

“Students Living By the Book”
Session #2 – Making Observations

This is a simple, step-by-step explanation of how to glean truth from Scripture.

- This gives you a framework for studying the Bible at your own pace

Session #2:

1. Step 1: Observation

- *“What do I see?”* --you are a detective looking for clues, no detail is trivial.

Sherlock Holmes – *“You see, but you do not observe?”*

Psalmist was praying for the powers of observation:

“Psalm 119:18” – Open my eyes that I may behold wonderful things from Thy law.”

This session provides a number of pointers to boost your powers of observation when you read Scripture.

2 Reasons people fail in Bible Study:

- They don’t know how to read
- They don’t know what they are looking for.

Not meant to be insulted but meant to instruct you. Our culture has made a radical shift in the last century –

- **From a word-based society of readers to a**
- **An image-based society of viewers**

The media of our time are movies, television, and the Internet, not books. As a result, unlike our forebears of just a few generations ago, **we don’t know how to read. To a large extent, we have lost the art.**

Example: 11 different occasions Jesus said to the most well-read people of His time, “Have you never read?”

Of course they had. They had spent all their lives reading. **But they didn’t understand what they had read.**

b. You Must Learn to Read

3 suggestions to help you learn how to read:

i. Learn to Read Better and Faster

- Distinct correlation between your ability to observe Scripture and your ability to read.
- **So anything you can do to improve your reading skills will be instrumental to improving your observation skills.**
- **Illustration:** suppose you want to study the book of Ephesians
 - It takes you 1 ½ hours to read through 6 chapters
 - If you learned to read it in 15 minutes and also doubled your comprehension – imagine the fruit.
 - Then for the same time—1 ½ hour—you would increase your effectiveness fourfold.
- **Book recommendations**
 - Mortimer J. Adler – *How to Read a Book*
 - Norman Lewis – *How to Read Better and Faster* (workbook promising to help you read 50-60% faster with better comprehension)
 - How to read for main ideas, how to think along with the author, how to read with a questioning mind.

ii. Learn to Read as for the First Time

- ***Familiarity breeds contempt – but with the Bible familiarity often breeds ignorance.***
- One sets themselves up for failure when they approach a passage and say, ***“Oh, I know this one already.”***
 - **One of the great killers in Bible Study is the statement, “I already know that.”**
- **Reading a text as if you’d never seen it before in your life is quite a discipline.**

- Suggestion: try multiple translations for freshness

iii. Read the Bible as a Love Letter

- **Illustration:** observe a love struck individual pour time and attention over a letter from his sweet heart.
 - **He wouldn't mumble:**
 - “Oh another letter from _____!”
 - “I guess I better read it.”
 - **He doesn't sit down, read the first paragraph, and then say, “Well, that's enough for today. I can check that item off of my list.”?**
- **No way! → That person reads every single letter four or five times.** In the morning, before bed, in between classes.
- **Why? → Because they are in love with the person who wrote the letter.**
- **Such is the way to come to the Word of God.** Read it as though it were a love letter to you.
- **If people read Scripture with anything like the same concentration, we would be a race of spiritual giants.**

THINK ABOUT IT: God wanted to communicate with you in the 21st century—and He wrote His message in a book.

2. Six Things to Look For

Illustration: Doctor looks down your throat and says, “Aha! → Right away he knows what's wrong. I could look down your throat forever, but it would do no good, because I don't know what I'm look for.

- **The same is true for the Bible – We must know what we are looking for.**
- **6 Clues to Watch for in Scripture → Memorization Tactic** – Your Hand
 - a. Things that are Emphasized -- Thumb

- The Spirit of God uses a number of tools to emphasize ideas, events, people, and other material in Scripture.
- **4 of those tools**
 - **Amount of Space** – *a book can emphasize something by devoting a large portion of space to it.*
 - **Example:**
 - **Genesis 1-11**, Creation, Fall, Flood, Babel, etc.
 - **Genesis 12-50**, focus on the lives of 4 individuals: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph
 - **Emphasis:** the most important thing in the book is the family that God chose to be His people.
 - **Matthew** – 342 of 1062 verses are discourses of the Savior (1/3)
 - **Some gospels take much more space on the crucifixion than they do the other events in the life of Christ** (Gospel of John)
 - **Epistles of Paul** – often see great balance between theology and practice (Ephesians and Colossians)
 - **But in Romans 11 chapters are doctrine while 5 are practice.**
 - **Stated Purpose** –
 - Some writers tell us straight out what they are up to.
 - **John 20:30-31**
 - **Proverbs** – Solomon tells the reader why he ought to read the book – Proverbs 1:2-6) – whatever else you expect from the book, you know that it is going to emphasize wisdom.
 - **Order** –
 - **Example:** Genesis 2 – God chose Adam and Eve “to cultivate and keep” the garden.
 - Gen 3 the couple sin
 - Some say work is a result of sin

- But the order of events in Genesis disallows that interpretation.
 - **Luke 6:14-16** – notice order in Christ calling His disciples:
 - Simon Peter and Andrew, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew, Matthew and Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot.
 - **Look for order in a text, it may yield major insights.**
- **Movement from Lesser to the Greater – vice versa –**
- Not far removed from ORDER – **a writer will build to a climax, where he presents some key information.**
 - **Example:** 2 Samuel 11-12 – *most crucial event in David's life* (sin with Bathsheba) serves as a pivot for the rest of the book
 - Everything before leads up to these chapters,
 - Everything afterwards goes down from there
 - **Acts 2 – pivot for rest of the book**
 - It's the one chapter without which you couldn't have the rest of the book.
 - Everything grows out of what happens there. It is Luke's way of emphasizing that material.
- **So look for what is EMPHASIZED** – the writers have gone to trouble to hang a sign out that says, "*Hey this is important.*"
- b. **Things that are Repeated – Pointer Finger**
- Probably no tool of teaching more powerful than repetition.
 - ***Have you ever noticed how often Jesus repeats things to His disciples?***

- 9 times in Gospels – “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”
- Revelation – Christ had John record the same thing to the 7 churches.
- **You get the impression that Jesus wanted his disciples to pay attention to what He had to say.**
- **A Few Categories of Repetition**
 - **Terms, Phrases, and Clauses** –
 - **Example: Psalm 136:1-2**
 “Give thanks to the Lord for He is good.
 His love endures forever.
 Give thanks to the God of gods.
 His love endures forever.”
 - **“His love endures forever” – 26x** – we get the bottom line of the psalm.
 - **Example: Hebrews 11—God’s Hall of Fame, or Hall of Faith**
 - **“By faith” – 18x**
 - Referencing different people living in different times under different circumstances – **but all lived by faith.**
 - **Example: 1 Corinthians 15 – “if” → 7x** in vv. 12-28 (Critical Importance of Christ’s Resurrection)
 - **“IF”** emphasizes the fact that everything we believe is conditioned on the resurrection.
 - **Characters** –
 - **Example: Barnabas** (original name—Joseph—given name Barnabas—**“son of Encouragement”**—which is fitting)
 - Luke brings Barnabas into the story at strategic points as a model of spiritual mentoring.
 - **Whenever someone in the early church needed a hand, up would pop Barnabas:**

- Saul—Acts 9:27
- The believing Gentiles in Antioch—Acts 11:22
- John Mark—Acts 15:36-39

- Incidents and Circumstances —
 - **Example: book of Judges** – author begins each section with *“then the sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.”* – upon which God would appoint a judge – the heart of the problem is exposed in the conclusion – *“Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” (21:25)*
 - **Example: Gospel of Matthew – tension between Jesus and the Pharisees**
 - Calling attention to the power struggle going on between the old system of self-righteousness and the new way of salvation in Christ.

- Patterns –
 - **Example: life of Joseph and life of Jesus**
 - The experience of Israel and that of Jesus
 - Saul and David in 1 & 2 Samuel – whatever Saul does wrong, David does right.
 - The juxtapositions show that although God acceded to the people’s pleas for a king (Saul), it would later be David who reflected God’s “own heart”

- NT use of OT passages –
 - **If the Spirit of God compels a NT writer to recall a passage from the OT, it’s likely because He wants to emphasize that portion of God’s Word.**
 - **Example: Jonah** – some people in early church didn’t want inclusion of the book
 - Jesus’ reference to the book makes it indispensable to divine revelation (Matt 12)

- *Example:* Hebrews reliance on OT – *it would be hard to imagine what that book would have to say without such references.*

- In short, whenever something is repeated mark it down. It's not because the writer didn't have anything else to say. It's their way of pointing out matters of critical importance.

c. Things that are Related – *Middle Finger*

- Those things that have some connection, some interaction with each other. Look for ways things are *tied together*.

- **3 Kinds of Relationships in Scripture:**

- **Movement from the General to the Specific**
 - Relationship between the whole and its parts, b/w the big picture and details.
 - *Example: Genesis 1 – “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”*
 - But God didn't stop there—He goes on to provide specifics.
 - *Example: Matthew 6 – “Be careful not to do your “acts of righteousness” before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.”*
 - General principle then moves to 3 specific illustrations: *giving (vv.2-4), praying (vv.5-15), and fasting (vv.16-18).*
 - **Whenever you come across a broad general statement in Scripture, look to see whether the writer follows with specific details that flesh it out in some way.**
- **Questions and Answers**
 - *Questions are one of the most powerful tools of communication. Asking questions forces us to think.*

- The Bible implores strategic questions and helpful answers.
 - **Example: Romans – written as a legal treatise**—Paul constantly asking questions and then answering them.
 - 6:1 – “*What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?*” → “*By no means!*”
 - **Sometimes the question itself carries so much weight that it needs no answer**
 - **Example: Job** – barrage of questions God fires at Job -- “*Now gird up your loins like a man, and I will ask you, and you instruct Me!*” (38:3). – severe sarcasm
 - God launches into a series of questions for 2 chapters—questions that carry their own answer.
 - **Example: Christ questioning His disciples**
 - “*who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?*” Matthew 6:27
 - “*why are you timid? How is it that you have no faith?*” Mark 4:40
 - “*So you men could not keep watch with Me for one hour?*” Matthew 26:40
 - **Questions and answers demand your attention**
- Cause and Effect
- In Scripture we find all sorts of cause-effect relationships ricocheting around the text.
 - **Example: Acts 8:1** – “*On that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem.*”
 - “*What day?*” → context == Stephen had been martyred.
 - **Acts 8:4** – “*Those who had been scattered went about preaching the word.*”
 - Cause = persecution

- **Effect = preaching of the word**
- **Example: book of Nehemiah** – prophet banked on cause-effect relationship in his prayer -- *praying that if the people repented (cause), then God would return them to the land (effect).*
- **Example: Psalm 1** –
 - **Direct cause-effect relationship between Scripture and God’s blessing.**
 - *“the person who plants himself in the counsel of God’s Word will flourish like a well-watered tree.”*

d. Things that are Alike , & Unlike – *Ring and Pinky Finger*

- **Things that are Alike – Ring Finger**
 - Similes –
 - Use of the words “*as*” and “*like*” – noting a word picture that draws a comparison between two things.
 - **Example: Psalm 42:1** “*As the deer pants for the water, so my soul pants for Thee, O God*”
 - **Example: 1 Peter 2:2** – “*Like new born babes, long for the pure milk of the Word, that by it you may grow in respect to your salvation.*”
 - Metaphors –
 - Comparison made without the words “*as*” or “*like*”
 - **John 15:1** “*I am the True vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.*”
 - Not literally but figuratively. He’s painting a picture that illustrates His relationship to the Father, and as the passage develops, to believers as well.
 - **Get in the habit of looking for comparisons.**
Similarities are meant to grab your attention.

- **Things that are Unlike – *Pinky Finger***
 - **“*Opposites Attract*” – In the case of Bible study opposites attract the eye.**
 - **Use of “*but*”**— signifying a change in direction
 - ***Example: Sermon on the Mount* – “*you have heard it said...but I say to you.*”**
 - ***Galatians 5* – “*Now the deeds of the flesh are evident (v.19)...But the fruit of the Spirit is ... (v22ff.).*”**
 - **“*but*”** – is one of the most important words you’ll come across in Scripture. Whenever you see, stop and find out, what contrast is being made?
 - **Metaphors** –
 - **Metaphors can also point out things that are unlike**
 - ***Example: Luke 18*** – widow cries out day after day to a judge of little integrity, asking him to give her justice. But he turns a deaf ear. Finally, though, the woman’s persistence drives him to rule in her favor
 - **Jesus through this parable is setting up an effective contrast**
 - **Irony** –
 - ***Luke 8***—Luke sets it up so that we notice a simple woman who quietly and privately approaches the Savior in faith. We notice her and benefit from her example.
- e. **Things that are True to Life – *Palm of your hand***
- Issue here is of ***Authenticity***.
 - ***What does this passage tell me about reality?***
 - ***What aspects of the text resonate with my experience?***
 - Our culture is obviously different that Bible culture – ***but the same human condition remains consistent.***
 - We have the same type of questions they had, the emotions they felt.

- They were real live people who faced the same kind of struggles, the same kind of problems, the same kind of temptations that you and I face.
- **So as you read Scripture, ask yourself:**
 - *What were this person's ambitions?*
 - *What were his goals?*
 - *What problem was he facing?*
 - *How did he feel?*
 - *What was his response?*
 - *What would be my response?*
- **We often read the Bible as some sort of Academic lesson—no wonder we're bored.**
- **Example: Abraham**
 - *Genesis 22:2 – “Take your son, I mean your only son, I mean the one whom you love, the seed—and offer him up as a sacrifice.”*
 - How do you suppose he felt?
 - How would you feel?
- **Example: Moses**
 - **Moses was an incredible leader, but never entered the Promise Land. Why?**
 - Because he struck a rock twice (Numbers 20:1-13).
 - One act of bad temper, and he's eliminated from going in.
 - *How did that punishment affect him?*
 - *How might it have made him feel toward God?*
 - *Toward life* (see Psalm 90).
 - *How do I respond to the consequences of my own sin?*
- **Example: Noah**
 - **Noah was a man of great righteousness**
 - But the same account (Gen 9) tells me that he also got dead drunk.
 - *How is that possible?*

- The Scripture paints him not as a perfect individual but as a real, live person.
 - ***Righteous?***
 - ***Honored by God? → Absolutely. But also failing, weak, and sinful.***
 - ***What insight does that shed on me?***
- ***Example: David***
 - ***Man with it all – brilliant, incredibly gifted, ultra-competent, great warrior, athlete, poet and musician, and also a great leader.***
 - But then his tragic mistake
 - ***What is the Spirit of God saying to us by including this tragedy in the narrative?***
 - ***What warning does it give us?***
 - ***What flags does it wave about our humanity?***
- ***Example: Peter***
 - The reason so many of us like Peter is that he reminds us of ourselves. → **Peter was human**
- ***Example: John Mark***
 - One person liable to lose because so little is said about him.
- **When you study the Word of God, make sure you plug into real life.**

6 Things to Look for Every Time you Open Your Bible

- 1. What things are emphasized? (*thumb*)**
- 2. What things are repeated? (*index finger*)**
- 3. What things are related? (*middle finger*)**
- 4. What things are alike? (*ring finger*)**
- 5. What things are unlike? (*pinky*)**
- 6. What things are true to life? (*palm*)**

❖ Bible Study Exercise for Next Week:

- Examine Acts 1:8 writing down as many observations as you can.
- ***Remember that my main concern in observation is, “What do I see?”***

Acts 1:8

But you shall receive power

when the Holy Spirit has come upon you;

and you shall be My witnesses

both in Jerusalem,

and in all Judea,

and Samaria,

and even to the remotest part of the earth.