BIBLE CHARACTER STUDIES
SESSION ONE
DEVELOPING CHRISTIAN CHARACTER THROUGH STUDYING GOD’S WORD

God gave you His Word, the Bible, so that He can have a personal relationship with you. As you get to know God better, you will become overwhelmed by God’s character—God’s love, mercy, and compassion; His courage and strength; His faithfulness and justice. You will also become more aware of your own failures as a human being—your selfishness, pride, and lack of concern for others. As a result, you will desire to see your own character changed so that you can become more like God.

The moment that you believed in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, Jesus saved you. At that moment, all of your sins were completely forgiven and you received God’s gift of eternal life. You became a “new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17). Becoming like God, however, is a process that takes time. There are two sides of this process. One side of this process is called sanctification. Sanctification means to become more holy or pure, to assimilate God’s character into your own life. God brings about sanctification in you through the work of the Holy Spirit. The other side of this process is your cooperation with the Holy Spirit that allows Him to do His work in you. There are certain things that you need to do that will free the Holy Spirit to work in you so that your character will become more like God. Some of these things include prayer, Bible study, telling other people about Jesus, and using your gifts and talents to serve God and other people. This second side of the process is called discipleship.

Read Philippians 3:1-14

Describe how Paul changed as a result of becoming a Christian.

Before Paul became a Christian, he was a zealous Jew. He had studied all of the Jewish teachings so that he understood them perfectly and followed them faultlessly. According to the standards of the Jewish religion, he would have been considered perfect and righteous. Paul was also a persecutor of Christians. According to Acts 8:1-3, Paul encouraged putting Christians to death and he had many Christian men and women put in prison because of their faith in Jesus.

When Paul became a Christian, he completely changed. Paul left behind his old way of life. Before Paul followed the teachings of Judaism, but now he followed Jesus. Before, Paul depended on his own ability to achieve righteousness. Now, Paul considered his own achievements to be rubbish and depended, rather, on the righteousness that comes through faith in Christ. Before, Paul hoped to achieve his goals through his own abilities. Now, all of Paul’s goals became related to his hope in Christ. Paul writes,

“I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection of the dead. Not that I have already obtained all of this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold
of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 3:10-14)

Paul has left behind his old way of life and has made the goal of his new life sanctification. He is focusing on becoming like God. In order to understand what God is like, Paul looks to Jesus who came to earth to reveal to us what God is like. “No one has ever seen God, but God the only Son, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known” (John 1:18). Paul compares the process of sanctification to running a race in order to receive a prize. This race is not like a sprint that is finished in only a few seconds. The race is more like a marathon. When marathon runners finish their race they often collapse into the arms of waiting teammates because the runners have used up all of their energy. Similarly, the race of sanctification requires great energy and endurance. Paul says that he only is able to complete the race because he is determined to win the prize. Only those who complete the race of sanctification qualify to win the prize of becoming like God.

One of the best ways for you to learn about God-like character is through character Bible studies. In a character Bible study, you focus on one specific person in the Bible. You learn about this person’s relationship with God and how this relationship with God changed the person. These people were changed by God and used by Him to do extraordinary things that they could not have done by themselves. None of them, however, achieved perfection in the present life. All of them continued to sin. Sometimes they even doubted God. But throughout their lives they kept running the race, reaching out for the goal that God had called them to achieve.

When you do a character Bible study, you will try to answer four main questions.
1. What was the person’s life like without a relationship with God?
2. How did the person’s relationship with God begin?
3. How did the person relate with God on an everyday basis? (Prayer, obedience, worship, etc.)
4. How did the person’s relationship with God change them? How did their life become different as a result of their relationship with God?

Application
1. Read about again about the change in Paul’s life in Philippians 3:1-14. If you would like more information, you also may want to read Acts 7:54-8:3; 9:1-31.
2. Based on your reading in the Bible and this session, answer the four main character Bible study questions about Paul.
3. Now apply what you have learned in this study to your own life by applying these questions to yourself:
   (1) What was your life like without a relationship to Jesus?
   (2) How did you meet Jesus?
   (3) How do you relate to Jesus on an everyday basis?
   (4) How has your relationship with Jesus changed your life?
SESSION TWO
HOW TO DO CHARACTER BIBLE STUDIES

The method for doing **character Bible studies** is similar to the basic Bible study method that you have already learned (See the **Basic Bible Studies** unit). The main difference is that you want to learn about the relationship between God and one specific person in the Bible so that you can apply these lessons to your own life. In order to do this, you will want to study as many Scriptures as possible about the person. In order to accomplish this,

1. Find out what Scriptures that you need to study in order to find out about the person. The section below on **Possible Character Bible Studies** is a good place to begin, but there are also many other people in the Bible that you may want to study about. Keep in mind that every Scripture may not be about the person that you want to study about; some Scriptures may be written by the person that you want to study about. For example, you can learn about David by studying the Psalms, or about Peter, Paul or John by studying their writings in the New Testament. In some cases there may be too many Scriptures for you to study every one of them. In that case, you will need to be selective about what Scriptures you study. For example, you may do a study of David based only on what is written about him in 1 and 2 Samuel, or a study of Paul based only on what is written about him in Acts.

2. Do a study of each of the Scriptures you chose using the study questions below.

3. Summarize the main things that you learn from your study of each of the Scriptures. Look for ideas that show up more than once. These may be some of the primary lessons that God wants to teach you.

4. Look for similarities between situations in the person’s life and situations in your own life. Are there any specific applications that you should make to your own relationship with God? Is there something specific that you need to do in response to God’s leadership? These also may be lessons that God wants to teach you through the character Bible study.

5. Make a specific plan to apply what God has taught you through this character Bible study.

**Questions for Character Bible Studies**

1. **Literal Meaning**: As you read the passage, use the following questions to try to understand its basic meaning.
   - Who was involved?
   - What happened? What ideas are expressed? What are the results?
   - Where did it take place?
   - When did it take place?
   - Why did it happen?
   - How are things accomplished?

2. **Spiritual Significance**: Now read the passage again along with your notes from the first section. Use this information to answer the following questions.
   - What was the life of this person like without (or prior to) a relationship with God?
   - How did this person’s relationship with God begin? What did God do to get this person’s attention? How did the person respond to God?
   - How did the person carry on his relationship with God? (Prayer, obedience,
service to God and other people, worship, etc.)

How did the person’s relationship with God change him? What kind of character has the person developed as a result of his relationship with God? Has God led the person to do something that he could not have done by himself?

3. It is not enough to learn the literal meaning and spiritual significance of the passage. For God’s Word to change you, you must be able to apply it to your life. Use the following questions to help you determine the practical application of the passage.

- Is there a sin for me to avoid?
- Is there a sin for me to turn away from?
- Is there a promise for me to claim?
- Is there a praise to give?
- Is there a prayer to pray?
- Is there an example for me to follow?
- Is there a command for me to obey?

**Possible Character Bible Studies**

The most important character Bible study that you can do is on Jesus Himself. You can learn about Jesus by studying the four gospels and what is written about Him elsewhere in the Old and New Testaments. Learning about Jesus is a lifetime study. There is too much too learn about Jesus at one time. You will want to use the **character Bible study method** to study various Scriptures about Jesus at different times throughout the rest of your life.

There are also many other people in the Bible who are possible subjects for character Bible studies. The following is a list of some important men and women in the Bible and Scriptures related to them. These are only examples—there are many more.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Scripture References</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adam and Eve</td>
<td>Genesis 2:4-3:24</td>
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<tr>
<td>Noah</td>
<td>Genesis 5:28-9:29; Hebrews 11:7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joshua</td>
<td>Exodus 17:8-9; 24:12-13; Numbers 13:1-14:9; Deuteronomy 31:1-8; Joshua 1:1-24:33</td>
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<td>Gideon</td>
<td>Judges 6:1-7:25; 8:22-35</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ruth</td>
<td>Ruth 1-4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Character</td>
<td>References</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nehemiah</td>
<td>Nehemiah 1:1-13:31</td>
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<tr>
<td>Esther</td>
<td>Esther 1:1-10:3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas</td>
<td>John 11:1-16; 14:1-6; 20:24-28</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stephen</td>
<td>Acts 6:1-8:1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Philip</td>
<td>Acts 6:1-7; 8:4-40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Acts 7:54-8:3; 9:1-31; 11:19-30; 13:1-28:31; Romans; 1 and 2 Corinthians; Galatians; Ephesians; Philippians; Colossians; 1 and 2 Thessalonians; 1 and 2 Timothy; Titus; Philemon</td>
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**Application**

1. Choose one person to do a character Bible study about from the list provided in the Possible Character Bible Studies section above.
2. Do a character Bible study on the person that you have chosen.
3. Make a specific plan to apply what you learn as a result of this character Bible study to your own life.
4. Share what you learn as a result of this character Bible study with one of more members of your small group.

**Reflection**

1. What have you learned about doing character Bible studies?
2. What questions do you still have about doing character Bible studies?
3. What is your plan to share what you have learned about doing character Bible studies with another person?