

I. Biblical Biographies from the Bible
Biblical Biographies: Who? Why? How?

“Let Us Also...”

Hebrews 12:1–3

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I enjoy giving a study on Hebrews because I get to tell you who I think wrote Hebrews. I don't think it was Paul but there are some Pauline-isms in it so I think it was someone close to Paul. Personally, I think there are three choices with one being someone we have no idea under the direction of Paul, therefore apostolic authority. Secondly, it was someone close to Paul perhaps someone like Apollos or thirdly, I believe it's the third volume of Luke's trilogy. I think it was Luke who actually wrote this under the direction of Paul for various reasons and it's an interesting epistle. Let's look at the first few verses.

Hebrews 12:1–2 says [1] *Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, [2] looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*

I am planning on walking you through a study on Biblical biographies with this being the first. In this study I will answer three questions – who we will study, what you study when you look at Biblical biographies and why Biblical biographies are worth studying. I will also point out what our focus should be as we study them. I want to substantiate why I'm doing this with this text from Hebrews. This text is one of my favorite texts because of a family story.

When our oldest was born I was pretty aggressive on family devotions and since I was taking Greek I felt like she ought to learn Greek. So we started with Greek and then went to the Shorter Catechism, then to all the creeds and confessions plus memory verses. Hebrews 12:1–2 was my oldest daughter's memory verses when I was attending Covenant College. When we would host people at our house one of my bridges to evangelism at our little dinners is I would tell them what we did as a family in our home at the dinner table and that was to have family devotions. Then I would tell them they could participate or at least listen in.

I would go through the reading of Scripture and then I would tell my daughter to share with those there what she was learning. Sometimes as a young child you can have a hard time separating what you are learning and I'm a proud daddy but the Lord has a way of humbling you when you have exalted yourself or exalting you when you have humbled yourself. The Lord me that day when I proceeded to ask my daughter 'We have learned the Apostles Creed, haven't we?' She said 'yes' and then I said 'We've learned Hebrews 12, right?' She said 'yes' so I asked her to share it with them and I'll never forget this moment because I think of this moment every time I come to this verse in Hebrews.

She said 'Therefore since we have a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also run with endurance the race that is set before us and let us set aside the sin that so easily entangles us, fixing our eyes on Jesus who for the cross that was set before Him endured it and despising the shame has sat down at the right hand of the Father, from then He shall come to judge the quick and the dead and I believe in the Holy Spirit the holy catholic church, the communion of saints...' So I think I set my daughter up for my own humility that day, but I love this passage.

This is a pivotal moment for Hebrews is unfolded the glories of the New Covenant that comes from the concealment of the New Covenant in the Old Covenant that has now revealed what the Old Covenant was all about in the New Covenant. There is Moses but now we have One better than Moses. There is David but now we have One better than David. There are the Levitical priests but now we have the Priest according to the order of Melchizedek and here is the glory of the New Covenant. Then He tells us that these Old Covenant saints have so much to teach us. Then we have Hebrews 11, this great chapter of faith and we see Noah, Enoch, Gideon, Samson, etc and saint after saint, like you on the other side anticipating Christ, saved by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone by their believing the promises of God. Then we see how they lived by faith.

Many preachers call Hebrews 11 the hall of faith but then after giving us this chapter he then goes to Hebrews 12 and we can't miss the first word of it – therefore. In other words, he is telling us the trophies of grace in Hebrews 11, but not exhaustively of all those in the Old Testament, but specifically selected ones by the Spirit of God, the writer of Hebrews says that there were there for you. So that we could learn from them, understand what it means to walk by faith and not by sight and how you walk by faith that has been secured as a gift of God's grace. We even have a better position for we are on the other side of the fulfillment of promises of God in the New Covenant.

What do you learn from these saints? When you take a look at them you learn how to deal with entangling sins. You learn how to shed everything that would keep you back from running the race to the glory of God to the best of your ability. Take a look at them with warts, pimples, beauty marks and all because He will show it to you. He is encouraging us to see what you can learn from them.

If I had the opportunity to disciple every person I would do what I plan to do in the Biblical biography studies. I would introduce you to models and mentors of the faith and those who have gone before you that can motivate you in the faith. I will also do biographies from the nativity. What can you learn from the Innkeeper, the shepherds, the wise men? God has recorded for us in His Word biographies and they are there for our encouragement, our edification, our conviction and our consolation. Here are a great cloud of witnesses all through the 66 books of the Bible.

One of the reasons I am doing this is because it's one way I can disciple from a distance yet be very personal by introducing you to these biographical narratives. I love history and many of you know that. In my library the majority of my history books are biographies. I think there is no better way to learn about history than to read about the people who were living it, making it, were enduring it and shaping it. When people say to me 'pastor you may need to rethink some of your theology or you are going to be on the wrong side of history' that has no impact on me whatsoever, because the people I read who make history never worry about being on the wrong side of history and that's why they make history. While I'll never be able to untie the latches of their shoes I do know that their heart's desire is to be on the right side of theology, which is the right side of God.

I will be honest with you because I will show you their warts and pimples as well as their beauty marks because the Bible records it. The Bible records it for a reason. I'm not going to take the easy way out on this. It would be easy to do biographies from Joseph, Daniel, Job, Moses but I'm not going there. Another thing we did in our family is when there was a movie worth seeing we'd go to that movie together as a family and then we'd talk about it. One of my

children said to me ‘Can’t we just watch the movie?’ But I’d say ‘No, because that’s what they want you to do but you need to filter it so that you can understand it.’

Here’s the deal. Everything that is being communicated to us comes through a world and life view where people have a perspective that they are communicating to you. It doesn’t matter whether it’s a song, book, play, TV show, movie etc. there is something that is being communicated visually and scenically that is impacting you. I noticed that the movies I was learning from and that kept me watching, not only had good leading men and women but they were what the business calls ‘character actors.’ Go try and find a John Wayne movie without Chill Wills, you won’t find one.

Everyone paid for the leading man or woman but those who usually made the story were the ones that people tended to skip over. Like Nathan in the story of David for we loved to go to David, but if you didn’t have Nathan you wouldn’t have David as the man that he is. What does the Bible say about Nathan? Where was the first revival that perhaps staved off to some degree the flood’s application for another generation? Enoch walked with God and was no more. Enoch is who we will look at in the next study. We will look at people like Gideon, Samson, Miriam, Deborah, Nathan the non-descript preacher and other characters that have so much to say to us. The Bible presents them to us with honesty. These are the people that usually fill in the blanks. We usually go to the leading men and women, understandably so and should, but we can’t miss these background characters that bring so much to us.

So those are some of the ‘who’ we will study but what are we going to study? When we are done with this I will recommend some books to you with one being by one of the greatest preachers who has ever lived – Alexander White – if you want to continue this study on your own. Howard Hendricks says there are 349 biographical sketches/studies in the Bible. Then Howard makes an amazing statement that I am going to take at his word, ‘Only 67 of those 349 finish strong.’ So their last mile was their best mile. What is there to learn from the 67 or the 200 plus who didn’t finish strong? The Bible knows there is a lot there for you to take in. Let me show you the passages that moved upon my heart to do this series.

I Thessalonians 1:5–6 says *[5] because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. **You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. [6] And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit.*** The saw the biographies of their lives being played out and they became models and mentors.

I Thessalonians 2:13–14 says *[13] And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. [14] For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews.* They learned from their brothers and grabbed a hold of some biographical messages.

Now let’s look at Hebrews 13 another one of my favorite passages. This verse was the foundation for my 3D leadership book that I wrote. Hebrews 13:7 says *[7] Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.* Learn from your leaders. Learn how to embrace it for the Lord. Now let’s look at 3 John.

3 John 1:10–11 says *[10] So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church.*

[11] Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God. In other words, there are things that you don't imitate and there are things you do.

You will see things in the life of biographical studies that are good by God's grace and you're also going to see things that aren't good. That's why when Paul tells Timothy to imitate him he always qualifies it this way; 'imitate me as I imitate Christ.' Don't imitate the sin that you see and there are no perfect models except Jesus. The Bible will be honest about this. So we'll know what is right to imitate and what is wrong to imitate and what is behind what we're imitating. Now let's look at I Corinthians.

I Corinthians 4:14-17 says *[14] I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. [15] For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. [16] I urge you, then, be imitators of me. [17] That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church.*

Paul is telling them to imitate him as he imitates Christ and to imitate Timothy who learned to imitate Christ from Paul so now they have two generations and they are about to have a third one which is the generation that learns of Timothy and Paul both. I believe two things effect you in your Christian walk. One is instruction and the other is imitation. People probably think I would say instruction and mentoring is more important than imitating and modeling and I would say yes and no. I believe that 80 percent of what you learn in life you learn by imitation.

My best illustration of this is when a child learns their first language. Those who taught you how to speak your native tongue were your parents and particularly your mother. When you were taught a foreign language you probably learned from vocabulary cards with the English word on one side and the foreign language word on the other. When you were born you learned a foreign language without a vocabulary card and you were taught by your mother who was probably never trained to teach a foreign language much less a foreign language without vocabulary cards. Most parents have already done the most difficult feat possible by teaching their baby a foreign language with no point of reference. Why was this able to happen?

It happened for two reasons. One is a mother's particular gift. Yes I am not an egalitarian. I do not believe men and women are interchangeable but I do believe they are equal. A mother's love and leadership is different than a father's love and leadership. One is not superior to the other but both are needed and both are different. We are different and it's not just biologically. We use words differently, we see things differently, we function differently and our children need that. They need that father's love as well. Paul says to those in Corinth that he was a father to them.

I know leaders are imperfect but I thank God for the constellation of leaders, ordained, formal and informal leaders in the Lord's church, small group leaders, congregational community leaders, elders, deacons, pastors, leaders upon leaders, male and female. My favorite time of the day is the gloaming. It is when the sun has gone down but the rays are still shining. I love the breeze that comes with it and the sights of the shadows that are lengthening. I like to stop, sit and think in the quietness of that moment of the day. Then as the darkness descends the constellations comes out and it's just absolutely awe-inspiring to me. I know the God that made that happen! He created the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the evening and the stars, the constellations.

There is a constellation of leadership that if you stop, think and look, you can learn from. You can learn from your own father. Fathers, please don't abandon your role as a father. I know you think they are not learning but they are and they are not going to learn from you if you need to be like them. We need our young and our youth to grow up to be like you. I couldn't wait to wear my daddy's clothes. I'm glad he didn't feel the necessity to wear mine. We want to put on the life of our fathers not only in our family but in the family of God, the church and our fathers and mothers from church history, from these Biblical narratives/biographies.

Just like my own father was not perfect for there were things that I would not pick up but there was so much for me to learn and so it is of these Biblical (fathers) I am learning from. Paul said "I was a father and here now is my son Timothy who learned from me is going to become a father for you, learn from him." Now I'd like to look at I Corinthians 11 which perhaps is my favorite one.

I Corinthians 11:1 says *[1] Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.* Find your models. Learn from them as they followed Christ and where they are able, stand on their shoulders. Do not fall prey to the arrogance of modernity that dismisses the past. Give grandparents, parents, spiritual grandparents and spiritual parents a voice in your life. Observe their life and learn from their life. Know their life. God has given us 349 of them with 67 of them finishing strong. I think these secondary people that we will be looking at have a primary impact.

As we look at these people we are going to be instructed as to what to imitate in life. It is just like that little baby who learns a foreign language from a father's commitment and a mother's gifts, for we are born imitators. That's why the world tries to get these celebrities in front of you. I want you to find heroes. Celebrities are parasites that live off of a culture and ultimately destroy the people that pattern their life after them. Heroes are those who make cultures worth living in. None of them are going to be perfect but find those whom the Lord has used and is using. You can find them in the church and its leadership and you can extend that constellation to church history, to Biblical biographies and learn from them.

Why? Here are two reasons and this is how I will conclude this study. Number one is because of Biblical content. The Biblical biographies are found in the Scripture. II Timothy 3:16-17 says *[16] All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, [17] that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.* So if God put 349 biographies for us to know in His Word then He has them there to profit us – what went right and what went wrong. It is there to instruct us. It is there for reproof, to change us. It is there for correction, to redirect us. They are there to equip us and train us in righteousness.

God put this in His Word through human authors and some of them are the ones we are going to study. Whatever God put in His Word through His Spirit working in these human authors is profitable for us. It is for our instruction so that we can imitate what we learn and fix our eyes on Jesus, not the models. The models are sign posts who are pointing us to Jesus. When they point us away from Jesus, we don't want to go that way. Where they are pointing us to Jesus is where we want to learn from them.

There are books that tell preachers not to do what I intend to do. It is called rabbinical preaching. It's called moralism but it's only moralism if I don't connect these characters to Jesus. I want you to know what Paul wants you to know which is to imitate me as I imitate Christ. How did Paul come to imitate Christ? He says 'I am what I am by the grace of God.' I want you to see in their life not simply something to mimic but to know where it comes from,

who it comes from, how it came to them and what got in their life when they took their eyes off of Jesus which you don't want in your life. I believe they are in His Word to point us to Christ.

I am not telling you to be them but I will tell you for instance about Daniel, what he does and then who made Daniel (yet not in this series). It was the grace of God and how that grace worked in his life. We will learn its origin and its capstone. The foundation of the biographies of the Bible that point us to Christ comes from Christ. The capstone of those whom we will be studying are sending us to Christ.

The second reason why we're going to study these biographies is because of Biblical intent. Why are they there? They are there to give you hope. Three of the most prolific writers of the Bible are Moses, David, and Paul – murderer, adulterer, manslaughter. If God does that with a religious terrorist, like Paul, what might He do yet with us? If God is willing to do that with a man who takes someone's life out of his own tempestuous anger like Moses, what might He do with us? If God can take a traitor like Peter, three times, then what might He do with us? If God can take that same Peter who later would preach a false gospel and have to be corrected by Paul, what yet might He do with us?

I want us to take the Bible content and use it for its intent. One of those intentions is to tell us that God saves sinners and He uses saved sinners whom He makes saints by the blood and righteousness of Christ. Secondly, I want you to have three 'L's' in your life – love, learn and live. Love Jesus, His Word, and everything Jesus loves which He tells you in His Word. Learn Jesus from His Word by the teacher of the Holy Spirit and then fix your eyes on Jesus. Use models and mentors but live your life for Christ.

I would like to quote Jim Elliot who said 'One life will soon be passed. Only what's done for Christ will last.' If you want those three 'L's' to be lived out then you need the three 'M's' which are models (to imitate), mentors (for instruction) and motivators (for inspiration). In this series I will introduce you to some imperfect, God-given and recorded models and mentors and by God's grace will motivate you as we get into the Scriptures. Not only will we learn about Jesus who saved them, was patient with them, molding them, and making them as models, mentors and motivators but some of them are types of Christ for us. They are there to tell us something about Jesus so we will learn even more about our Savior. Please join me in this journey.

The first Biblical biography we will look at in our next study will be Enoch – the first revival, walked with God, who was no more. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the time we could be together in Your Word. Thank You for the evening sacrifice of praise and worship. We thank You for those who lead us. We ask that You would bless us and saturate us with Your Spirit and Your Word, use others in our lives and use these biographies that we will study from Your Word to challenge us to imitate Christ through these sign posts, to learn of Christ from these mentors and to be inspired and motivated to follow Christ. Here I am Lord, send me. I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.