

# How to Study Biblical Narrative

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## TWO COMPLEMENTARY WAYS OF STUDYING BIBLICAL STORIES

1. Focus on Literary Aspects: We use boldface, italics, and underlining to make sure we get a point across. The biblical writers did not do it that way, but they did have techniques. You'll learn how to identify the literary techniques of the human authors, and then you will better participate in the unfolding of the larger storyline.
2. Focus on Characters: You'll learn how to relate to a character, and then you will better participate in the emotional and spiritual aspects of that character's encounter with Jesus.

### 1. LITERATURE – FOCUSED STUDY

**THEMES.** Do you see **Themes** running through stories?

What themes and patterns are repeated in the narrative? In particular, the ending of each narrative is very important because it ties up various themes.

*Finding Nemo*: Three scenes revolving around the motif of, 'Nemo, you can't do this!'

Go to Youtube, enter: "Finding Nemo swimming out to sea"  
0.00 – 1.25

Go to Youtube, enter: "Finding Nemo full whale scene"  
2.15 – 6.00

Go to Youtube, enter: "Finding Nemo keep swimming"  
0.00 – 1.25

In *Finding Nemo*, how does this theme of 'Nemo, you can't do this!' develop over the course of the whole story? What does it mean for the story?

1 <sup>st</sup> : Marlin at the reef	2 <sup>nd</sup> : Marlin in the whale	3 <sup>rd</sup> : Marlin outside the fishnet

In Luke 5:1 – 16 (below), what is repeated in the narrative? What is this calling our attention to?

<sup>5:1</sup> Now it happened that while the crowd was pressing around him and listening to the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret; <sup>2</sup> and he saw two boats lying at the edge of the lake; but the fishermen had gotten out of them and were washing their nets. <sup>3</sup> And he got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little way from the land. And he sat down and began teaching the people from the boat. <sup>4</sup> When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.' <sup>5</sup> Simon answered and said, 'Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but I will do as you say and let down the nets.' <sup>6</sup> When they had done this, they enclosed a great quantity of fish, and their nets began to break; <sup>7</sup> so they signaled to their partners in the other boat for them to come and help them. And they came and filled both of the boats, so that they began to sink. <sup>8</sup> But when Simon Peter saw that, he fell down at Jesus' feet, saying, 'Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!' <sup>9</sup> For amazement had seized him and all his companions because of the catch of fish which they had taken; <sup>10</sup> and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, 'Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men.' <sup>11</sup> When they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

<sup>12</sup> While he was in one of the cities, behold, there was a man covered with leprosy; and when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and implored him, saying, 'Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.' <sup>13</sup> And he stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, 'I am willing; be cleansed.' And immediately the leprosy left him. <sup>14</sup> And he ordered him to tell no one, 'But go and show yourself to the priest and make an offering for your cleansing, just as Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.' <sup>15</sup> But the news about him was spreading even farther, and large crowds were gathering to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. <sup>16</sup> But Jesus himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray.

**ECHO.** Do you hear an **Echo** of another passage?

An echo is a parallel or allusion to previous biblical literature or historical events that help reinforce expectations or provide emotional charge. For example: a concert performance of Puff Daddy singing *I'll Be Missing You*, but featuring Sting singing, *Every Breath You Take*. (Find it on Youtube if you'd like)

Sting's <i>Every Breath You Take</i>	Puff Daddy's <i>I'll Be Missing You</i>

Compare Luke 5:12 – 16 with Haggai 2:11 – 13 and Leviticus 13:1 – 4, 45 – 46:

Haggai 2:11 Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Ask now the priests for a ruling: <sup>12</sup> 'If a man carries holy meat in the fold of his garment, and touches bread with this fold, or cooked food, wine, oil, or any other food, will it become holy?'' And the priests answered, 'No.' <sup>13</sup> Then Haggai said, 'If one who is unclean from a corpse touches any of these, will the latter become unclean?' And the priests answered, 'It will become unclean.'

Leviticus 13:1 Then the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, <sup>2</sup> 'When a man has on the skin of his body a swelling or a scab or a bright spot, and it becomes an infection of leprosy on the skin of his body, then he shall be brought to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons the priests. <sup>3</sup> The priest shall look at the mark on the skin of the body, and if the hair in the infection has turned white and the infection appears to be deeper than the skin of his body, it is an infection of leprosy; when the priest has looked at him, he shall pronounce him unclean...<sup>45</sup> As for the leper who has the infection, his clothes shall be torn, and the hair of his head shall be uncovered, and he shall cover his mustache and cry, 'Unclean! Unclean!' <sup>46</sup> He shall remain unclean all the days during which he has the infection; he is unclean. He shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp.

Haggai 2:11 – 13 Leviticus 13:1 – 4, 45 – 46	Luke 5:12 – 16

**STRUCTURE:** Can you discern a **Literary Structure or Pattern** here?

Structures are literary patterns giving shape to the narrative. Examples include: parallels and pairings, repetition, chiasms. Luke pairs incidents together, linked by a key word or concept.

*Luke 5:1 – 11 in the context of Luke 4:14 – 6:11*

Passage	Jesus' Action	Disciples' or Others' Action	Opponents' (Pharisees/Scribes) Action
4:14 – 30	Preaches – Nazareth synagogue	Reject – they hate Gentiles; 'filled with rage'	
4:31 – 44	Preaches – Capernaum synagogue	Reject – they want to keep him to themselves	
5:1 – 11	Calls to follow	Falls, leaves to follow	
5:12 – 16	Heals, cleanses uncleanness	Falls	
5:17 – 26	Heals, forgives sin	Gets up	'Who is this who speaks blasphemies?'
5:27 – 28	Calls to follow	Gets up, leaves to follow	
5:29 – 32	Heals; "I have come to heal sick"	Eat with Jesus	'Why do you eat with sinners?'
5:33 – 39	Calls to leave the old for new	Eat with Jesus	'Why do your disciples eat and not fast?'
6:1 – 5	Calls to leave the old for new	Sabbath with Jesus, eat	'Why do what is not lawful on Sabbath?'
6:6 – 11	Heals	Sabbath with Jesus; gets up	Can't answer 'What is lawful?'; 'filled with rage'

Jesus:

- What is Jesus doing?
- What's the relationship between Jesus calling people and Jesus healing them?

Disciples

- When do the disciples enter the story? How do they respond to Jesus?
- What do they learn about Jesus as the story unfolds?

Opponents/Pharisees

- When do the opponents/ Pharisees enter the story?
- How do their objections intensify? Why?

*Luke 4:14 – 6:11 in the context of Luke's Gospel*

What's at the end of the Gospel? How does the story end? What does that mean for us?:

## 2. CHARACTER – FOCUSED STUDY

Bible Story	Your Story – Questions, Observations, Interpretations
<p>1. <b>Entrance:</b> How does the character enter the story?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Who are the characters?</li> <li>Where does the story take place?</li> <li>How do they come to Jesus?</li> <li>What do they believe, want, or do?</li> </ol>	<p>How are YOU entering the encounter with Jesus?</p>
<p>2. <b>Encounter:</b> What happens to the character?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How do they interact with Jesus?</li> <li>What kind of words or phrases seem to be repeated or emphasized? Why?</li> <li>What obstacles (internal or external) do they overcome in order to meet with Jesus?</li> <li>What obstacles has Jesus overcome to meet with the character? How does Jesus reach out to them? Does he make it hard or easy for the person to believe? Why?</li> <li>What does Jesus do for them, or to them?</li> <li>What does Jesus say or teach?</li> <li>What kinds of emotions might the character feel in the encounter with Jesus? They could have multiple feelings...</li> <li>Does the character choose to believe in him or not? What are their inner choices?</li> <li>What does the character learn about Jesus' character, and therefore, God's character?</li> </ol>	<p>What is being brought up in you as you read the story and encounter Jesus through it?</p> <p>What words stand out to you, or seem to have 'depth'?</p> <p>What hopes, fears, memories, or experiences might God be bringing up for you?</p> <p>* What has Jesus overcome to reach you?          * What must Jesus overcome to work through you to reach others?          * If you are not a believer, how do you sense Jesus inviting you?</p> <p>What might this mean about what Jesus could do for you? In you? Through you?</p> <p>How does that feel for you? In what way is Jesus attractive? Challenging?</p> <p>What would it mean to choose towards Jesus? What are your next steps?</p> <p>What have you learned about Jesus' character, and therefore, God's character?</p>
<p>3. <b>Exit:</b> How does the character leave the story? How do their lives reflect a change? Or, what did they miss?</p>	<p>If they are healed, what does their healing represent in your life? If they are changed, how does their change represent a possibility for you?</p>

Text: Luke 5:1 – 11	Questions, Observations, Interpretations
<p><b>Entrance</b></p> <p><sup>5:1</sup> Now it happened that while the crowd was pressing around him and listening to the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret; <sup>2</sup> and he saw two boats lying at the edge of the lake; but the fishermen had gotten out of them and were washing their nets.</p>	
<p><b>Encounter</b></p> <p><sup>3</sup> And he got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little way from the land. And he sat down and began teaching the people from the boat.</p> <p><sup>4</sup> When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.' <sup>5</sup> Simon answered and said, 'Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but I will do as you say and let down the nets.'</p> <p><sup>6</sup> When they had done this, they enclosed a great quantity of fish, and their nets began to break; <sup>7</sup> so they signaled to their partners in the other boat for them to come and help them. And they came and filled both of the boats, so that they began to sink.</p> <p><sup>8</sup> But when Simon Peter saw that, he fell down at Jesus' feet, saying, 'Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!' <sup>9</sup> For amazement had seized him and all his companions because of the catch of fish which they had taken; <sup>10</sup> and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, 'Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men.'</p>	
<p><b>Exit</b></p> <p><sup>11</sup> When they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.</p>	