

How to Understand Your Bible (#3)-Step 1: Observation

Mini-Lecture #15

River Valley Community Church

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Catch-Up Summary

Four Important Questions to Answer

1. What is the Bible?
2. Why do we need to understand it
3. Why is it difficult to understand?
4. How do we understand it?

Three Steps For Studying Your Bible

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|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Observation | Ask: What do I see? |
| 2. Interpretation | Ask: What does it mean? |
| 3. Application | Ask: What do I do? Or, So What? |

The Goal of Observation: to collect the initial _____ and _____ for interpretation.

He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction. (2 Peter 3:16)

Example, Joshua 11:20

For it was the LORD himself who hardened their hearts to wage war against Israel, so that he might destroy them totally, exterminating them without mercy, as the LORD had commanded Moses.

Example, Ephesians 1:11-12

In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.

Example, Ephesians 2:8-10

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Steps for Observation

1. Begin with _____:

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you. (John 16:13-15)

Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law. (Psalm 119:18)

2. Read the passage _____ times.

3. Figure out the _____.

Ask:

- a. What is going on in the _____ around this text?
- b. What is the _____ period of this text?
- c. What is significant _____ for this text?
- d. _____ is this text teaching/story taking place?

4. Determine the _____, _____ picture things (characters, setting, genre, flow of argument, etc.).

5. Dig deeper and broader like a reporter, asking the 5 W's and an H:

_____, _____?, _____?, _____?, _____?, _____?,
and _____?

6. Identify key _____ and key _____.

Here are a few things to look for as you observe:

(the first six “things” are from *Living by the Book*, by Howard Hendricks)

- ❑ *Things that are emphasized.* Emphasis is sometimes seen by the amount of space that is given to a subject, by a clearly stated purpose, by the order of material, or, by emphatic personal pronouns (i.e., "Jesus himself").

- ❑ *Things that are repeated.* Terms, phrases, clauses or even the names of people that are repeated are important to notice. Repetition is intentionally used in the Bible to teach you. Therefore, you should notice those things.

- ❑ *Things that are related.* Look for things that are connected in some manner or are interacting with each other. This is a great time to begin looking for the structure of the passage. Since ideas and statements are related in one of several ways, see if you can see how they are connected in your passage (i.e., comparison, general-specific, question-answer, cause-effect, foundation-purpose, action-manner, action-result, idea-explanation, promise-condition, point-illustration, etc.). Seeing these relations is a key part of understanding what is being said.

- ❑ *Things that are alike.* Keep your eyes open for any similes (“as” or “like”) or metaphors (“is”).

- ❑ *Things that are unlike.* Keep a look out for obvious dissimilarities. These are seen in the use of "but" or "however" as well as with metaphors pointing out contrasts and the use of irony.

- ❑ *Things that are true to life.* As you observe, take special note of the events or character qualities that relate closely to your own life (i.e., fear, lack of faith, the need for encouragement, practical issues).

- ❑ *The main thing.* If the passage is in a letter, try to find the main verb and you will find the main idea of the passage. If the passage is a narrative, see if you can determine the main message the author is trying to get across.

- ❑ *The little things.* Little words often carry big ideas. Determine the meaning of all prepositions and conjunctions and you can often easily trace the argument of a passage.

- ❑ *The confusing things.* Whenever you come across a word, phrase, or activity that you don't understand, mark it for further study. You must understand it all in order to understand it all.
- ❑ *The mood of things.* Is this a passage of joy or of sorrow? Is the writer encouraging an activity or is he rebuking one? The author's intention here will be key to understanding his meaning. He wrote for a specific purpose.
- ❑ *The form thing.* While reading, take a look around and determine in which literary form (genre) this passage was written. The four main forms are narrative (a story), discourse (ideas presented logically and directly), poetry (word pictures for expressing feelings, emotions, and ideas), and prophecy (symbolic language to reveal future events or truth). Meaning, obviously, is conveyed differently within each genre.

7. Write out _____ you need to _____ (for interpretation step).

Bonus Tips:

1. Observe the text as if you are reading it for the _____.
2. Compare _____.
3. Handle the Bible as if it is a _____.
4. Observe with controlled _____.

PRACTICE:

(Acts 1:8) *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

- Q. What is most important term?
- Q. People involved?
- Q. What is the main verb?
- Q. What are they going to receive?
- Q. Any cause-effect relationships?
- Q. What is the effect?
- Q. Whose witnesses?
- Q. What is a witness?
- Q. Where?
- Q. How does this relate to the whole?