

**The  
Barnabas  
Family  
Bible**

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# Introduction

Jesus asked, 'Who is my mother and who are my brothers?' Then he looked at the people sitting around him and said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers. Anyone who obeys God is my brother or sister or mother.'

## MARK 3:33–35

'Family' is a big word. At least, it always used to be. Certainly it was so in Old Testament times, when family included a wide network of more distant as well as immediate relatives. It linked up all those connected not just by DNA but by bonds of friendship, financial obligations and mutual concerns over territory and shared faith. It is only in more recent times that we have limited family to two parents and their biological children in a small home. But times have changed and now once again families come in all shapes and sizes, drawn together by a commitment that does not necessarily depend on the promises of marriage vows.

Family is a big idea and needs to be seen as such. It is for all sorts of families that *The Barnabas Family Bible* has been written. Wherever children are being nurtured in love by significant adults in their lives, there is family. This is the family of those trying to do things God's way. Jesus talked about this when his own immediate family told him to get back home and stop behaving crazily! He had to remind them, as he does us today, that his family was much bigger. In fact, the family of faith—of those who do God's will—was created by the intergenerational community gathered around Jesus. As the Gospels make clear, this included a bunch of young men who were tradesmen and accountants, women who were wealthy and well-connected, and even others of more dubious reputation. It was a family of mothers with their young children, as well as those

who were sick, alone and vulnerable. This model is an exciting and relevant one for today, helping us to reclaim and redefine the concept of family.

So however you are gathering to read the Bible together, we hope that this book will become a treasured and valued companion. It includes a selection of passages that will take you right through the story of the Bible from its glorious and hopeful beginnings in the garden of Eden through the very human and often tragic stories of the people of God; from the longing of God's heart to mend the brokenness of the world to the wonder of the story of Jesus and what he did to bring the family of God together again; and it ends with the beautiful description of the new earth and heaven to which all those who have faith in Jesus are travelling. The aim of the authors has been to make these passages accessible for all ages in your family as you take time to focus on these stories together.

The translation used is the Contemporary English Version (CEV), which is easy for both adults and children to read. Following each **Bible passage**, there is a **commentary** that starts to unpack each story, with regard to both its place within the wider narrative of the Bible and its relevance for us today. Although this is designed primarily for adults to read, we hope that the language will also be accessible to older children.

What follows is an opportunity to engage with the story in a number of creative ways. The **questions** that

follow the commentary are designed to get everyone talking. They are not just for the children but, we hope, will stretch everyone's minds and imaginations. And, recognising that it is always helpful to have a focus, a suggestion for a **visual aid** is made. This will be an item that can be found easily around the home, so that it can be on display as the story is read and talked about.

We learn most by doing things, of course, and there is therefore an **activity idea** too, providing an engaging and memorable way to touch the theme of the story. Christians believe that the stories of the Bible can teach us more about ourselves and about God, and therefore, as we open up its pages, we are drawn closer to God himself, to which the natural response is to pray. Again, picking up on the contents of the story, there is always a **prayer idea** to help you do this.

From each passage we have also picked out a **key verse** which is a headline for that story and points to a Bible truth that can become an anchor for both adults and children as they read the story together.

Sadly, space was limited, and this has meant that we have had to miss out some really good stories. We would have loved to explore the ups and downs of Samson's volatile life, the bravery of Esther, the patience of Job, the wisdom of Solomon, more from the poetry of the Old Testament prophets and the teaching from Paul's epistles, but we couldn't cover everything. Nevertheless, we hope you will enjoy what is here so much that you will want to go on and read more for yourselves. To help you with that, for every single story we have provided a **story link** passage to somewhere else in the Bible, which should encourage you to continue exploring this amazing book.

After the Bible story times is a section of **guidance and support**—a series of short articles with practical advice about how to grow faith in the home, handle

difficult questions and establish patterns for praying together. Unless faith takes root in the home, all the best efforts of our work on Sundays (or whenever churches meet) are liable to flounder. The strength of the Bible's understanding of family is that faith is rooted in the everyday, in a family's experiences of festivals and celebrations, when everyone comes together. This was the way faith grew in the early history of the church, where households of faith came together to worship God in gatherings that included a wide range of people of different ages and in different relationships. Once again we're back to a much wider and more exciting definition of 'family' than perhaps churches have tended to promote.

Finally, there is a short **overview of the Bible** and a selection of **best-loved Bible passages** to provide a regular reference point for your inspiration and encouragement.

It is as young and old rub shoulders together alongside God's word that faith can really grow effectively. The young need the older members, to hear and learn from their experience of what it means to trust God through all the circumstances of life; but the old also need the younger members of the family, who bring a lively spirituality and sense of adventure when it comes to exploring the wonders of God's creation and what faith in Jesus means. Faith grown in this sort of soil is much more likely to put down deep roots and produce beautiful fruit.

It is our prayer that you will find this book useful and, as you turn its pages together, you will meet with more than just good ideas and thought-provoking insights; rather, we hope, far more importantly, that you as a family will be drawn closer to God himself as part of the family that Jesus talks about—the family of those who discover God's ways and God's will in today's world.

# God's promise

<sup>1</sup> Later the LORD spoke to Abram in a vision, 'Abram, don't be afraid! I will protect you and reward you greatly.'

<sup>2</sup> But Abram answered, 'LORD All-Powerful, you have given me everything I could ask for, except children. And when I die, Eliezer of Damascus will get all I own. <sup>3</sup> You have not given me any children, and this servant of mine will inherit everything.'

<sup>4</sup> The LORD replied, 'No, he won't! You will have a son of your own, and everything you have will be his.'

<sup>5</sup> Then the LORD took Abram outside and said, 'Look at the sky and see if you can count the stars. That's how many descendants you will have.' <sup>6</sup> Abram believed the LORD, and the LORD was pleased with him...

**17** Abram was ninety-nine years old when the LORD appeared to him again and said, 'I am God All-Powerful. If you obey me and always do right, <sup>2</sup> I will keep my solemn promise to you and give you more descendants than can be counted.' <sup>3</sup> Abram bowed with his face to the ground, and God said:

<sup>4-5</sup> I promise that you will be the father of many nations. That's why I now change your name from Abram to Abraham. <sup>6</sup> I will give you a lot of descendants, and in the future they will become great nations. Some of them will even be kings.

<sup>7</sup> I will always keep the promise I have made to you and your descendants, because I am your

God and their God. <sup>8</sup> I will give you and them the land in which you are now a foreigner. I will give the whole land of Canaan to your family forever, and I will be their God.

**GENESIS 15:1–6; 17:1–8**



## Commentary

I wonder what your definition of a best friend would be. Maybe it is someone who always keeps a promise. In other words, he or she is completely trustworthy and will never let you down. This is the sort of friend that God offers to be to Abram in the story, and in this friendship God makes an amazing commitment to Abram. He promises lifelong protection and a great future for his family, with the gift of a child. Abram and Sarai are old and childless at this point and are frightened about what will happen when they die. But God has a plan for them—a plan that, in fact, reaches right through the Bible and on into our own time. Abram's family will one day be like stars in the sky, completely beyond counting, and this family will make history right across the globe. It must have seemed like an impossible dream to Abram, but his name change would always remind him of the God who made that promise; and God's promises never fail.



## Visual aid

Find some luminous stars that will glow in the dark. Decide where you are going to stick them in your

## Questions

- ▶ How do you feel when someone breaks a promise to you?
- ▶ Why do you think Abram felt he could believe what God promised him?
- ▶ What promises have you made recently? Have you managed to keep them?
- ▶ What sort of promises does God make and keep for each one of us every day?

home as a reminder each night that God has kept and will always keep his promises to us.



## Activity idea

Together, cover a large piece of black card with as many stick-on stars as you can, to create a beautiful, bright night sky scene. Whenever Abraham saw the stars in the sky, he remembered God's great promises to him. What promises from God can they remind you of? For example: God will always love us; God will never leave us; God will always hear our prayers, and so on.



## Prayer idea

It is as if God breathed a new syllable into Abram's name to help him remember that God had made this special friendship with him forever. He was now to be called

Abraham. God's breath is his Spirit. As you pray for your family and friends, write out the word S P I R I T several times, with spaces between the letters, and then add the names of the people you want to pray for, as a way of asking God to breathe his Spirit into them, to help them and keep them safe, just as he has promised.

For example: **S p P e i t R e i r T**

## Key verse

'I will always keep the promise I have made to you' (Genesis 17:7).

## New Testament story link

**Galatians 3:6–9 and 14:** Paul reminds us that the promises made to Abraham are now promises for us too, all because of Jesus.

# Ruth and Boaz

<sup>1-3</sup> One day, Ruth said to Naomi, 'Let me see if I can find someone who will let me pick up the grain left in the fields by the harvest workers.'

Naomi answered, 'Go ahead, my daughter.' So straight away, Ruth went out to pick up grain in a field owned by Boaz. He was a relative of Naomi's husband Elimelech, as well as a rich and important man.

<sup>4</sup> When Boaz left Bethlehem and went out to his field, he said to the harvest workers, 'The LORD bless you!'

They replied, 'And may the LORD bless you!'

<sup>5</sup> Then Boaz asked the man in charge of the harvest workers, 'Who is that young woman?'

<sup>6</sup> The man answered, 'She is the one who came back from Moab with Naomi.' <sup>7</sup> She asked if she could pick up grain left by the harvest workers, and she has been working all morning without a moment's rest.'

<sup>8</sup> Boaz went over to Ruth and

said, 'I think it would be best for you not to pick up grain in anyone else's field. Stay here with the women <sup>9</sup> and follow along behind them, as they gather up what the men have cut. I have warned the men not to bother you, and whenever you are thirsty, you can drink from the water jars they have filled.'

<sup>10</sup> Ruth bowed down to the ground and said, 'You know I come from another country. Why are you so good to me?'

<sup>11</sup> Boaz answered, 'I've heard how you've helped your mother-in-law ever since your husband died. You even left your own father and mother to come and live in a foreign land among people you don't know. <sup>12</sup> I pray that the LORD God of Israel will reward you for what you have done. And now that you have come to him for protection, I pray that he will bless you.'

**RUTH 2:1-12**

## Commentary

Although Naomi and Ruth had returned to Bethlehem, their troubles were not yet over. They were desperately poor and had to depend on the charity of others. It was the custom to leave some grain in the fields at harvest time for poor people to pick up. Ruth offers to gather some grain so that she and her mother-in-law won't starve.

God is clearly guiding events that day because the field where she works turns out to belong to one of Naomi's relatives by marriage. Boaz is a kind man who has heard of Ruth's kindness to Naomi. He arranges for Ruth to pick up as much as she needs and also orders his workers to keep an eye out for her safety. It is the beginning of a love story that leads to a new husband for Ruth, a sure future for Naomi and, in time, children and grandchildren. It is into Ruth's family line that King David is born and from David's family that Jesus comes, far

in the future. Ruth's beautiful act of loyalty is rewarded and Boaz's prayer that God will bless her is richly answered.

### Visual aid

Take a loaf of bread out of its packet and place it in the centre of a large plate. Now empty the crumbs from the packet all around the loaf. These are like the leftovers that Ruth was allowed to take. How much can you pick up?

### Activity idea

By leaving some grain in the corner of the field for the poor to pick up, Boaz was obeying one of the harvest laws in the Old Testament. Our loose change is a bit like the leftovers in Boaz's field. As a family, set out to find and collect as many low-value coins as you can find lying around the house. Look down behind the sofa! Add the money together and turn it into a gift to a charity that cares for those who don't have enough to eat, either in your own country or another.

### Prayer activity

Boaz's greeting to his workers was 'The Lord bless you'. He also

## Questions

- ▶ Have you ever experienced what it is like to go without food for a while? If not, can you imagine it?
- ▶ What risks do you think Ruth was taking in offering to go out and pick up the leftover grain in the fields?
- ▶ What makes you think that Boaz was a kind man?
- ▶ Why do you think Ruth was surprised to be treated so kindly?
- ▶ Can you imagine what Ruth said to her mother-in-law when she returned that evening and described the events of the day?

prayed a blessing on Ruth. To bless someone is to want the best for them. Write the words 'May God bless...' in the middle of a sheet of paper and, as a family, add the names of people, places and special situations that come to your minds. Read them out loud together as a prayer.

### Key verse

'Now that you have come to [God] for protection. I pray that he will bless you' (Ruth 2:12).

### New Testament story link

**Luke 6:27–38:** Jesus tells us of the many ways in which we can bless others, just as Boaz blessed Ruth.

# Jesus chooses his first disciples

<sup>1</sup> Jesus was standing on the shore of Lake Gennesaret, teaching the people as they crowded around him to hear God's message. <sup>2</sup> Near the shore he saw two boats left there by some fishermen who had gone to wash their nets. <sup>3</sup> Jesus got into the boat that belonged to Simon and asked him to row it out a little way from the shore. Then Jesus sat down in the boat to teach the crowd.

<sup>4</sup> When Jesus had finished speaking, he told Simon, 'Row the boat out into the deep water and let your nets down to catch some fish.'

<sup>5</sup> 'Master,' Simon answered, 'we have worked hard all night long and have not caught a thing. But if you tell me to, I will let the nets down.' <sup>6</sup> They did it and caught so many fish that their nets began ripping apart. <sup>7</sup> Then they signalled for their partners in the other boat to come and help them. The men came, and together they filled the two boats

so full that they both began to sink.

<sup>8</sup> When Simon Peter saw this happen, he knelt down in front of Jesus and said, 'Lord, don't come near me! I am a sinner.' <sup>9</sup> Peter and everyone with him were completely surprised at all the fish they had caught. <sup>10</sup> His partners James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were surprised too.

Jesus told Simon, 'Don't be afraid! From now on you will bring in people instead of fish.'

<sup>11</sup> The men pulled their boats up on the shore. Then they left everything and went with Jesus.

**LUKE 5:1–11**

## Commentary

It seems that Jesus was good at noticing things. He noticed the four fishermen mending their nets, even though he was busy telling stories about God to the crowd. He noticed that they were not with the crowd and perhaps not even listening much to him. He noticed that they hadn't caught any fish, and finally he noticed their two fishing boats nearby, beached on the shore. All this gave him an idea. One boat out on the water would make an ideal stage to speak from. He could be easily seen and wouldn't be crushed by the crowd.

So one of the fishermen, Simon Peter, agrees to row Jesus out and be a steady hand on the tiller so that Jesus can stand and talk to the people. Jesus then suggests that they go fishing. Peter knows that the fish just aren't biting that day. The fishermen have tried since before dawn without success. However, out of respect for this holy man, he

agrees to one more go. To his surprise, the resulting catch is too much for him to cope with, and his partners, James and John, have to come to the rescue. Now Jesus is speaking to Peter in a language he can really understand. If Jesus can arrange such an incredible catch, then he is certainly someone worth honouring, listening to and following. Peter's life, and the lives of his three friends, will never be the same again.

### Visual aid

A small model boat and some netting will help you retell the story together.

### Activity idea

Use a reference book or the internet to research how many different types of fish are caught off the shore of your country. If you can cut out or print off some images, you might like to create your own aquarium collage of the variety of fish God has created. You could look up Psalm 104:24–25 for a good picture caption.

### Questions

- ▶ Have you ever been fishing or seen fishing boats on the shore by the sea? Describe the sights and smells.
- ▶ What sort of mood do you think Peter and his friends were in after their unsuccessful night on the lake?
- ▶ Why do you think Peter was prepared to lend Jesus his boat?
- ▶ What was it about Jesus that persuaded Peter to give fishing one more go that day?
- ▶ Why did Peter feel bad when he saw what happened?

### Prayer idea

A good catch of fish was vital for Peter and his friends, and God promises to answer our prayers for the things he knows are vital for us. Find some of the fishing net-like bags that contain washing powder tablets. Cut out some fish shapes from coloured card and, on each one, write or draw a prayer to God. Put the cards in the net. Later this week, go back and take out the fish. Talk about how God has answered your family prayers and which things you still need to go on praying about.

### Key verse

'Simon answered, "... But if you tell me to, I will let the nets down"' (Luke 5:5).

### Old Testament story link

**Genesis 12:1–5:** Abram is called to follow God and begin a new chapter in his life's story.

# Jesus ascends to heaven

<sup>4</sup> While [Jesus] was still with them, he said:

Don't leave Jerusalem yet. Wait here for the Father to give you the Holy Spirit, just as I told you he has promised to do. <sup>5</sup> John baptised with water, but in a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit.

<sup>6</sup> While the apostles were still with Jesus, they asked him, 'Lord, are you now going to give Israel its own king again?'

<sup>7</sup> Jesus said to them, 'You don't need to know the time of those events that only the Father controls. <sup>8</sup> But the Holy Spirit will come upon you and give you power. Then you will tell everyone about me in Jerusalem, in all Judea, in Samaria, and everywhere in the world.' <sup>9</sup> After Jesus had said this and while they were watching, he was taken up into a cloud. They could not see him, <sup>10</sup> but as he went up, they

kept looking up into the sky.

Suddenly two men dressed in white clothes were standing there beside them. <sup>11</sup> They said, 'Why are you men from Galilee standing here and looking up into the sky? Jesus has been taken to heaven. But he will come back in the same way that you have seen him go.'

**ACTS 1:4–11**

## Commentary

For 40 days after Easter, Jesus kept appearing to the disciples, both as a group and individually, sometimes up in Galilee but also in and around Jerusalem. During this time he was preparing them for the next stage in God's plan. Now it was over to the disciples, and those who would believe because of them, to bring people into the kingdom. It would start in Jerusalem and slowly spread outward to include nearby countries and eventually the whole world. But Jesus knew they would need help. He couldn't be with everyone, everywhere, all the time, even in his new body, so he told them to wait in Jerusalem for God's power to come. He would come back to them in a new, invisible form—God the Holy Spirit. They needed to be filled and surrounded with the Spirit in order to do this new work.

Interestingly, the disciples still didn't quite understand the scale of the task and were

thinking about a new king just for Israel. On the Mount of Olives above Gethsemane, where Jesus prayed just before his death, he finally left them. We call this 'the ascension', but it happened only so that Jesus could live in his disciples by his Spirit and, one day at the end of time, could return again when the job they were about to begin would be completed.

### Visual aid

Use a picture of some traffic lights. The 'stop, wait, go' colours are a simple way to remember the instructions that Jesus gave his disciples before he left.

### Activity idea

In today's story we hear Jesus' last important instructions to his disciples. Do you really think they were up to the job ahead of them? Talk together about this and make a list of all the arguments for and against trusting the future of the kingdom of God to this small bunch of believers.

### Questions

- ▶ What do you think Jesus meant by being baptised in the Holy Spirit?
- ▶ Do you think that the disciples really understood how big a plan they were caught up in?
- ▶ Why did Jesus need to go back to heaven?
- ▶ What did the angels mean about Jesus coming back in the same way that the disciples saw him go?

### Prayer idea

Jesus' strategy for growing the kingdom of God was to start where you are (in Jerusalem), go to those you know (Judea), then take the message to those people you don't know so well or even don't like (Samaria), and only afterwards set off into the whole world. On a piece of paper draw a set of concentric circles getting larger and larger. Put your family at the centre and then, in each circle further away from the centre, put the names of people who are close to you, neighbours and friends, people you are not so sure about, or people a long way away. Ask God for the power of the Holy Spirit to help you find practical ways of loving these people.

### Key verse

'The Holy Spirit will come upon you and give you power' (Acts 1:8).

### Old Testament story link

**Zechariah 4:1-9:** Zechariah receives a message from God about the power of God's Spirit and the promise to bless small beginnings.

# Faith begins at home

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Being a parent or carer is said to be one of the hardest jobs an adult will ever do. Whether you agree or not, the reality seems to be that it is a role that requires time, attention and a great deal of learning along the way.

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Various studies and research have suggested that the parent/carer has the primary influence upon a child overall. They also suggest that he or she holds the primary responsibility for encouraging and supporting the development of faith. This is a significant responsibility alongside all the other roles. It can be a challenge for parents who have grown up with a knowledge and understanding of the Christian faith, and maybe even more so for those who have not grown up with this knowledge.

Whatever a parent/carer's level of knowledge, there are some important points to recognise at the start.

- It is never too late to start exploring, discussing and living out faith in the home.
- There is no set or right way to live out faith in the home. Flexibility is a key aspect. What works for one family will not be right for another. It is important to find out what is most suitable for you and your family.
- The adults do not have to know all the answers. It is more about being on a journey together as a family. You may all be at different stages but can enjoy the opportunities to explore and discuss the journey as you learn more about faith together.
- It is not about measuring levels of faith and does not involve success and failure. Faith is an ongoing learning experience throughout life.
- It does not necessarily require you to add pressure to your already busy lives by spending numerous additional hours every week. It is possible to build faith into your existing everyday activities.
- All families are different. The term 'family' in this book refers to all backgrounds, sizes and shapes of families.
- The way in which faith is lived out in the home may vary depending on the ages, interests and learning styles of your family. The same is true when it comes to reading and exploring the Bible together.

The following sections will explore this more fully, offering some practical ideas and signposting resources available, but some suggestions to get started include:

- » Reading the Bible in a traditional style, followed by discussions about a passage or story.
- » Starting with an activity that introduces a Bible story. This might include food, craft, construction, challenges or quizzes.
- » Watching a film together. Many films and TV programmes have content that can open up an issue or trigger a faith-related discussion.

Whatever your preference, a key aspect is enjoyment. It may take a while, but it is worth making the time to find out what works best for your family, taking into consideration age, time and budget and being willing to be flexible and adapt as the seasons of family life change.

# Best-loved Bible passages

## The good shepherd

<sup>1</sup> You, LORD, are my shepherd.  
I will never be in need.

<sup>2</sup> You let me rest in fields of green  
grass.

You lead me to streams  
of peaceful water,  
<sup>3</sup> and you refresh my life.

You are true to your name,  
and you lead me  
along the right paths.

<sup>4</sup> I may walk through valleys  
as dark as death,  
but I won't be afraid.

You are with me,  
and your shepherd's rod  
makes me feel safe.

<sup>5</sup> You treat me to a feast,  
while my enemies watch.  
You honour me as your guest,  
and you fill my cup until it  
overflows.

<sup>6</sup> Your kindness and love  
will always be with me  
each day of my life,  
and I will live for ever  
in your house, LORD.

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## A prayer for forgiveness

<sup>1</sup> You are kind, God!  
Please have pity on me.

You are always merciful!  
Please wipe away my sins.

<sup>2</sup> Wash me clean from all  
of my sin and guilt.

<sup>3</sup> I know about my sins,  
and I cannot forget my terrible  
guilt.

<sup>4</sup> You are really the one  
I have sinned against;  
I have disobeyed you  
and have done wrong.

So it is right and fair for you  
to correct and punish me.

<sup>5</sup> I have sinned and done wrong  
since the day I was born.

<sup>6</sup> But you want complete honesty,  
so teach me true wisdom.

<sup>7</sup> Wash me with hyssop  
until I am clean and whiter  
than snow.

<sup>8</sup> Let me be happy and joyful!  
You crushed my bones,  
now let them celebrate.

<sup>9</sup> Turn your eyes from my sin  
and cover my guilt.

<sup>10</sup> Create pure thoughts in me  
and make me faithful again.

<sup>11</sup> Don't chase me away from you  
or take your Holy Spirit away  
from me.

<sup>12</sup> Make me as happy as you did  
when you saved me;  
make me want to obey!

<sup>13</sup> I will teach sinners your Law,  
and they will return to you.

<sup>14</sup> Keep me from any deadly sin.  
Only you can save me!  
Then I will shout and sing  
about your power to save.

<sup>15</sup> Help me to speak,  
and I will praise you, Lord.

<sup>16</sup> Offerings and sacrifices  
are not what you want.

<sup>17</sup> The way to please you  
is to feel sorrow deep in our  
hearts.

This is the kind of sacrifice  
you won't refuse.

<sup>18</sup> Please be willing, Lord,  
to help the city of Zion  
and to rebuild its walls.

<sup>19</sup> Then you will be pleased  
with the proper sacrifices,  
and we will offer bulls  
on your altar once again.

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