacted with mercy and practical assistance as he sent Nehemiah to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

In your own life of faith, has God proven trustworthy in all things? When you keep your focus on his goodness and faithfulness, you will find the strength to overcome your fears.

January 7

Semper Fi TYCHICUS

Tychicus will give you a full report about how I am getting along. He is a beloved brother and faithful helper who serves with me in the Lord's work.

COLOSSIANS 4:7

On the morning of November 15, 2004, a mortally wounded U.S. Marine sergeant named Rafael Peralta completed one final act of heroism as he lay dying near the entrance to a terrorist hideout in Fallujah, Iraq. As Marines from his squad stepped over his bloody body, he reached out and grabbed a live enemy grenade that had landed near him. He tucked it under his torso just moments before it exploded, thus saving the lives of several of his comrades.

Officials later praised Peralta for living up to the Marines' motto, *Semper Fidelis* (often shortened to *Semper Fi*), which means "always faithful." He spent his last months defending his nation's freedom and his last moments protecting his fellow Marines. Even as he drew his last breath, Rafael Peralta remained faithful.

A man in the Bible named Tychicus was cut from the same cloth. The apostle Paul commended him as a faithful and "beloved brother." Although the name *Tychicus* means "fate," the Lord, not fate, brought Tychicus into Paul's life.

The faithfulness of Tychicus won Paul's confidence so thoroughly that the apostle later considered sending him to Crete, a notoriously difficult mission field (see Titus 1:12-13; 3:12). Only a truly faithful comrade could handle such a tough ministry assignment. Paul's confidence in Tychicus as a faithful coworker never wavered, and even as the apostle neared the time of his martyrdom, he sent Tychicus to Ephesus on a special mission (see 2 Timothy 4:12).

Be honest: Does the term *faithful* describe you? Could you appear on the same list as Rafael Peralta and Tychicus, the "faithful helper"?

You don't have to be a U.S. Marine to live by the motto *Semper Fi*. You can be "always faithful" as a husband, father, friend, or disciple maker. Someone is counting on your faithfulness.

January 8

Righteous in the Midst of Corruption

LOT

God also rescued Lot out of Sodom because he was a righteous man who was sick of the shameful immorality of the wicked people around him. Yes, Lot was a righteous man who was tormented in his soul by the wickedness he saw and heard day after day. 2 PETER 2:7-8

The recent discovery in South Africa of a diamond *twice* the size of the former record holder has stunned the world's diamond community.

The gem had been there all the time, of course, hidden in the dirt, but someone had to dig for it. However harsh their surroundings, diamonds are worth the effort it takes to separate them from the mud and muck.

The Bible calls Lot a “righteous man” although he lived in the wicked city of Sodom. As the only upstanding man to make his home in the midst of such corruption, Lot remained alone in his anguish over the sin he saw day after day. He remained alone in suffering the jeers of people who despised his way of life almost as much as he was grieved by theirs.

Can you imagine how Lot felt? Maybe you can even identify with it.

Perhaps you live in a modern-day Sodom. Maybe your neighbors, friends, and even family would feel right at home in such a moral sewer. Maybe you're the only godly man living in an environment that lacks any hint of morality or righteousness. Perhaps you feel totally alone in your desire to hold on to a godly life.

Though Lot was far from perfect, his love for God made him a gem that shone from the ancient city of Sodom. Like Lot, you can hold on to righteousness, despite ridicule and opposition, and be a man willing to shine for God in the midst of corruption.

God never promised us an easy ride. It's difficult to be righteous in the midst of corruption. If God calls you to live as a diamond amid the dirt of this world, he will also encourage and equip you.

January 9

Good Conduct Yields a Clear Conscience

PAUL

We can say with confidence and a clear conscience that we have lived with a God-given holiness and sincerity in all our dealings. We have depended on God's grace, not on our own human wisdom. That is how we have conducted ourselves before the world, and especially toward you. 2 CORINTHIANS 1:12

Have you ever cringed as you looked at a news report or article exposing some unsavory sin in the life of a well-known Christian? When the criticism and finger-pointing begin, the average believer can only respond by highlighting the obvious problem of focusing on people instead of on God.

You know what a black eye such situations can give the church and the cause of Christ, and you grieve.

The apostle Paul understood the importance of maintaining good conduct within his ministry, whether among fellow believers or before a watching world. For integrity and credibility, he refused to tolerate dishonesty or corruption within his team.

Is it any wonder that he was confident and enjoyed a clear conscience?

Paul set a great example for us in his self-examination, good conduct, confidence, and clear conscience. His life and words were consistent with his personal commitment as a faithful representative of Jesus Christ to a needy, battered world.

Many have pointed out that believers in Christ provide the only reflection of Jesus that the world will ever see. Ask yourself how you can better reflect Jesus Christ in all you say and do.

Are you *confident* in your own walk of faith? Do you have a clear conscience about your personal expression of faith? How do people generally see you, both within and outside of the church? When did you last examine yourself seriously about these things?

January 10

Look Past Your Limitations

MOSES

Moses protested to God, "Who am I to appear before Pharaoh? Who am I to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt?" God answered, "I will be with you."

EXODUS 3:11-12

Think of the last time that you felt you were in over your head. What made you feel ill-equipped, either mentally or spiritually?

Maybe you had a conflict with your wife that refused to work itself out. Perhaps you couldn't understand the behavior of a rebellious child. Do you have a problem at work that you can't get past? Did a falling-out with a friend result in serious relational damage that you don't know how to fix?

Life has a way of overwhelming us at times. The good news for every believer in Christ is that when you feel completely inadequate, God has you right where he wants you.

Moses certainly felt ill-equipped when he heard God's command to return to Egypt: "The cry of the people of Israel has reached me, and I have seen how harshly the Egyptians abuse them. Now go, for I am sending you to Pharaoh. You must lead my people Israel out of Egypt" (Exodus 3:9-10).

Surely Moses felt that twinge we all feel when an overwhelming problem or challenge confronts us. He responded, "Who am I to appear before Pharaoh? Who am I to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt?" (Exodus 3:11).

God never directly answered Moses' question. Instead, God emphasized his own impressive credentials (see Exodus 3:12).

Moses focused on himself when he needed to focus on God. The Lord responded by patiently shifting his chosen deliverer's attention to the God of unlimited power who had expressed his unchanging commitment to accomplish *everything* he had promised.

When you feel you are in over your head, what would happen if you took the focus off of yourself and consciously placed it on God? Certainly you have shortcomings and weaknesses—we all do. God didn't remove Moses' weaknesses when he called him into leadership, but he did promise Moses his presence, and he makes this same promise to you.

Do you think that God will do any less for you than he did for Moses? What does the promise of his presence mean to you? How can you turn your focus from your own shortcomings to the One through whom you can accomplish any task and solve any problem?