

Observation – Improving Your Ability To See What’s Really In the Text

How to Study the Bible Like a Pro – Week 4

Introduction

- Key question
 - Have you ever read a passage and thought, “I know what that means,” only to discover later on that you had missed something?”

Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” Mark 2:3-5

- We all have _____ (i.e. a blind spot in an otherwise normal field of vision)
 - **Holmes:** “You see, but you do not observe. The distinction is clear. For example, you have frequently seen the steps which lead up from the hall to this room.”
 - **Watson:** “Frequently.”
 - **Holmes:** “How often?”
 - **Watson:** “Well, some hundreds of times.”
 - **Holmes:** “Then how many are there?”
 - **Watson:** “How many? I don’t know.”
 - **Holmes:** “Quite so! You have not observed. And yet you have seen. That is just my point. Now, I know that there are seventeen steps, because I have both seen and observed. (A Scandal in Bohemia, Gutenberg Project)

- Scotomas (the non-medical form) usually exist because of one or more of the following reasons
 1. Perception _____

“The greatest deception men suffer is from their own opinions.” Leonardo Da Vinci

2. Past training/teaching/instruction/reading

“At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.” Mark 1:9-11

3. Lack of _____ in observation

“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.” Acts 1:8

Howard Hendricks’ class at Dallas Theological Seminary discovered over _____ observations on this verse

4. Speed (“Speed is the enemy of observation”)
 5. _____/Focusing on something else
- A few quick reminders

1. Interpretation = what the text meant (to the original audience)
2. Application = what the text _____ today (for you or others)
3. The goal in accurate interpretation isn't to be a certain knower but a responsible interpreter. Certainty is an illusion. Probability is a reality.
4. The hermeneutical spiral should always remind you to be humble
5. There are four steps to studying the Bible like a pro (ORIA)
 - Observation ("What do I see?")
 - Research ("What could this mean?")
 - Interpretation ("What did it mean?")
 - Application ("What does this mean for me?")
6. The Bible is an _____ document, not a systematic theology
7. Context reigns as king in interpretation (the first of 14 principles of interpretation we discussed in week two)
8. _____ can significantly influence the meaning of a text

I. The Process of Responsible Observation

1. _____ to be filled with the Holy Spirit and ask Him to lead you into truth

"Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law" Psalm 119:18
2. Be mindful of your own _____ (self-acuity)
3. _____ down your reading pace. Bible study isn't about speed.
 - My recommendation – write out the text (yes, old school with pen and paper whenever possible). If you simply did this one thing, you'd be a better observer and interpreter.
 - i. Write out each verse using double spacing
 - ii. Break the text at normal thought changes (i.e. this is NOT the same thing as diagramming a sentence in English class)
 - iii. Add an extra line between verses
 - iv. Write the text number in the left margin
 - v. Don't worry about perfection. You're not turning this in.
4. Read the text through a couple of times. Don't _____ you've "seen" everything correctly the first time through (remember Da Vinci). Use your pen and paper and interact with the verse (circle, underline, draw arrows, enumerate, come up with short cuts like "?" = question or "R" for research or "HNI" for "Have no idea" etc.).
5. Ask _____ of questions of the text (start with the 5 W's and H)
 - a. Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?
6. Always focus on what you _____ – not what it meant or what it means – at this stage of the process
7. If you're reading just a verse or two, always read the verses surrounding them
8. Optional Ideas
 - a. Read the passage in different translations (Key question: "Where do they differ?")
 - b. Read parallel passages (e.g. the gospels often have parallel pericopes)

"When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." Luke 3:21-22

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." Matthew 3:16-17

- c. Listen to the text being read

II. What to Look For When You're Observing

1. _____ (refer to week two)
 - a. Literary
 - b. Historical
 - c. Geographical
 - d. Theological
 - e. Authorial
2. Literary form (refer to week three)
 - a. What genre is it (e.g. narrative, law, parable, prophecy, poetry, etc.)?
 - b. What figure of speech is it (e.g. metaphor, simile, hyperbole, etc.)?
3. Grammar
 - a. Sentence structure (subject, verb, object, adverbs, adjectives, _____, etc. ... which are all much easier to see if you're writing out your verses)

*"Conjunction Junction, what's your function?
Hooking up cars and making 'em function" School House Rock*

- b. Verb tense

"Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. Mark 11:24

"What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?" Romans 6:1-2

- c. Connecting words (i.e. and, either, or, neither, nor, etc.)

- d. _____ words (i.e. but, however, although, except, otherwise, etc.)

"Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." 1 Cor. 6:9-11

"I have the right to do anything," you say – but not everything is beneficial. "I have the right to do anything" – but I will not be mastered by anything. You say, "Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both." The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body." 1 Cor. 6:12-13

- e. Conditional words (i.e. if ...)

i. "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you." John 15:7

- f. Concluding words (i.e. therefore, since)

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us," Hebrews 12:1

- g. Purpose or _____ words (i.e. so, for this reason, so then, in order that, as a result, etc.)

"I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong – that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith." Rom. 1:11-12

- h. Explanation words (i.e. for, because, etc.)

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile." Rom. 1:16

- i. Comparison words (i.e. like, as, likewise, so as, too, etc.)

"Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away." Matthew 13:24-25

- j. _____ words (i.e. when, now, then, awhile, at that time, after, before, etc.)

"Don't you have a saying, 'It's still four months until harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together." John 4:35-36

4. _____ of key words or phrases

- a. Judges

"Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and ..." Judges 2:11 (3:7, 4:1, 6:1, 10:11, 13:1)

- b. Hebrews 11 – "By faith ..." 20X

"By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going." Hebrews 11:8

- c. James – "faith" and "works/deeds"

"What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder. You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?" James 2:14-19

5. Emphasis – amount of space devoted to the topic or the frequency of mention (Ex. 1 vs. Ex. 3)

6. The line of reasoning/argument (Thesis 1, Thesis 2, Conclusion)

"My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul?" 1 Cor. 1:11-13

7. Changes in subject matter

8. Anything strange or _____

*Abraham was the father of Isaac,
Isaac the father of Jacob,
Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,
Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar,
Perez the father of Hezron,
Hezron the father of Ram,
Ram the father of Amminadab,
Amminadab the father of Nahshon,
Nahshon the father of Salmon,
Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab,
Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth,
Obed the father of Jesse,
and Jesse the father of King David." Matthew 1:2-6*

9. Questions and answers

"Now for the matters you wrote about: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman." 1 Cor. 7:1

10. Commands and promises

11. Cause and effect

"But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you." 2 Cor. 4:7-12

"All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God." 2 Cor. 4:15

Example

11 Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul.

12 Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

13 Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority,

14 or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.

15 For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people.

- 16 Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves.
- 17 Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor.
- 18 Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh.
- 19 For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God.
- 20 But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.
- 21 To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.
- 22 "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth."
- 23 When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.
- 24 "He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed."
- 25 For "you were like sheep going astray," [f] but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Making It Real

1. Which of the five reasons for scotomas/blind spots describes why you have them? How will you overcome that?
2. Pick a new passage/chapter to study for the next few weeks: Passage: _____
3. Write that passage or chapter out by hand
4. Using what you learned today, make some observations (circle, underline, enumerate, etc.)
5. Using the list above, go back and see if you can highlight other observations (context, grammar, 5W's and H, similar, repetition, changes, transitional words, historical references, geography, etc.)
6. What was easy about practicing observation?
7. What was difficult or felt unnatural for you to do when you were simply trying to observe the text?
8. With whom will you share what you learned from this session in the next 48-72 hours?

Who: _____ When: _____