

## Personalities around Paul<sup>1</sup>

The apostle Paul has been called “the world’s greatest Christian” and “the world’s greatest missionary.”<sup>2</sup> The second half of the book of Acts in the New Testament is devoted to a narrative of his missionary journeys. Thirteen books (letters) of the New Testament out of the twenty-seven are attributed to him. Model Christian, profound theologian, persuasive apologist, zealous missionary, inspired author—Paul had a deep impact not only on his generation but on all subsequent generations.

Yet Paul did not labor alone. He served the Lord in partnership with scores of “lesser lights,” men and women who assisted the apostle in his great endeavors. It is to these “personalities around Paul” that we are devoting the next three months of our Sunday school studies.

Some weeks we will concentrate on one of the more prominent personalities around Paul: Silas, Timothy (twice), Luke, Titus. Other weeks will find us exploring pairs or trios of associated characters: Barnabas and John Mark; Aquila, Priscilla, and Apollos; Felix, Festus, and Agrippa; Philemon and Onesimus. During two of the weeks, we will study a whole array of minor characters, each daily Bible reading introducing a new personality. In general, we will study the characters in chronological order, beginning with those who influenced Paul (Saul) at the time of his conversion and concluding with those who helped Paul during his Roman imprisonments up to the time of his death.

While many of the daily Bible readings will involve events from the book of Acts, our focus throughout the quarter will be on characters, personalities. Teaching Bible characters gives the teacher “an opportunity to set forth in a clear fashion the modern counterpart to the experience of a Biblical person. The use of this type of subject matter helps to make the Scriptures come alive with real persons who faced real situations, and with whose lives, difficulties, hopes and relationships God was immediately concerned and intimately involved. . . . [Use of biography] is an excellent means of demonstrating the contemporary relevance of the Scriptures.”<sup>3</sup>

The following pages provide the following helps for teachers: (1) a set of twelve questions that you can use to evaluate each of the personalities we study during this quarter; (2) guidelines for handling a character study lesson; and (3) a sample teacher’s worksheet that can be used in compiling and organizing your ideas for a character study lesson.

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<sup>1</sup> Title borrowed from the book by D. Edmond Hiebert, *Personalities around Paul* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1973).

<sup>2</sup> J. Oswald Sanders, *Bible Men of Faith* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965), 198, 210.

<sup>3</sup> Lloyd M. Perry, *A Manual for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993), 106-107.

## Questions for Use in Studying Bible Characters<sup>4</sup>

1. What is the meaning of the individual's name? Check the individual's name in a good Bible dictionary, general reference Bible, or Bible encyclopedia. The meaning of the name will oftentimes give you a clue to the importance of the individual.
2. What is the ancestral background? By checking Bible helps and your Bible encyclopedia, trace the ancestral background of the individual being studied.
3. What significant religious and secular crises occurred in this life? List these including chapter and verse reference for each.
4. What advantages for personal development were enjoyed by this individual? Was he privileged to attend school? Did he have an opportunity to be exposed to wide cultural backgrounds?
5. What traits of character were manifested? List these and give chapter and verse reference for each.
6. What important friends did this person have? Who were the close companions of this Bible character?
7. What important influences did this individual exert? Did he influence other individuals, a church, or a nation?
8. What failures and faults occurred in his life? God had to use imperfect instruments. Tabulate these shortcomings and give chapter and verse reference for each.
9. What important contributions were made by this individual?
10. What one main lesson can be found within this life which is of special value to you?
11. What was the influence of the locality from the standpoint of geography, history, and culture upon this individual?
12. If this individual were in our present society, what would be his occupational status?

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<sup>4</sup> Lloyd M. Perry and Robert D. Culver, *How to Search the Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1967), 181-182.