

## Session Two: How to Study the Bible - Observation

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### 1. Introduction

- a. In our first session we said that the goal of prayer and Bible study is primarily to hear and encounter Jesus. Our primary aim is not personal growth, spiritual nourishment, or increased knowledge and learning.
- b. This is true for two reasons:
  - i. The Bible is not about you or me it is about God. The person we should be looking to find in the Scriptures and in prayer is God not ourselves.
  - ii. What principle or fact or inspiration is more powerful and life transformative than God Himself? And what greater could God give us than Himself?
- c. Hearing God in and through prayerful Bible study does not happen by accident. Many, if not most, who heard Jesus preach did not actually “hear” Him.

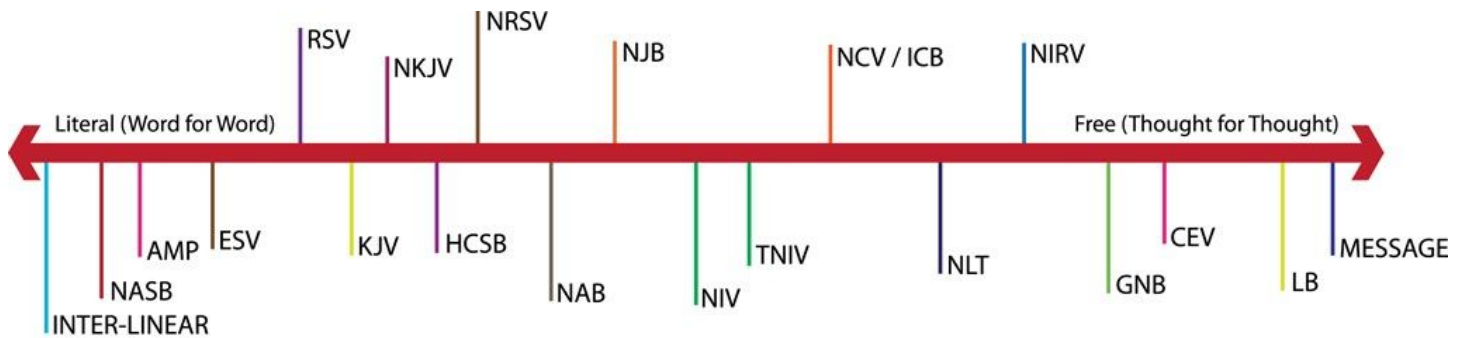
*“Seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.” - Luke 8:10*

- d. There are two keys to hearing and encountering Jesus in and through the Bible.
  - i. Combining your Bible study and prayer time so they are one in the same.
  - ii. Becoming a student of the Bible instead of a reader of the Bible.
    1. There is a large and quantifiable difference between reading the Bible and studying the Bible. Reading will get you started but if the goal of prayerful Bible study is to hear and encounter Jesus what is needed is Bible study.

<u>Casual Reading</u>	<u>Intentional Study</u>
Meaning is often missed	Meaning is understood
Quantity is key	Quality is key
Feels good but leads to little change	Challenging but leads to transformation
Little thought required	Provokes questions and thinking

### 2. Getting Started

- a. **A Bible** - Picking out a Bible can be a daunting task so what should you look for in a Bible?
  - i. Genuine Leather - They are a bit more but well worth it in quality and durability.
  - ii. Version - The most important thing is getting a version you can read and understand. I recommend the ESV, NKJV, or the NASB. All of them are more literal translations which are better for studying but again find something that you can read and understand.



- iii. **Study Notes** - Many Bibles have study notes in them. These can be very helpful but many of them take very different theological stances which can change the meaning of a verse. So while these notes can be helpful you have to realize they are subscribing to a particular school of theological thought. Some highly regarded study systems within Evangelicalism are:
  1. **ESV Study Bible** - full study notes, maps, concordance, and outlines.
  2. **Thompson Chain** - links similar verses together to help you study but does not have full notes at the bottom of the page.
  3. **Ryrie Study Bible** - full study notes, maps, concordance, and outlines.
- b. **A Journal** - You will want to journal what you are learning and what God is showing you. This will help you learn more and also allow you to go back and read what God spoke to you in a particular season of your life. There are also plenty of journaling apps for computer users.
- c. **Pens and Highlighters** - Don't be afraid to mark up your Bible. Strategically using them can really help you connect thoughts, ideas, and verses thus enriching your studying dramatically.
- d. **Time and Place** - Becoming a student of the Bible takes consistency. It is imperative that you find a regular time and place to study. In my experience those that don't schedule your Bible study time you simply won't do it.
  - i. One of the premier bible teachers in the UK was asked one time, "How did you learn so many Bible verses? What was your study routine?" To this he simply responded, "An hour a day for 50 years will do that."
- e. **Slow Down and Have a Plan** - You should have an idea of what you are going to study every day when you sit down. If you study and read at random you don't learn nearly as much and most likely will become frustrated.
  - i. I recommend studying the Bible by book. Set aside a few months and devote your Bible study and prayer to one particular book (1 Peter or 1 John are great places to start).<sup>1</sup>
  - ii. Doing this helps your mind stay rooted in the Scriptures which in turn leads to more clarity and understanding which produces more transformation.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.daltonthomas.org/blog/2014/12/31/a-worthy-vision-for-2016>

### 3. Introduction to Luther's 'A Simple Way to Pray'

- a. There are countless pages written about prayer but seemingly very few about how to actually do it. I've found Martin Luther's *A Simple Way to Pray* to be the very best approach to actually praying. Not only does Luther's model teach us to pray it teaches us how to pray the Bible; i.e. prayerful Bible study.
  - i. The story goes that Martin Luther's barber was newly converted and asked Luther how to pray. To help this new believer with no background in the Bible or church he wrote *A Simple Way to Pray*.
- b. Luther's model consists of a series of four questions that help you engage with the Bible and turn it into prayer. They are:
  - i. Instruction: *What is this scripture telling me to believe or do?*
  - ii. Thanksgiving: *What worship and praise is due God?*
  - iii. Confession: *What sin do I need to confess and repent of?*
  - iv. Prayer: *How can I pray for my own life and for those around me?*
- c. Martin Luther would go through this process with every passage of the Bible he was studying. While to some this may seem limiting or restricting but to Luther, and I would agree with him, the model acted more like a doorway into encounter than wall of limitation and thus became liberated him to hear from God.
- d. This four step process is not something invented by Luther but is found in many prayers in the Bible. Daniel 9 is possibly the clearest example.

*"...in the first year of his reign **I, Daniel, understood by the books** the number of years specified by the word of the Lord through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. **Then I set my face toward the Lord** God to make request by prayer... '**O Lord, great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and mercy** with those who love Him, and with those who keep His commandments, we have sinned and committed iniquity, **we have done wickedly and rebelled**, even by departing from Your precepts and Your judgements... Now therefore, our God, hear the prayer of Your servant, and his supplications, and for the Lord's sake cause Your face to shine on You sanctuary, which is desolate... **O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and act!**'" - Daniel 9:2-5, 17 & 19*

- i. Daniel first understands what was written by Jeremiah and then is moved into prayer. His prayer has the same three stages in the same order Luther. He first extols the greatness of God, then confesses and repents of sin before finally asking God to act on the nation's behalf by releasing them from captivity.
- e. Here in Daniel and in Luther you can see two distinct sections within the four part progression. They are as follows:
  - i. Instruction: - Luther rightly noted that before you can meditate on a passage, repent of your sin because of a passage, or intercede for others out of a passage of Scripture you first had to understand what it was saying. You simply can't pray what you don't understand. Daniel first understood before he prayed.

*“But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and **understands it**, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.” - Matthew 13:23*

1. Therefore our first step is going to be actual study of the Scriptures that will propel us, like Daniel was, into prayer.
- ii. Thanksgiving, Confession, and Prayer - The final three stages of Luther’s model help us take what we just learned from the Bible and transform it into prayer.
  1. It should be noted that these four stages are purposefully ordered but fluid in their practice meaning there are natural ebbs and flows back and forth which should be naturally followed.
  2. These stages represent a road to drive on to get you somewhere not a ball in chain to keep you from moving.
- f. This model is going to be our roadmap for the remainder of this teaching series. The tentative schedule is as follows.

<u><b>A Simple Way to Pray</b></u>	<u><b>Activity</b></u>	<u><b>Week of Teaching</b></u>
Instruction	How to study the Bible	Weeks 2-5
Thanksgiving	Prayerful worship	Week 6
Confession	Prayers of repentance	Week 7
Prayer	Prayers for breakthrough	Week 8

#### 4. Instruction

- a. Our first job is to seek understanding because only those who understand actually find God.
  - i. If the Bible is the word of God which perfectly and rightly leads us to hear and encounter the Living Word of God (Christ) than the only way we can know or encounter Christ is by understanding what the Bible says. Therefore we can say our ability to know and love God is directly connected to our understanding of the Bible.

*“My son, if you receive my words, and treasure my commands within you, so that you incline your ear to wisdom, and **apply your heart to understanding**; Yes, if you cry out for discernment, and **lift up your voice for understanding**, if you seek her like silver, and search for her as for for hidden treasures; **Then you will understand** the fear of the Lord, and **find the knowledge of God**. For the Lord gives wisdom; **From His mouth come knowledge and understanding...**” - Proverbs 2:1-6*

- b. So where do you start? After you have picked a book read through it a few times with one of those times being out loud. This will help you gain a general sense of the book.
- c. Once you have done this you are able to begin working through various passages.

- i. With some books it works best to work through verse by verse in order simply because the book's structure is a series of connected ideas and arguments. The New Testament epistles work this way.
- ii. However this is not always true. The Gospels for example do not necessitate this. You don't need to understand Luke 6 to understand the story of the sinful woman in Luke 7. Same with the Psalms.
- d. There are three stages to proper Bible study. The order of these three stages is of the utmost importance. Most error, whether small or big, stems from going through these stages in the improper order or in many cases simply skipping a stage all together.
- e. The three basic stages in order are:
  - i. Observation - What do I see?
  - ii. Interpretation - What does this mean?
  - iii. Application - What should I believe or do?

## 5. Observation

- a. What makes one person a better Bible student than the other? He can simply see more. That is all. One person sees ideas, connections, and details that the other does not and more often than not meaning, and God's voice, are found in the details.
- b. This is what reading is in the most fundamental sense. Reading is seeing. We need to train the eyes of our mind to see. To do that we need to know what we are looking for.
- c. Here are 20 things to observe that will become the foundation for proper interpretation and application. They fall into three categories (some fall into multiple categories):
  - i. Terms - What words/phrases are used?
    1. Commands - Matthew 22:37-39
    2. Emotions - 2 Corinthians 9:7
    3. Parallels to Jesus - 1 Samuel 17
    4. Prayers - Psalm 13:3
    5. Repetition - Romans 6
    6. Quotations - Luke 4:1-12
  - ii. Structure - How is the text laid out and arranged?
    1. Amount of Space - John 13-17
    2. Clear Beginning or End - 1 Corinthians 7:1
    3. Locational Markers - John 2:11-12
    4. Pivotal Statements or Events - Acts 2
    5. Purpose Statement - Heb. 8:1
    6. Time Markers - John 2:13, 6:4, 12:1
  - iii. Grammar - How are words related to each other?
    1. Cause and Effect (*key terms: therefore, that, so, then, as a result*) - Romans 1:24-32
    2. Compare and Contrast (*key terms: like, as, too, also, but, yet*) - Psalm 1
    3. Connecting Words (*key terms: for, and, therefore, moreover, since, but, because*) - Hebrews 4:1

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4. Explanation or Reason (*key terms: that, for, why, because, therefore, so*) - *John 3:16*
5. Metaphor/Similes (*key terms: like, as*) - *Psalm 42/Psalm 23:1*
6. Order - *Genesis 2:15 and Genesis 3:17-24*
7. Prepositions - (*key terms: in, by, with, on, upon, through, about, concerning, from, for*) - *Ephesians 1:3*
8. Question and Answer/Rhetorical Question - *Romans 6:1-4*