
How to Read and Apply the Bible

Week 1: Observation

Key Question: *What do I see in the text?*

Note: Much of this lesson material comes from the book [Living By the Book](#) by Howard and William Hendricks. I commend this resource to you for further study; see the full citation on the course overview.

The Value of Bible Study

- **The Bible is God's Word.**
 - **Habakkuk 2:18-19** ¹⁸ *“What profit is an idol when its maker has shaped it, a metal image, a teacher of lies? For its maker trusts in his own creation when he makes speechless idols! ¹⁹ Woe to him who says to a wooden thing, Awake; to a silent stone, Arise! Can this teach? Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in it.*
 - **2 Timothy 3:16-18** 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.*
 - **2 Peter 1:19-21** ¹⁹ *And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, ²⁰ knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. ²¹ For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*
 - **Question:** How do these truths affect our attitude as we come to God's Word?
- **Bible study is essential to growth as a Christian.**
 - **1 Peter 2:2-5** ² *Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— ³ if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. ⁴ As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, ⁵ you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*
 - **Question:** How should this reality affect how we prioritize God's Word?
- **Bible study is essential to spiritual maturity.**
 - **Hebrews 5:11-14** ¹¹ *About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. ¹² For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles*

of God. You need milk, not solid food, ¹³ for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

- **Question:** How is maturity defined here, and what role does God's Word play in developing maturity?
- **Bible study is essential to spiritual effectiveness.**
 - **2 Timothy 3:16** ¹⁶All 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.
 - **Question:** What does this verse teach us about God's purpose for us through His Word?
- **Bible study is essential to true wisdom.**
 - **Psalm 1:1-4** ¹ Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; ² but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. ³ He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. ⁴ The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.
 - **Question:** What benefits are highlighted in Psalm 1's description of one who treasures God's Word?
- **Bible study is essential to building our faith.**
 - **Romans 10:17** So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.
 - **John 15:1-11** ¹ "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. ⁹ As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

An Approach to Personal Bible Study

- **Observe** – What do I see in the text?
- **Interpret** – What does the text mean?
- **Apply** – How do I respond to the text?

Step 1: Observe

- **Five Key Areas:**
 - **Context** – Where is the passage situated in the paragraph, the book, and the grand redemptive narrative? How does this influence what we see? Context will drive not only what we see, but how we interpret it and apply it to our lives.
 - **Terms** – Understanding the words on the page, especially key words that unlock meaning.
 - **Structure** – How has the author constructed the text?
 - **Grammatical** – How are the sentences constructed? What parts of speech are the key words, and how do they relate?
 - **Literary** – How are ideas and themes related within a text? Is there a climax to the narrative? What cause-and-effect relationships exist? Is there a question or problem that's being answered or addressed?
 - Consider diagramming a text, grouping relationships and phrases.
 - **Literary Form** – What genre is the text you're reading, and how does that influence how you understand it?
 - **Atmosphere** – What experientially is going on in the text? Can you put yourself experientially in the shoes of the author and his readers?
- **Six Things to Look For:**
 - **(1) Things that are Emphasized**
 - **Space Taken** – Consider Jesus' discourses in Matthew.
 - **Stated Purpose** – Consider John 20:30-31.
 - **Ordering** – Consider work being given before the fall.
 - **Lesser to Greater/Greater to Lesser** – Consider 2 Samuel 11-12 and David's sin with Bathsheba.
 - **(2) Things that are Repeated**
 - **Terms, phrases, and clauses** – Consider Psalm 136:1-2; Hebrews 11
 - **Characters** – Barnabas shows up in Acts as a spiritual encourager (Acts 9:27, Acts 11:22, Acts 15:36-39).
 - **Incidents and Circumstances** – Consider the book of Judges; Jesus' interactions with the Pharisees in Matthew.

- **Patterns** – Consider types and similarities between historical events and individuals. For example, notice the parallels between the experience of Israel and the life of Jesus in Matthew’s gospel.
- **New Testament use of Old Testament Verses** – The connections made are intentional on the part of the author and the Holy Spirit.
- **(3) Things that are Related**
 - **Movement from General to the Specific** – Consider Matthew 6:1, then Matthew 6:2-18.
 - **Questions and Answers** – Consider Paul in Romans, i.e. Romans 6:1; Jesus in Matthew 6:27, etc.
 - **Cause and Effect** – For example, consider Acts 8:1 – what “day” and activity motivated the preaching of God’s Word beyond Jerusalem?
- **(4) Things that are Alike**
 - **Similes** – Comparisons made with “like” or “as” to emphasis a similarity or relationship.
 - **Psalm 42:1** *As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God.*
 - **Metaphors** – Comparisons made without using “like” or “as”.
 - **John 15:1-2** ¹ *“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.*
- **(5) Things that are Unlike**
 - **Stated Contrasts** – The use of “but” is a clue that a change in direction is coming.
 - **Galatians 5:19-23** ¹⁹ *Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.*
 - **Metaphors** – Consider God’s being compared to the unjust judge in Luke 18. How is Jesus using this metaphor to make his argument?
 - **Irony** – Irony is an action or situation that seems contrary to what one may expect. Consider the woman with the flow of blood in Luke 8; we would not expect Jesus in the midst of the pressing crowd and the urgency of Jairus’ need to see Jesus pause to interact with the woman.

- **(6) Things that are True to Life**
 - What emotions did the people in the text feel?
 - What would the experience in the text have felt like?
 - What questions did the individuals have? What questions would we have had?
 - What temptations were the people facing? How are those similar or different from temptations we face today?
 - How did the people in the text respond? How would I have responded?

Practice

Acts 1:8

Preceding Context:

But you will **receive power**

when the Holy Spirit has come upon you,

and you **will be** my **witnesses**

in Jerusalem

and in all Judea

and Samaria,

and to the end of the earth.”



Following Context: