

Studying, Interpreting and Applying the Bible
Observation: The Role of a Detective, pp. 77-97

Observation: *The recording of what may be seen in a selected method of Bible study*

Have the Right Mental Attitude (pp. 78-79)

- 1) *Observation requires an act of the will*
You must have determination to know and to learn
- 2) *Observation requires a persistence to know*
Change in life are a result of the diligence and discipline put into it - reflect on those changes
- 3) *Observation requires patience*
True learning takes time - short cuts short circuit the learning
- 4) *Observation required diligent recording*
Recording observations are the reminders that help you remember and learn
- 5) *Observation requires caution*
 - a. Don't lose yourself in the details; divide your time proportionately
 - b. Don't stop with observations - go on to ask questions and seek meaningful answers
 - c. Don't give equal weight to everything; carefully discern what is important

Use the Six Basic Questions (pp. 80-81)

- 1) Who? - *Who is the subject of the passage? Who is the object of the passage? Who is speaking?*
- 2) What? - *What is happening in the passage? What is the subject doing? What is happening to the object in the passage? What type of passage is this: Poetry? Narrative? Direct teaching? Prophetic? etc. What is the context of the passage? What is the atmosphere of this passage: Calm? Emotionally intense? Fearful? Rejoicing? What words do I need to look up to understand? What is God doing in this passage? What do I learn about God, Jesus Christ, or the Holy Spirit in this passage?*
- 3) When? - *When do the events in the passage take place? Or will take place? What time sequences is there in the passage? What events occur before or after?*
- 4) Where? - *Where does the passage take place? What places do the passages talk about? What are the characteristics of those places?*
- 5) Why? - *Why are the subjects doing what they are doing? Why is this passage included in the Bible - particular book, chapter, passage? Why were particular words in the passage used? (Lexical/syntactical)*
- 6) How? *How should this passage affect my life? How would I have handled the situation? How did God work in this passage? How does this passage relate to other parts of Scripture?*

Discover the Form or Structure of the Passage Under Study (pp. 81-83)

How does the writer deal with the content? What form or structure does he use? - What literary devices does the writer use to convey his message?

- 1) Relating the way things are: Relational - use of common experience to make the point
- 2) Admonition or exhortation : Commands to obey. Errors to avoid
- 3) Teaching: Instruction in truth / revelation of doctrine

- 4) Parables: A particular type of teaching using stories that could be true
- 5) Narrative: Presenting an historical accounting of events that took place
- 6) Other methods: Proverbs - wise saying of general truth, Poetry - using poetic structures for any of the above, Prophecy - predictions of what would occur in the future, Apocalyptic - prophecy of what will happen in the last days - eschatological

Find the Key Words (pp. 83-85)

What particular words are most important in conveying the message of the writer. Identify them and define them according to their usage by the writer. See exercise assignment #2

Consider Comparisons and Contrasts (pp. 85-87)

Comparison notes how things are similar

Contrast notes how things are different

See exercise assignment #3

Investigate the Use of Old Testament References (pp. 88)

When one Scripture passage is cited / quoted, then that passage must be understood in its context in order to understand its use in the one referring to it. This most often occurs in the New Testament citing Old Testament Scriptures.

Note the Progression of an Idea or Thought Chain (pp. 88-90)

This is tracing an idea through a passage and noting their connections to each other

Be Alert for Proportions (p. 90)

The amount of detail given to a particular portion of a story / idea in a discourse highlights its importance. Example 1: The amount of written material in Acts given to particular time sequences. Example 2: The amount of written material in 1 Corinthians given to correcting particular problems that existed there.

Record Repetitions (pp. 91)

This begins with particular words and their cognates that are repeated but also includes similar ideas / themes that are repeated. It should also be noted if words / ideas that might be expected are omitted in the text.

Visualize the Verbs (pp. 92)

Verbs carry the action so note what is taking place. (In Greek, the verb is the key to understanding the sentence). Is the subject doing the action (active) or the action being done to the subject (passive). Is the action describe taking place in the present, in the future or in the past? Is verb a command?

Picture the Illustrations (pp. 92-94)

Illustrations must be understood in their context in order to understand their meaning according to the writer - that may require crossing cultural or historical barriers to understand them (Agricultural illustrations can easily be misunderstood by city dwellers).

Examine the Explanations (pp. 94)

A passage / book often provides its own explanations to questions that may arise if you keep reading. Sometimes an explanation is given to unstated questions.

Be Sensitive to Connecting Words and Conjunctions (pp. 95)

See exercise assignments #4 & #6

Connecting words & conjunctions explain the relationship between the thoughts / ideas presented in phrases, sentences and paragraphs

Be Willing to Change Your Viewpoint (pp. 95-96)

Set aside preconceived idea and make your observations impartially.

Consider the perspective of both the writer and the recipients - put yourself in their shoes

Mark Your Bible as You Read (pp. 96)

Use symbols, highlighting and marginal notes to help you find and remember your observations

Observation: The Role of a Detective - Exercises

Observation means to make a careful and thorough examination to see what the text is saying. It requires concentrated looking and thinking. Aim for clear recognition of what God has revealed. Ask the who, what, when, where, why & how questions.

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Example:

Read Acts 1:8 to see how many observations you can make from this verse.

- a. The word *but*, show that the statement to follow is contrasted with what has been said earlier.
- b. A specific event is mentioned as the point at which the disciples would receive power.
- c. This specific event is the Holy Spirit coming upon them.

What other observations do you see? List as many you can:

- 1) *They are charged with a specific responsibility - be Jesus' witnesses*
- 2) *Jesus is the one speaking - vs. 1-6*
- 3) *Jesus' disciples are the ones being spoken to*
- 4) *Their responsibilities expand in geography - Jerusalem, Judea & Samaria, world*
- 5) *They start locally, but eventually to the remotest part of the earth*
- 6) *Jerusalem - city. Judea - Jewish nation. Samaria - ½ breed nation. Uttermost part of the world - pagan nations. Expansion from those closest to true God to those farthest away*

Now read John 3:16, and try to list *ten* observations you find in this passage.

- 1) *Who: Jesus is speaking*
- 2) *Who: Nicodemus is receiving an answer to his question from Jesus (vs. 2)*
- 3) *Who: God is subject, the world (cosmos) is the object.*
- 4) *What: "World" refers to people in this verse, not world system (cf. 1 John 2:15)*
- 5) *Who: God's son is His only "begotten" - God does not have other children like this one.*
- 6) *What: God gives His son- who will be lifted up - vs. 14.*
- 7) *Who: Whoever believes - a universal offer*
- 8) *What: Belief is basis for receiving the benefits*
- 9) *What: Two benefits of belief - not perish (avoid a negative) and gain eternal life (gain positive)*
- 10) *Why: Reason for God's actions is His Love*
- 11) *When: Night*
- 12) *Where: Jerusalem, in private*

2) Key Words

One way of helping to observe a passage closely is to look for key words. Often they (or a cognate) is repeated frequently.

1. Read 1 John 4:7-21. What important word is used repeatedly in this passage? Love

How many times is it used. Love is used 27 times and "beloved" is used 2 times

2. Read each of the following passages. List the important word which is repeated in each one.

Luke 9:57-62 "I will follow you" 3 times "Permit me" 2 times

1 Corinthians 6:12-20 (Body - Temple, flesh) Lawful / Immoral

1 Timothy 6:17-19 Rich - 4 times + treasure

Ephesians 6:10-20 Strong - 1 Stand Firm - 3 Actions: Gird, Put on, having shod, take up (3 times), pray (2 times & implied 1)

The word or phrase might be repeated throughout a large section of Scripture.

For example, examine Ephesians 4:1; 4:17; 5:1,2; 5:15.

What key word occurs: _____

3. Reading through a passage you may notice that while a particular word is not used repeatedly, the same idea is repeated using synonyms or phrases referring to the same thing.

What central subject is repeated in Psalm 19:7-9? Word of God

How many different synonyms or phrases are used? Six

Who is the subject in John 1:1-18? Jesus Christ

What different terms are used? Word, light, only begotten, Jesus Christ

Remember though that while a key word maybe repeated it does not have to be and may occur only once. For example, what might the key word be in Psalm 1:1-3? The Blessed Man

3) Comparisons & Contrasts

Comparisons show how things are alike. Contrasts show how things are different. Some of the words that often indicate a comparison are "even so" "as . . . so" and "likewise." Words that may indicate a contrast are "but," "nor," "not."

What are the comparisons in the following:

John 3:14 - the serpent lifted up in the wilderness compared with Son of man being lifted up

Romans 5:18-19: one transgression resulting in condemnation compared with one act of righteousness resulting in justification; one man's disobedience making many sinners compared with the obedience of One making many righteous. (Even so)

Mark 12:21 the second and third brothers compared (likewise)

Luke 17:26 The days of Noah compared with the days of the Son of Man (Just as)

What are the contrasts in the following:

Genesis 2:16-17 eat freely of all other trees contrasted with not eating from tree of knowledge

Psalm 30:5: Momentary anger of God contrasted with favor and joy during lifetime

Proverbs 11:24 one scattering gaining increase contrasted with the one withholding having want

Revelation 3:1 a name that is alive contrasted with reality of being dead

4) Cause and Effect Statements

Another helpful observation is to take note of cause and effect statements. These are statements that say, "if *this*, then *that*." i.e. if you plant corn (the cause) you will get corn (the effect)- not beans." If you have faith in Jesus Christ (the cause), then you will receive eternal life" (the effect).

A quick identification of these statements can be made by looking for sentences that begin with words such as *if*, *because* and *since*. For example, Romans 5:1. *Therefore, since we have been justified through faith* (the cause clause) *we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ* (the effect clause).

Examine the following Scriptures and mark the cause and effect clauses:

John 15:5 - Cause: Abide

Effect: Much fruit

1 John 1:9 - Cause: Confession

Effect: Forgiveness & Cleansing

1 John 5:14 - Cause: Ask according to His will

Effect: He hears us

Psalm 66:18 - Cause: Regard wickedness in my heart

Effect: The Lord will not hear me

Proverbs 24:14 - Cause: If you find wisdom

Effect: There will be a future and a hope

5) Commands

Commands give instruction or an order that is expected to be carried out. We can think of them as requirements or rules. There are many direct commands in the Scriptures.

Example: Matthew 5:14-16

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 "Nor do [men] light a lamp, and put it under the peck-measure, but on the lampstand; and it gives light to all who are in the house. 16 "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

This passage, which teaches how Christ's disciples are the light of the world, contains one direct command: *Let your light shine before men.*

List below the commands given in Romans 12:9-13

Love without Hypocrisy;

Cling to what is good;

Give preference to one another in honor;

Be devoted to prayer;

Be contributing to needs of saints;

practicing hospitality;

persevering in Tribulation

Abhor what is evil;

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love;

Be not lagging behind in spirit;

Be fervent in Spirit;

Be rejoicing in hope;

Be serving the Lord;

6) Linking Words

Various phrases and sentences in Scripture are tied together using various connecting words.

These words can be very important in giving meaning and understanding to a passage.

Contrast is shown by the word **but**. In Titus 1:16 Paul uses it to show contrast about certain people who were spreading false teachings. "*They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him.*" Their actions are contrasted with their claims.

Purpose can be emphasized by using phrases such as: **so that** or **in order that**. Example: 1 John 5:20 "*And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding, in order that we might know Him who is true, and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.*"

Reasons can be introduced using words such as **for** and **because**. Example: Psalm 136:1 "*Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; For His lovingkindness is everlasting.*"

Conditional clauses are introduced with the word **if**. Example: 1 John 1:7 "*but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.*"

There are many other linking or connecting words in Scripture, most of which we often use in our own speech.

1. Read Acts 1:6-8 and look for the importance of the connecting word **but** at the beginning of verse 8. What were the disciples looking for?

The establishment of the Kingdom

What, instead, did Jesus say they would receive?

They would receive power from Holy Spirit and would be His witnesses throughout the Earth

2. Find the linking word used most often in Acts 9:23-28. What is it? but
3. Read Ephesians 4:11-16. List the major linking words in this passage:

And - links phrases together adding elements to statement

For - gives purpose / reasons for what is being done

But - gives contrast between what we were and what we should be