

**OBSERVATION**  
**LESSON SIX – LEARNING TO LOOK**

**INTRODUCTION**

The importance of careful biblical interpretation can hardly be overstated. Misinterpreting the Bible is ultimately no better than disbelieving it. What good does it do to agree that the Bible is God's final and complete revelation and then misinterpret it? The result is still the same: one misses God's truth. Interpreting Scripture to make it say what it was never intended to say is a sure road to division, error, heresy, and apostasy.

We must never forget that the task of hermeneutics is to discover the meaning of the text in its proper setting. We are to draw meaning from Scripture (Exegesis) rather than reading one's presuppositions into Scripture (Eisegesis). (John F. MacArthur, Jr, Charismatic Chaos, p. 87)


In light of our continued emphasis, you need to consider how you handle the Word of God. Are you guilty of mishandling or misrepresenting God's Truth? Perhaps you have never even worried about context. You can profess to believe in inspiration, inerrancy, infallibility, and all the other theological truths concerning the Word of God, but unless you treat the Word properly, you are denying the very things you claim to believe.

Observe the following figuration below for thirty seconds and write down how many squares you see.

Okay, how many did you find . . . 16, 17, 21, 26, I believe there are as many as 30. Thirty squares! Your ability to lay hold of as many squares as possible is found in your power to observe. Observation is not the *only* step, but is it the *first* step in the hermeneutical process. (MacArther, Expository Preaching, p. 211. Hendricks, Living By The Book, p. 47.) It is here that we ask and answer the question. "What do I see?" (Hendricks, p. 35). "Look. That's the key to fruitful Bible study. We study at a well that will never run dry -- so drink deeply of its life-giving provision." (Mayhue, p. 50). With observation and investigation you are gathering facts. There is an inherent progression in the learning process that must take place if you are going to be Biblically wise.



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Knowledge is the accumulation of information. This is where observation takes place. Understanding is where the observer seeks to put all of the pieces together. Observation is the pieces of the puzzle. Understanding is the putting of the various pieces together to form a picture. In the hermeneutical process understanding falls under the category of interpretation. Wisdom is learning how the facts apply to me. Wisdom enables the individual to step back and see the big picture. Wisdom is application.

Notice something about this progression. "We are commanded to acquire knowledge, but more to acquire wisdom. Knowledge is necessary if wisdom is to be gained, but it is not identical with wisdom. *One can have knowledge without having wisdom, but one cannot have wisdom without having knowledge.* A person without knowledge is ignorant. A person without wisdom is deemed a fool." (R.C. Sproul, Knowing Scripture [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1977], p. 21).

It is for this reason that you must always keep Bible study in its proper perspective. Unless you come to the Scripture with the mind-set that God is speaking directly to you and that *He* is talking, then the Bible can become distant, cold, and inevitably boring. It must not be looked upon as a book of literature. The Scripture is relational. Do not come to gather information or facts, come to know Him. If this thought is in the forefront of your mind, then you will know Him.

Have you ever been accused of staring at something or someone when you really weren't even looking at them!? You're looking, but not really observing. There is a vast difference between looking and observing. Looking is superficial whereas observation is penetrating. Looking gathers general information whereas observation gathers specific information. Looking can be casual, but observation is concentrated. Looking can be flippant, but observation is focused. It has been said that, "the ability to see is a developed process." (Hendricks, p. 47). It is this ability that makes one person a better student of the Bible than another person. The line that separates the two is drawn by their ability to observe.

There are five elements that characterize good observation.

I. We must learn to observe singularly

The first element is the ability to observe singularly. This is one's ability to eliminate all outside distractions. It is the ability to focus exclusively on the task at hand. Unfortunately, this is where many Bible students fail. Today's Christian is bombarded with an abundance of study Bibles and helps. Their intent is to help the believer in his understanding of Scripture. Unfortunately, it has backfired. We have become addicted to books about the Bible but have failed to study the Bible. In so doing we circumvent

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the need to study hard and depend heavily on the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit (1 John 2:27). We need to read our Bibles first and foremost before turning to any outside source.

II. We must learn to observe systematically

The second element is the ability to observe systematically. As noted in our first lesson, systematic is the opposite of random and spontaneous. There is a place for spontaneous, but it is not to be found in Bible study. Whether you move from the book, section, paragraph and finally text (deductive) or from the text, paragraph, section, and to the book (inductive) there must be a method employed. In this way all of the objects shall be covered without the chance of overlooking anything.

There is perhaps no better verse that brings this out than Psalm 119:11, “Thy Word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.” The word hid is used of the mother of Moses hiding her child against the decree of Pharaoh in Exodus 2:2,3. It is used of Rahab of Jericho covering the two Israelite spies (Joshua 2:4). The audience of Proverbs is exhorted to hide God’s Word in his thinking (Proverbs 2:1; 7:1). Job hid God’s Word in his heart as well (Job 23:12). In each of these causes a system is implied. The mother of Moses, Rahab, and Job had carefully thought out the means whereby the end results could be achieved. There was a system employed. We should do no less.

Our Lord’s instruction was sharply distinct from that of the Scribes and Pharisees. Why? Because they were noted as being men of books, but Jesus was a man of the book (Matthew 7:29; Luke 4:36). Can the same be said of us? In years to come we will be noted as men of the book?

III. We must learn to observe carefully

The third element is the ability to observe carefully. We should observe with the idea of discovering. Instead of being careful, we have become careless. Our carelessness is accented because of the environment in which we are being raised. Everything promotes immediate gratification. Unfortunately, the Bible is out of step with current culture when it comes to quick fixes. Time is one of those indispensable elements if you are going to know the Bible and ultimately God. We should painstakingly and meticulously study the Bible. This will take an enormous amount of time and energy, but in the long run it will reap a rich and large harvest.

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IV. We must learn to observe thoroughly

The fourth element in learning to look is the ability to observe thoroughly. The Scripture tells of a group of believers who were thorough examiners of God's Word. They are called the Berean believers and their story is told in Acts 17:11, "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so." The key word is found with "searched". It means to investigate or scrutinize. It is used of a judge holding an investigation in order to uncover the truth. It is used in this way in Luke 23:14, Acts 4:9, 12:19, 24:8,18 of those who are being examined by a judge to determine the truth. Friend, we are invited to search the Scripture in order to determine their truthfulness. Do not let go until you have uncovered every stone. Do not allow yourself to become a slave to your time. Give God the necessary time to speak openly and freely with you in your study of His Word.

V. We must learn to observe intimately

The fifth and final element in learning to look is that of intimately. Read it like you would a letter from someone you love. King David said the Word of God is to be more desired than refined or pure gold and is sweeter than honey and the honeycomb (Psalm 19:10; 119:103; Proverbs 24:13,14 [God's Word satisfies the longing of our soul]). Job noted God's Word as being a precious treasure and more necessary than his daily intake of physical food (Job 23:12). King Solomon saw wisdom as being better than rubies and considered it priceless (Proverbs 8:11). Is this simply poetic license or did these men actually love the Word this much? Consider those who loved the Word so greatly that they were willing to not only invest their life in its preservation and proclamation, but were willing to die for its truth. The Bible should be our greatest delight because it tells us of our greatest desire. Consider how carefully you look when love is involved.

We are slowly winding our way down to the very objective or purpose in all of our hermeneutical endeavor. Step by step we are moving from our affirmation of a God-breathed text to that of personal application and ultimately public proclamation.

So far we have noted ideas such as time, location, language and culture. We have also seen that we must interpret according to the grammatical, historical, dispensational, and theological framework. A goal as lofty as uncovering the author's intended meaning demands earnest and persistent effort along with a complete dependence on the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. There is only one meaning in any given passage and thus we must endeavor to find it. God has spoken in such a way as to be understood. Thus, when we read as interpreters we must understand that God is speaking to us and we can

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understand His message. The key to the interpretive process is learning to ask the right questions and bombarding the text with a multitude of probing questions. No reading of the Scripture is completely without bias. We bring to the hermeneutical process our past experiences and our present level of knowledge.

With this in mind let us note four foundational ideas concerning the interpretation of the Bible.

#### VI. We must learn to observe thematically

We must learn to know the meta-narrative [i.e. big story] of the Bible. It is in knowing the whole, we can understand the parts.

## PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

As we close in on our final step in the fulfillment of the hermeneutical process we need to consider two thoughts. First, Personalization. "The keys to application are the steps of observation, investigation, interpretation, and correlation. Until you have answered the question, What does the text mean by what it says? It is impossible to answer an even greater question, What does the text mean to me?" (Mayhue, p. 64). "Our study of Scripture is never complete until what we know begins to direct how we live" (Mayhue, p. 65). The thought of personalization seeks to answer the question, "How does it work?"

The second thought is that of appropriation. "All of the steps so far have involved our intellect. These last two [personalization and application] engage the will. To stop short here [is to fail miserably]. This is the step that transfers the fruit of your labors from the head and heart to the hands and feet" (Mayhue, p. 66).

We have already noted the "six honest serving men" of Lesson 1. However, we still need to flesh this out in learning to feed ourselves. Here is a basic format to assist you in *Cutting It Straight*.

#### I. LOOK AT THE PASSAGE YOU ARE READING (Acts 17:11; 2 Tim. 2:15)

How do we look?

##### A. Do It *Diligently* (2 Tim. 2:15)

15 "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

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The primary word in our passage is that of "study". The word means, "to hasten, make hasten, to exert one's self, endeavor, give diligence." It is translated by several other English words which fill out the idea of "to study".

"Endeavoring"	Eph. 4:3; 1 Thess 2:17; 2 Pt 1:15
"Diligence"	2 Tim. 4:9,21; Titus 3:12; 2 Pt 3:14
"Labour"	Heb. 4:11

Listen carefully to the words of R.C. Sproul concerning this idea of studying the Scripture. "There is a great deal of difference between reading and studying. Reading is something we can do in a leisurely way, ... But study suggests *labor*, serious and diligent work. Here then, is the real problem of our negligence. We fail in our duty to study God's Word not so much because it is difficult to understand, not so much because it is dull and boring, but because it is *work*. Our problem is not a lack of intelligence or a lack of passion. Our problem is that we are *lazy* (emphasis added)." R.C. Sproul, *Knowing Scripture* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1977), p. 17.

B. Do It *Daily* (Acts 17:11)

11 "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so."

Interestingly enough the Bereans are identified by the descriptive word "noble". It means "to be well born, of noble race, noble minded". Why were they considered to be of a noble race? Because they allowed the Word to have entrance into their lives. The Word was hospitably received. It was made to feel welcomed. They were eager to receive the Word. Notice the various ways in which the word "eager" is translated in our English text.

"Readiness of mind"	Acts 17:11; 2 Cor. 8:11
"A willing mind"	2 Cor. 8:12
"Ready mind"	2 Cor. 8:19
"Forwardness of your mind"	2 Cor. 9:2

However it did not stop there. They are described by the word, "searched". This particular word is extremely descriptive. It means, "to investigate, examine, inquire into, scrutinize, sift, question specifically in a forensic sense of a judge to hold an investigation; to interrogate, examine the accused or witnesses." Notice its usage in the following passages Luke 23:14; Acts 4:9; 12:19; 28:18. Remember, the key to understanding the Scripture is to bombard the text with questions and that is exactly

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what we see in the various passages before us as well as by those believers in Berea. What has always amazed me about this passage is that these Bereans were more than mere sheep. They had someone no less than the apostle Paul preaching to them and yet they compared what he said against what the Scripture taught. Believers have for too long allowed themselves to be mere sheep when they must become Bereans.

They were consistent in their hunt by doing it daily. Notice four distant areas in which we are to bombard the text of Scripture in our hunt to find the author's intended meaning.

1. Observe The People Involved (Who Is Involved?)
2. Observe The Places Involved (Where Is It Taking Place?)
3. Observe The Period Of Time (When Is It Taking Place?) Note The Time Of Writing As Well As The Time Of The Event Whether It Is Past, Present, Or Future.

**REMEMBER** "What is a dispensation?" A dispensation is an distinguishable economy in the outworking of God's purpose. (Ryrie, p. 29). A dispensation is marked by three thoughts; 1) a distinct **period** (time), 2) a distinct **plan** (content of revelation), and 3) a distinct **people** (responsibility & accountability).

4. Observe The Purpose In Writing (Why Is It Being Written?)

II. LISTEN TO THE PASSAGE BEING READ (1 Tim. 4:13).

13 "Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine."

Listening is not simply hearing, it is listening for the purpose of obeying. Vance Havner (p. 134) "The big question today is not, 'Is God speaking?,' but 'Are you listening?'" Charles Hadden Spurgeon (p. 100) "I have an **ear** for other preachers, Sir John Cheke used to say, but I have a **heart** for Latimer."

In the passage before us each of the following are in the imperative mood.

Verse 13 "Give attendance"

It means, "to turn the mind to, attend to be attentive. To apply one's self to, attach one's self to, hold or cleave to a person or a thing; to be forgiven or addicted to; to devote thought and effort to." We are to be addicted to . . .

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Reading	"Devotions"
Exhortation	"Preaching/Church"
Doctrine	"Bible Study/Class"

Verse 14 "Neglect not"

The idea is to not be careless nor neglectful of. It is translated . . .

"To make light of" Matt 22:5

"If we neglect" Heb 2:3

"Regarded them not" Heb 8:9

Verse 15 "Meditate upon these things"

The word "meditate" means "to care for, attend to carefully, practice; used of the Greeks of the meditative pondering and the practice of orators and rhetoricians." It is translated by the following words.

"Premeditate" Mark 13:11

"Imagine" Acts 4:25

"Meditate" 1Tim. 4:15

What is meditation? For example, if you were to add together the following words you would in a sense be meditating.  $2+2+5+1+10-5+10=$ \_\_\_\_. You were meditating.

Verse 16 "Take heed unto thyself"

To "take heed" means "to have or hold upon, apply, to observe, attend to, to give attention to." It is translated by the following words.

"Marked out" Luke 14:7

"Gave heed" Acts 3:5

"Stayed in" Acts 19:22

"Holding forth" Phil 2:16

"Take heed" 1Tim. 4:16

Again we need to bombard the text with questions.

- A. Who Is The Communicator? (Who wrote the book or preached the message?)
- B. To Whom Is The Communicator Saying It? (Who is listening?)

INTRODUCTION – **OBSERVATION** – INTERPRETATION – APPLICATION



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- C. What Is The Context Saying?
1. Outline the main points in each chapter/passage/verse.
  2. Can you break the chapter down into sub points?
  3. Is anything else beside the main point addressed?
  4. Are there repetition of words or ideas? What about commands or prohibitions within the passage or book?
  5. What are the theological truths found within the book, chapter, passage and verse?
    - A. What does this say about God the Father?
    - B. What does this say about God the Son?
    - C. What does this say about God the Holy Spirit?
    - D. What does this say about the church?
    - E. What does this say about sin?
    - F. What does this say about salvation?
    - G. What does this say about humanity?
    - H. What does this say about angels (good and bad)?
    - I. What does this say about the Bible?
    - J. What does this say about the end times?
    - K. What does this say about the Jews and other Nations?
    - L. What does this say about prayer, witnessing, and other forms of Christian growth?

This list is not exhaustive, but will assist you in *Cutting It Straight For Yourself*.

III. LEARN THE MESSAGE BY MEMORY (Psalms 1:1-2; 119:9-11; Colossians 3:16)

"It's a mental discipline that you carry throughout your day. It's a mindset and a lifestyle in which the Word courses through your mind." (Hendricks, *Living By The Book*, p. 111). Psalm 1:1 and 2 notes how the reader of Scripture finds "Pleasure" in the reading of Scripture. Scripture is a thing to be desired, a valuable commodity.

Joshua 1:8 describes the Word as something that is to percolate within you. "Biblical truth should **percolate** through your mind: 'day and night.'" (Hendricks, *Living By The Book*, p. 111).

Colossians 3:16 speaks of the idea that God's Word is to dwell within us. Its presence is for the purpose of influencing for good. Why are we to learn it by heart?

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A. For The *Purifying* Your Life (V9)

Psalm 119:9 uses the word, "cleanse". It means "to be translucent. To be clear, to count as pure." It is used eight times in the Old Testament (Job 15:14; 25:4; Ps 51:4 'clear'; 73:13; Pro 20:9; Isa. 1:16; Micah 6:11). Yet the cleansing power of the Word is not found in simple exposure. The verse says that only by taking heed are we cleansed. The word "taking heed" means "to hedge about (as with thorns). To guard, to protect, attend to."

B. For The *Piloting* Your Life (V10)

(Pro. 23:7) "You are not what you think you are, what you think, you are." (Hendricks, *Living By The Book*, p. 111).

C. For The *Protecting* Your Life (V11)

"Memorizing Scripture strengthens your faith because it repeatedly reinforces the truth, often just when you need to hear it again." (Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* [Colorado Springs, Col.: NavPress, 1991], p. 39).

The word "hid" is used in three very graphic passages.

Moses hid by his mother	Exo. 2:2,3
Rahab and the spies	Jos. 2:4
Sin cannot be hid from God	Jere. 16:17; Numbers 32:23

"First rate Bible reading calls not for snapshots, but for times exposures." (Hendricks, *Living By The Book*, p. 113).

If all you do is read without memorization or meditation it is like "Going from room to room of the royal feast, and the sight of the tables will never stay thy hunger." (Spurgeon, p. 102). You must partake!!!

How Do You Memorize And What Are Some Practical Ways Of Memorizing?

Unfortunately, "Most of the time memorizing is mainly a problem of motivation." (Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* [Colorado Springs, Col.: NavPress, 1991], p. 40).

1. Have A Plan.
2. Write Out The Verses.

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3. Draw Picture Reminders. Most Of The Time You Know The Verse But Not With The Reference. This Will Help To Remind You Of What The Verse Is Speaking About.
4. Memorize The Verses Word-Perfectly.
5. Find A Method Of Accountability.
6. Review And Meditate Every Day. #S 1-6 Taken From (Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines For The Christian Life* [Colorado Springs,Col.: Navpress, 1991], Pp. 41-42).

Remember, "memorizing verses is not an end in itself. The goal is not to see how many verses we can memorize, *the goal is Godliness* (emphasis added)." (Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* [Colorado Springs,Col.: NavPress, 1991], p. 43).

IV. LIVE THE PASSAGE IN YOUR LIFE

A. Let Your *Light Shine* (Matt. 5:16)

We must first bind the Word to our hearts and minds, then we must shine the Word to those around us.

We have a tremendous amount of head knowledge, but we lack in our manifestation of this truth to those around us.

B. Let Your *Love Show* (John 13:34,35; 14:15,23)

1. Learn to obtain life-related truths
2. Learn to ask yourself the question, "What have I learned from this book?"
3. Learn to ask yourself the question, "How can I apply what I have learned to my life?"
4. Learn to ask yourself the question, "In what type of situation is this truth applicable?"
5. The application must always be consistent with the author's intended meaning.

**SUMMARY**

LOOK	-	Like a Doctor would look	-	to expose
LISTEN	-	Like a Musician would listen	-	to harmonize
LEARN	-	Like a Teacher would learn	-	to advance/grow
LIVE	-	Like a Farmer would live	-	to produce/never off the job

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**APPLICATION**

- Bible study is to be an act of love. If you love God, you will go to whatever lengths, to not only *cut it straight*, but to implement the truths learned into your heart and life.
- We need to remember before venturing further that "a particular statement may have numerous possible personal applications, but it can only have one correct meaning." R.C. Sproul, *Knowing Scripture* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1977), p. 39.
- We must reject multiple meanings to biblical passages, but we should not restrict the application of Scripture to a single sense. Though it should be remembered that application is not unlimited. There are certain boundaries to application (i.e. consistent with the intended meaning).

Let us not forget the words of Grand Osborne concerning the hermeneutical process and its ultimate objective.

"THE STUDY OF SCRIPTURE CAN NEVER BE COMPLETE UNTIL ONE HAS MOVED FROM TEXT TO context. **1)** *The static study of the original meaning of a text dare never be an end in itself* but must at all times have as its goal **2)** *the dynamic application of the text to one's current needs* and **3)** *the sharing of that text with others* via expository teaching and preaching. **4)** *Scripture should not merely be learned. It must be believed and then proclaimed.* This dynamic aspect of the Word is the task of contextualization and homiletical analysis (Emphasis Added)."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 318.

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**THE OLD TESTAMENT | 39 BOOKS**

<b>NARRATIVE</b>	<b>WRITINGS</b>	<b>PROPHECY</b>
<b>PENTATEUCH *</b>	JOB	<b>MAJOR</b>
GENESIS	PSALMS	ISAIAH
EXODUS	PROVERBS	JEREMIAH
LEVITICUS	ECCLESIASTES	EZEKIEL
NUMBERS	SONG OF SONGS	DANIEL
DEUTERONOMY	LAMENTATIONS	<b>MINOR</b>
		HOSEA
JOSHUA		JOEL
JUDGES		AMOS
RUTH		OBADIAH
1&2 SAMUEL		JONAH
1&2 KINGS		MICAH
1&2 CHRONICLES		NAHUM
EZRA-NEHEMIAH		HABAKKUK
ESTHER		ZEPHANIAH
		HAGGAI
		ZECHARIAH
		MALACHI

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\* 'Pentateuch' = the first five books of the Old Testament

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### THE NEW TESTAMENT | 27 BOOKS

GOSPELS	NARRATIVE	LETTERS	PROPHECY/LETTER
MATTHEW		<b>PAUL → CHURCHES</b>	REVELATION
MARK		ROMANS	
LUKE	ACTS	1 CORINTHIANS	
JOHN		2 CORINTHIANS	
		GALATIANS	
		EPHESIANS	
		PHILIPPIANS	
		COLOSSIANS	
		1 THESSALONIANS	
		2 THESSALONIANS	
		<b>PAUL → INDIVIDUALS</b>	
		1 TIMOTHY	
		2 TIMOTHY	
		TITUS	
		PHILEMON	
		<b>GENERAL</b>	
		HEBREWS	
		JAMES	
		1 PETER	
		2 PETER	
		1 JOHN	
		2 JOHN	
		3 JOHN	
		JUDE	

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