Whenever we pick up the Bible and read the stories, we are tempted to make the biblical characters larger than life. We tend to think they were superhuman—that they never had a bad day, never fought with their spouses, never yelled at their kids, and never got ticked off when another camel cut them off in traffic. Nothing could be further from the truth. They were just like us. Ordinary. Common. Flawed. Pudgy. Unrefined. Bald. Normal.

And they weren’t perfect. They had a sin nature just like you and me. At times they lost momentum and got spiritually stuck just like us. One of the great things about the Bible is that it doesn’t airbrush its characters. We are allowed to see their great faith and their great failures. We get a front-row seat to their real-life battles with anger and temptation and relationships and money and . . . faith.

In this devotional we will look at five of those Old Testament characters. We are going to spend time with Abraham, Daniel, Moses, Jonathan, and Joseph. It’s my prayer that your interaction with them in these pages will
not be as mystical supersaints, but rather as ordinary people who teach us how to live in the trenches of everyday life.

The premise of this devotional comes from Chip Ingram and his book *Living on the Edge.* In his book, Chip gives us a profile of a disciple from Romans 12. I’m grateful for his insightful writing, and I have used some of his thoughts in this devotional book.

In Romans 12, Paul gives us the *teaching,* and the Old Testament characters we’ll be looking at give us the *testimony.* Paul gives us the *principles,* and these men give us the *practices.* Paul gives us the *concept* of a disciple, and these men give us the *conduct* of a disciple.

- Abraham models a life of surrender.
- Daniel exemplifies what it means to live separate from the world’s values.
- Moses is a classic case study in having a sober self-assessment.
- Jonathan fleshes out what it looks like to serve others in love.
- And Joseph is the poster child of supernaturally responding to evil with good.

As you read and reflect on these pages, may God ignite your life and give you the courage to believe that ordinary people really can live extraordinary lives.
Therefore, I urge you, brother,
in view of God’s mercy,
to offer your bodies as living sacrifices,
holy and pleasing to God—
this is your spiritual act of worship.

—Romans 12:1
On April 6, 1865, over six thousand confederate soldiers were captured. The end was imminent. On the morning of April 9, General Robert E. Lee and his hungry men found themselves surrounded by five times as many Union soldiers as those who stood with him. Lee had no choice but to surrender.¹

It would be impossible to describe the anguish of the troops when word went out that surrender was inevitable. When General Lee appeared after the surrender, a shout of welcome instinctively ran through the troops. But their shouts soon gave way to silence. Every hat was raised, and the soldiers’ worn faces were bathed with tears.

As General Lee rode slowly along the lines, hundreds of his devoted veterans pressed around him. With tears flowing freely down his manly cheeks, the general said good-bye to his army.

**Surrender.** It’s an ominous and intimidating word that can conjure up images of raising white flags and laying down arms. It can make us think of giving in and giving up. Defeat and humiliation often go hand in hand with surrender.
So when we talk about surrender being vital to the Christian life, it can sound hard and harsh, unless we are surrendering to something better. The apostle Paul talks about surrender (total commitment) in Romans 12:1 when he says, “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.” Offering our bodies to God as a living sacrifice can seem daunting.

In ancient times, when animals were offered on the altar, the sacrifice was total and final. That is the imagery in Romans 12:1. Paul is calling on us to willingly crawl up on the altar and offer ourselves in total and final surrender. There is no such thing as partial surrender.

This call to offer our bodies as living sacrifices is bookended by two interesting phrases. First, Paul says that we offer ourselves “in view of God’s mercy.” Surrender is in response to God’s mercy. When you really grasp what you were saved from, when you deep down feel the undeserved and free grace that liberated you, surrender is motivated by gratitude. Surrender is saying to God, “Because of all you’ve done for me and in me, everything I am and everything I have I gladly surrender to you.”

Second, Paul says that our surrender is a “spiritual act of worship.” The word translated “spiritual” in this verse means ‘logical’ or ‘reasonable’ or ‘acceptable’. If God really is the king, ruler, and CEO of the universe, and if he really did send his son to die for me; then it is “logical” for me to surrender to him as an act of worship. God wants the same place in my life that he already has in the universe. And that is reasonable.

Our problem is that we tend to focus on what we are giving up rather than what we are getting in exchange. We fail to understand that “Total commitment [surrender] is the channel through which God’s best and biggest
blessings flow.” The Bible says that God wants you to experience abundant life—right here and right now. And the conduit through which God takes his blessings and pours them into your life is a pipe called surrender.

In the next few days, we’ll be looking at the life and times of one man who surrendered all. Abraham not only offered his own life as a “living sacrifice”; he literally offered his only son. Abraham’s life of faith was immortalized for our benefit so that we, too, can learn what true surrender is all about.

So what keeps us from surrender? Deep down, at the root of our fears is usually a misunderstanding of God and his character. If we are honest, many of us would have to say that we don’t really believe that God is good and that he has our best interests at heart. We think God is holding out on us. And we question whether God really has the equation for the “good life.”

Psalm 84:11 says, “For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD gives grace and glory; no good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly” (NASB). Push rewind. Listen carefully to those words. God is a sun (provider) and shield (protector). He is all about grace and relationship. He is not about rules and performance. And “no good things does He withhold from those who walk uprightly.” God’s desire for you is more and better than you could ever imagine. When we walk surrendered to him, his promise to us is that he will pour out the abundant life.

That’s just who he is. It is God’s nature and character to pour good gifts on undeserving people.
Romans 8:32 says, “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”

Because God is a good father and because we trust his heart, we can with confidence entrust our hearts to him.

It’s like the difference between a white flag and a wedding. Both are symbols of surrender. The white flag surrender is one of defeat and giving up. It represents what you lose. A wedding is a different kind of surrender. In a wedding you surrender your heart out of love and relationship. It is not at all about what you lose, but rather what you gain. God wants you to know that his challenge to surrender is about a wedding, not a white flag.

WHAT ABOUT YOU?
What are you afraid of when you think of surrendering to God? What are you hesitant to give up? As you remember the bookends of God’s call to surrender—his mercy and the reasonableness of his invitation—you will be on your way to trusting him with you.

Today’s Takeaway
Surrender is trusting God’s heart toward you and entrusting your heart to him.