

## Biographical Study

With this, you will select a biblical person and research the Scriptures to study his or her life and character to find out what made it a spiritual success or failure. This can be done for any person in the Old or New Testaments, but it is especially helpful to understand the Old Testament.

### Preparation:

- To do this as a single lesson, begin with a person about whom there is a small number of references such as Andrew, Barnabas, or Mary of Bethany.
- To do a thorough biographical study on someone such as Jesus, Moses, or Abraham, this lesson will need extended to a unit (Consult the “Character Quality” lesson formats for different lessons to interchange in that unit).
- **Bible Person\***
  - Select someone who has either a weakness that your small group has or a strength that they need to develop.
  - In this study, try to get inside the person’s mind to see how they think, feel, and respond to circumstances. Attempt to see things from their point of view, hear with their ears, mingle with their friends, and fight with their enemies.
- **References** about that Person
  - Using your study Bible, concordance, topical Bible, biblical encyclopedia, or blueletterbible.org, find out the facts about that person’s life, birth, major events, accomplishments, what others said about them, death. Record all the references that give information about this person.
  - Look up historical background on their life (Which empire was reigning? What was the culture like?)
- **First Impressions**
  - Read through all the references you have compiled.
  - Write down basic observations, and list problems, questions, difficulties. Try to think about their life from their perspective.
- **Chronological Order**
  - Read through all the references again.
  - For major biblical characters, create a chronological outline of their life’s events.
  - For minor characters, outline the information of their life as chronologically as possible.
  - Look for any natural, major divisions in their life. Then look for and write down areas of growth and/or changes of attitude in that person’s life as time progressed.
- **Insights** into the Person
  - Read through all the references again.
  - Answer some questions about the person’s life.\*\*
- **Character Qualities**
  - Read through all the references again.
  - Study the references to see which character qualities\*\*\* you can observe in their life, and write out which references display those qualities.

All methods and ideas are taken from Rick Warren’s *Bible Study Methods*.  
Warren, Rick. *Rick Warren's Bible Study Methods: Twelve Ways You Can Unlock God's Word*. Zondervan, 2006.

- **Other Bible Truths**
  - Examine the person's life to see how it might exemplify other biblical lessons that you know to be true (i.e. "You reap what you sow," or "Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart" [Ps. 37:4]).
  - Use cross references in a study Bible or on [blueletterbible.org](http://blueletterbible.org) or find these
- **Summary**
  - In a few sentences write out what you think is the main lesson that is taught or illustrated by this person's life. Is there any one word that could describe that life? What was his or her outstanding characteristic?
- **Application**
  - Develop an application that is personal, practical, possible, and provable (see "Basic Principles for Bible Study") as you consider the following questions:
    - Did I see anything of myself in this person's life?
    - Did he show some of my weaknesses?
    - Did he reveal to me some of my strengths?
    - What impressed me most about this person's life?
    - Where do I fall short in this area?
    - What do I intend to do about it?

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## Lesson Format:

Title: The name of your **Bible Person**.

Introduction: Provide a short activity, ice breaker, or thought-provoking question to focus the group's thoughts on the topic for the day.

Lesson Body:

- Share the **summary** with the group and explain why you chose this person, what you're planning to look at in their life, how many weeks you plan to study them, etc.
  - Explain that in the study of this person's life, we will try to get inside the person's mind to see how they think, feel, and respond to circumstances. Attempt to see things from their point of view, hear with their ears, mingle with their friends, and fight with their enemies. Only when we do that well, will we understand how God was really working in their life.
- Go through the **references**.
  - If the person you are studying has too many to go through, pick the ones that are most pertinent to the main idea you chose for this lesson (the **summary**).
  - Provide any historical background or cultural context that is important for a correct understanding of these Scriptures.
  - Read through the references in **chronological order**.
- Discuss any of the **insights** that you found pertinent to the topic.
  - This is a great time for discussion. Ask the group the same questions that you answered.
  - *Respond to their thoughts! Don't just wait for the "right" answer.*
  - Discuss **character qualities** and/or **other Bible truths** if they are relevant to the main idea of the lesson.

Conclusion: Discuss the **application** of lessons learned from this person's life.

-Make sure you are prepared to give examples of how this passage applies to your life before you ask others.

-How will they remember this throughout the week?

-How will they understand the importance of this?

Note: You will have a *lot* of information from this study. You don't need to include everything. You need to do that study to get correct information, make good inferences, and accurately judge what would help the people in your group grow. Keep the lesson focused!  
Keep the extra information for your own benefit or a separate lesson.

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\*A Partial List of Biblical People

Major Men in the Bible

Abraham	Isaac	Nehemiah
Daniel	Jacob	Paul
David	Jeremiah	Peter
Elijah	Jesus	Pharaoh
Elisha	John (Apostle)	Samson
Ezekiel	Joseph (O.T.)	Samuel
Ezra	Joshua	Saul (O.T.)
Isaiah	Moses	Solomon

Minor but Important Men in the Bible

Aaron	Gideon	Melchizedek
Abel	Habakkuk	Mephibosheth
Abimelech	Haggai	Mordecai
Abner	Haman	Naaman
Absalom	Herod	Nathan
Achan	Hezekiah	Noah
Adam	Hosea	Philemon
Ahab	Jabez	Philip
Ahithophel	James	Pontius Pilate
Amos	Jehoshaphat	Prophets (any)
Ananias	Jeroboam	Rehoboam
Andrew	Joab	Shamgar
Apollos	Job	Silas
Apostles (any)	John the Baptist	Stephen
Aquila	Jonah	Timothy
Asa	Jonathan	Titus
Balaam	Judas Iscariot	Tychicus
Barnabas	Judges (any)	Uzziah
Barzillai	Kings (any)	Zechariah
Caiaphas	Laban	Zedekiah
Caleb	Lot	Zephaniah
Eli	Luke	Zerubbabel
Esau	Mark	
Gehazi	Matthew	

Prominent Women in the Bible

Abigail	Dorcas	Jezebel
Abishag	Elizabeth	Jochebed
Anna	Esther	Lea
Bathsheba	Eunice	Lydia
Deborah	Eve	Martha
Delilah	Hagar	Mary (Jesus' Mother)
Dinah	Hannah	Mary Magdalene

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Mary of Bethany  
Michal  
Miriam  
Naaman's Maid  
Naomi  
Priscilla

Queen of Sheba  
Rachel  
Rahab  
Rebekah  
Ruth  
Sapphira

Sarah  
The Shunammite  
Vashti  
Zipporah

“\_\_\_\_\_’s wife,” such as Lot’s wife, Potiphar’s wife, etc.

“\_\_\_\_\_’s daughter,” such as Pharaoh’s daughter.

Various widows and women encountered by Jesus, such as the woman at the well of Sychar.

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## \*\*General Questions for a Biographical Study

### Reputation

Who wrote what we know about this person?

What did people say about him? What did his friends say about him?

What did his enemies say about him?

What did his family (wife, children, brothers, sisters, parents) say about him?

What did God say about him?

Why do you think God allowed this person to be mentioned in the Bible?

### Tests of Character

What were his aims and motives?

What was he like in his home?

How did he respond to failure? Did he get discouraged easily?

How did he respond to adversity? Did he handle criticism well?

How did he respond to success? Did he get proud when praised?

How did he respond to the trivial and mundane things in life? Was he faithful in the little things?

How quickly did he praise God for the good or bad things that happened to him?

How quickly did he obey God when told to do something?

How quickly did he submit to God-ordained authority?

What was he like when he was alone with God?

### Background

What can you discover about his family and ancestry?

What does his name mean? Why was he given that name? Was it ever changed?

What was his home-life like? How was he raised? Where was he raised?

What were the characteristics of his parents? How did they influence him?

Was there anything special about his birth?

Where did he live? What was his everyday life like?

Was he exposed to other cultures? Did they affect him in any way?

What was the condition of his country politically and spiritually during his lifetime?

What kind of training did he have? Did he have any schooling?

What was his occupation?

How long did he live? Where did he die? How did he die?

### Significant Events

Was there any great crisis in his life? How did he handle it?

What are the great accomplishments for which he is remembered?

Did he experience a divine “call”? How did he respond to it?

What crucial decisions did he have to make? How did they affect him? Others?

Did any particular problem keep recurring in his life?

Where did he succeed? Where did he fail? Why?

How did the environment and circumstances affect him?

What part did he play in the history of God’s plan?

Did he believe in the sovereignty of God? (God’s control over all events)

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### Relationships

How did he get along with other people? Was he a loner? Was he a team person?  
How did he treat other people? Did he use them, or serve them?  
What was his wife (her husband) like? How were they influenced by their spouse?  
Who were his close companions? What were they like? How did they influence him?  
Who were his enemies? What were they like? How did they influence him?  
What influence did he have on others? On his nation? On other nations?  
Did he take care of his family? How did his children turn out?  
Did his friends and family help or hinder him in serving the Lord?  
Did he train anyone to take his place? Did he leave a disciple (a “Timothy”) behind?

### Personality

What type of person was he? What made him the way he was?  
Was his temperament choleric, melancholic, sanguine, or phlegmatic?  
What were the outstanding strengths in his character? What traits did he have?  
Did his life show any development of character as time passed? Was there growth and progression there?  
What were his particular faults and weaknesses?  
What were his particular sins? What steps led to those sins?  
In what area was his greatest battle: lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, or pride of life?  
What were the results of his sins and weaknesses?  
Did he ever get the victory over his particular sins and weaknesses?  
What qualities made him a success or failure?  
Was he in any way a type of Christ?

### Spiritual Life

What personal encounters did he have with God that are recorded in Scripture?  
What was his purpose in life? Did he try to bring glory to God?  
What message did he preach and live? Was his life a message for or against Christ/God?  
Did he live a separated life, distinct from worldly ways?  
What did he believe? What great lessons did God teach him?  
Why do you think God dealt with him the way he did?  
What was his attitude toward the Word of God? Did he know the Scriptures existing at the time?  
What kind of prayer life did he have? Did he have close fellowship with God?  
Was he bold in sharing his testimony? Was he courageous witness in times of persecution?  
How big was his faith in God? How did he show it? Did God give him any specific promises?  
Was he a good steward of what God had given him—time, wealth, talents?  
Was he filled with the Spirit? What were his spiritual gifts? Did he use them?  
Was he eager to do God’s will, willingly and without question?

\*\*\*Positive and Negative Character Qualities

Positive Characteristics to Look for in a Person

Honesty	Resourcefulness	Earnestness
Integrity	Observer	Balance
Dependability	Industry	Moderateness
Loyalty	Creativity	Chasteness
Dedication	Enthusiasm	Pureness
Faithfulness	Positiveness	Cleanliness
Trustworthiness	Lovingness	Modesty
Sincerity	Kindness	Cheerfulness
Diligence	Patience	Optimism
Orderliness	Self-denying	Confidence
Righteousness	Self-giving	Boldness
Fairness	Sacrificing	Courageousness
Obedience	Compassionate	Man/Woman of Faith
Courteousness	Meekness	Bravery
Respectfulness	Sympathy	Durableness
Reverence	Generosity	Humbleness
Deference	Forgiveness	Calmness
Gratefulness	Gentleness	Quietness
Thankfulness	Mercifulness	Independence
Wisdom	Peacemaking	Tolerance
Discernment	Submissiveness	Contentedness
Sensitivity	Agreeableness	Uncomplaining
Perspective	Considerateness	Flexibleness
Discreetness	Self-control	Uncompromising
Carefulness	Wholeheartedness	A Servant
Cautiousness	Determinate	Sense of Humor
Discipline	Stableness	Characterized by the
Thriftiness	Energy	Beatitudes
Good Stewardship	Zealousness	

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## Negative Characteristics and Sins to Look for in a Biographical Study

A Liar	Unforgiving	Procrastinator
Unfaithful	Harsh	Argumentative
Unreliable	Unsociable	Disrespectful
Libelous	Grudging	Manipulative
Slanderer	Annoying	Bigoted
Gossiper	Irritating	Worldly
Backbiter	Indifferent	A Worrier
Compromising	Apathetic	Rejoiced in Evil
Flatterer	Idle	Lusts for Power
Lazy	Cowardly	Self-righteous
A Sluggard	A Cop-out	Undisciplined
Shallow	Impulsive	Apostate
Hypocritical	Humorless	Fears Men
Crafty/Sly	Fickly	Presumptuous
Deceitful	Double-minded	Profane
Dishonest	Wavering	Legalistic
Unfair	Headstrong	Doctrinally Off
Insulting	Proud	Friend of the World
Coarse	Conceited	Angry without Cause
Rude/Gross	Stubborn	Ashamed of Christ
Impolite	Boastful	A Doubter
Rebellious	Sensual	Independent Spirit
A Busybody	immodest	Loves Men's Praise
Tyrannical	Gluttonous	Forgets God
Disobedient	A Drunkard	
Ungrateful	Reprobate	
Murmurer	Immoral	
Shortsighted	Unclean	
Lukewarm	Adulterous	
Halfhearted	Fornicator	
Foolish	Covetous	
Talkative	Greedy	
Idolatrous	Stingy	
Careless	Fearful	
Forgetful	Arrogant	
Wasteful	Dogmatic	
Cruel	Vain	
Inhuman	Jealous	
Selfish	Envious	
Malicious	Sarcastic	
Unkind	Scornful	
Insensitive	Blasphemous	
Negligent	Bitter	
Callous	Violent	
Prejudiced	Complaining	

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