

How to Do a Character-Trait Bible Study

Purposes and Principles

One aim in Christian living is to produce godly character traits in your life. Character-trait Bible study attempts to identify the specific traits the Bible commends and denounces. Then you can apply God's power to produce the positive traits and avoid the negative traits. Your ultimate goal in this type of Bible study is to become more and more like the Lord Jesus.

Character-trait Bible study involves discovering what the Bible teaches about a particular trait. It has much in common with other types of Bible study, such as biographical study and word study. It differs from biographical study in that you study traits or qualities rather than a person's entire life.

The tools you will need to carry out character-trait Bible study include a Bible, a concordance, and a Bible dictionary or a word-study book such as A. T. Robertson and James Swanson's *Word Pictures in the New Testament*. In addition, a topical Bible such as John Perry's *So That's in the Bible* may prove helpful. An English dictionary will be valuable. Also, you will need to understand the meanings of the following words.

Write the definition of each word.

A synonym is

An antonym is

If you are not sure about your definitions, check them in a dictionary.

As you carry out character-trait Bible study, remember these guidelines.

1. *Select a character trait in which you have a vital interest.* The trait may be one you already have but need to develop more fully. Don't focus on the trait because you are merely curious. Study a specific trait you genuinely want to improve.

What are two character traits you would like to develop in your life?

1.

2.

Name one negative character trait in your life you would like to learn about so that you can deal with it more effectively.

2. *Concentrate on one quality at a time.* Concentrating on one quality is like hunting with a powerful rifle. With that rifle you can drill one shot into your prey in order to down it. Concentrating on many traits is like hunting with a shotgun. You may spray the entire forest with buckshot, but you may not bag a single animal. When you focus on a single trait, you can take the time to make certain that you are solidly building this trait into your life.

Which character trait would you study first?

3. *Study with the prayerful anticipation that God will produce the trait's good features in you.* Don't be disappointed if the trait is difficult to master. Fiery tempers and loose tongues do not develop overnight. Neither will a solution to these character deficiencies appear quickly. Focus on the specific trait you need and continue with a prayer for and study of the trait until it is a part of your life.

When you study the trait you selected as your first choice, what results do you expect that study to produce?

4. *Realize that some of your negative qualities may be positive traits that are misused.* An undisciplined waste of time may actually reflect a disposition to show such compassion to others that you forget about the clock.

Is it possible that your negative trait you identified earlier is a positive trait misused? ☐ Yes ☐ No **If so, how can you correct the misuse?**

5. *Recognize that some of the positive qualities in your life may reflect a natural personality rather than a deep spiritual conviction.* A gentleness of outlook and disposition may come from a casual, lazy attitude that lacks initiative. The gentle spirit is good, but it needs to be based more specifically on a positive response to God's character.

Do not view character-trait Bible study as merely an effort to master facts in the Bible. View it as a means God can use to produce traits in your life that are pleasing to Him.

Using Bible References to Study Character Traits

You can do a character-trait Bible study and apply what you learn to your relationship with God, your life, your relationships with others, and the church. As you read the following steps, refer to “Character-Trait Bible Study.”

1. **Select a trait.** Identify the trait you want to study.
2. **Record the dictionary meaning.** Find and write the meaning of the word using a dictionary.
3. **List synonyms.** Examining synonyms can help you understand the quality.
4. **List antonyms.** If you have a dictionary that gives antonyms, it can be very helpful. Some traits may have two or more opposites. For example, the opposite of joy could be sorrow, worry, self-pity, or even resentment.
5. **Discover the Bible definition of and teachings about the trait.** Use a concordance or a topical Bible to list references of Scripture passages in which the word appears. Study each passage and write a brief statement of what that passage says about the trait.
6. **Summarize the Bible teachings.** Write a brief summary of the Bible teachings you discovered about this trait. Your summary may include information on how to produce or avoid this trait, as well as a statement from Scripture commenting on this trait.
7. **Reflect on your study.** Use the following questions to guide your thinking.
 - What are some benefits of this trait in my life and in the lives of others?
 - What are some problems this trait could produce in my life or in the lives of others?
 - Is there a promise or warning from God about this trait? If so, what is it?
 - What factors produce this trait?
 - What effect does this trait produce in the life of the church?
 - Is this trait a part of God’s character?
8. **Write applications.** Identify ways you can apply your study of this trait to your relationship with God, to your life, to your relationships with others, and to the church.

**Use the process you just examined to do a study of patience or endurance.
Use the worksheet “Character-Trait Bible Study” on the following pages to
complete your study.**

A dictionary defines *patience* as the state of bearing pain or trials without complaint. Other synonyms for the words are *steadfastness*, *perseverance*, and *stamina*. The opposite qualities include *impatience*, *instability*, and *wavering*.

The synonyms for *patience*, *perseverance*, and *endurance* are used several times in the New Testament. For example, in Luke 8:15 (NASB) *perseverance* is used to describe those who hear the Word and bear fruit. In Romans 5:3 Paul writes that tribulation brings about perseverance. James 1:3 teaches “that the testing of your faith produces endurance.” Finally, Romans 15:4 teaches that perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures bring hope to a believer’s life.

Character-Trait Bible Study

Trait:

Dictionary definition:

Synonyms:

Antonyms:

Bible definition and teachings:

Summary of Bible teachings:

Reflections:

What are some benefits of this trait in my life and in the lives of others?

What are some problems this trait could produce in my life or in the lives of others?

Is there a promise or warning from God about this trait? If so, what is it?

What factors produce this trait?

What effect does this trait produce in the life of the church?

Is this trait a part of God's character? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Ways to apply the study—

- to my relationship with God:

- to my life:

- to my relationships with others:

- to the church:

In applying the scriptural teachings you discovered, you may have asked questions like these: What spiritual benefit does patience produce? How does this affect my attitude toward trials in life? What can happen in the life of a Christian who does not have patience? What are the means of producing patience in my life? Can I ever have too much of this trait? How does God show this trait? What will this trait cause in my relationship to myself? To others?

Accompany each step in your study of patience or endurance with a prayer that God will develop the trait in you. As you study the trait, God can make its experience a reality in your relationships with Him, with yourself, with others, and with the church.

Using Bible Personalities to Study Character Traits

You have learned to use Bible references to study traits of character. You can also examine the lives of Bible characters to study traits. This method of study is similar to biographical study, but it differs in that you primarily study a single trait or characteristic.

The method for using a Bible character to study a trait is identical to the method for using Bible references. First you select the quality you want to study and find its definition in a dictionary. After you have listed a definition of the word, you also list synonyms and antonyms. Then you are ready to look for characters in the Bible who illustrate the trait you are studying. How can you find the names of Bible characters who show the trait you are studying? Sometimes you can draw from your general knowledge of the Bible. You may be surprised at the ease with which you can associate different Bible characters with specific character traits.

Match the traits on the right with the Bible characters on the left by placing the appropriate letter beside each name.

- | | |
|-----------------|------------------|
| ___ 1. Job | a. love |
| ___ 2. Achan | b. deceit |
| ___ 3. Sapphira | c. encouragement |
| ___ 4. Saul | d. devotion |
| ___ 5. John | e. greed |
| ___ 6. Ruth | f. wisdom |
| ___ 7. Peter | g. patience |
| ___ 8. Barnabas | h. benevolence |
| ___ 9. Elijah | i. instability |
| ___ 10. Solomon | j. forgiveness |
| ___ 11. Hosea | k. courage |
| ___ 12. Dorcas | l. jealousy |

Sometimes you can use a concordance to find specific passages that discuss the trait you are studying. Often these passages contain the name of a person who demonstrates those traits. When you search for passages about patience, you eventually come to James 5:11, which speaks of the “patience of Job” (KJV). Sometimes a topical Bible contains in its listings the examples of persons who demonstrate the topic it is presenting.

You can use a study of the life of Barnabas to develop the capacity for encouragement in your life. To begin the study, you should define encouragement as including stimulation, consolation, cheering, or exhorting someone. The King James Version describes Barnabas as “the son of consolation” (Acts 4:36), and the New American Standard Bible translates the same verse as “Son of Encouragement.” Depending on the Bible version you use, you can use a concordance to study either the word *consolation* or the word *encouragement*.

Because Barnabas is clearly a person who gave encouragement to others, you could study his life to learn about encouraging other Christians. You will find references to some of his actions in Acts 4:36; 9:27; 11:23-26. You will also find several references to the actions of Barnabas on the first missionary journey of Paul in Acts 13-14. After Paul and Barnabas separated, Barnabas spent time with John Mark (see Acts 15:36-39).

To use a Bible personality to do a character-trait study, use the same steps you used when you used Scripture references to study the character. However, you should limit your consideration to references to a single trait in the life of that character. When you have located and listed references to the trait in the person’s life, use the following reflection questions to help you identify ways to apply what you learned about the trait to your relationship with God, to your life, to your relationships with others, and to the church.

- What in this person’s life demonstrates the character trait I am studying?
- How did this character trait affect others?
- What final result did this character trait produce in this person’s life and in the lives of others?

Use Acts 4:36; 9:27; 11:23-26; 13-14; 15:36-39 to do a study of the trait of encouragement in the life of Barnabas. Use the worksheet “Character-Trait Bible Study” on the following pages to complete your study.

By studying these passages, you should have been able to summarize what they teach about encouragement. Then you should have been able to apply these teachings to the four areas of your life.

Adapted from Thomas D. Lea, *God’s Transforming Word: How to Study Your Bible* (Nashville: LifeWay Press, 1986), 128-41. Out of print.

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What factors produce this trait?

What effect does this trait produce in the life of the church?

Is this trait a part of God's character? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Ways to apply the study—

- to my relationship with God:

- to my life:

- to my relationships with others:

- to the church: