

Introduction to Bible Study Methods
Power Walk Pastors and Leadership Conference
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Bible Study Method

There are six important factors that will help enlighten our study of God`s Word:

1. **History and Culture**---"From what sphere of reference was the passage written"
2. **Observation**---"What do I see"
3. **Context**---"What is with the text"
4. **Correlation**---"Association of passages, facts and doctrinal principles"
5. **Interpretation**--"What does it mean?"
6. **Application**--"How does it work"

History

"From what sphere of reference was the passage written"

A. If you have a study bible read:

1. Who is the **author**
2. Examine the **background** and **culture**
3. Check to see who were the **recipients** of the letter
4. Examine the **purpose** for writing the letter

OBSERVATION

"What do I see?"

A. Important Principles:

1. C.H. Spurgeon said, "If God has not called you to study he has not called you to preach." In our case it is teaching.
2. He also said, "A Bible that is falling apart usually belongs to person who is not."
3. We must look for detail because none of it is trivial.
4. To learn to observe we must learn to read well and to really see what is there and what isn't there. Too many of us are in the habit of reading without thinking.

5. Observation forms perception and develops awareness.

A. Definition:

1. Observation is essentially awareness

B. The purpose of observation:

To saturate our minds with the details of the content of a given passage.

Dr. H. T. Kuist says "it is the art of seeing things as they really are."

C. The methods of observation:

1. **KEY TERMS:**

You need to decide which words are most important for understanding the main thrust of the passage.

- a) Definition: "A term is a given word as it is used in a given context."
- b) Select the key terms, define and understand them.
- c) One term can have several meanings. The meaning that best fits the context.

2. **LOOK FOR ADMONITIONS:**

a) Is it a:

- command
- advice
- promise
- warning

b) In other words does it tell me:

- to do something
- not to do something
- to be something

3. Check connections for logical relationships:

- a) because or for: These words often **introduce a reason or result**.
- b) in order that: This phrase often **sets forth a purpose**.
- c) therefore: This word introduce a **summary of ideas, result or condition**.

d) if: This conjunction introduces a **condition which requires action or sets forth a cause which will bring forth certain results.**

4. Look for **contrasts, comparisons, illustrations.**

a) A comparison is the association of similar things. This is done by using "similes" (like) and "metaphors" (is).

5. Look for key grammatical constructions.

a) Important connectives:

- therefore
- yet
- however
- likewise
- nevertheless

Note: These connections reflect results, reasons and conclusions.

b) Emphatic words:

- truly, verily, behold, indeed, finally, especially, last of all, I tell you.

Note: These words give emphasis to the author's thought.

6. Ask questions:

- who, what, when, where, how, why.

7. Examine the atmosphere.

a) Is the passage reporting an event or is it a parable.

8. Review setting.

a) Where is that particular event taking place or where is it being told.

- is Paul in prison
- what is taking place while Jesus is taking the cross to Calvary
- what is occurring around the cross while Jesus is on the cross

Summary:

There are two marks which characterize the efficient observer: awareness and thoroughness. He is not mechanical in his observation. Rather he is alive to the contents of a passage. He perceives, he actually sees. And he sees all the components of a passage. He takes nothing for granted. He marks attentively each term, because he knows that any artist who is worthy of the name makes a thoughtful and purposeful selection of terminology. He also notes carefully the relations and interrelations between terms. He keeps his eyes open to the smallest as well as the largest connections. He pays close attention to the general literary form and atmosphere of a passage. In brief, all the constituents of a Biblical unit become a part of the consciousness of the proficient observer.

CONTEXT

A. Definition:

The portions surrounding the one we are studying, both before and after it.

B. There are two levels of the context to be recognized:

1. THE NEAR OR IMMEDIATE:

a) This is what comes just before or after verse (say, one paragraph or perhaps two or three).

2. THE FAR, OR REMOTE:

a) The context may be the preceding or next chapter or some other part of the same book.

C. The context can have many forms:

1. A **word's meaning** can only be understood within a sentence or paragraph.

The sentence then is the context of the word

2. The meaning of **a phrase** can be understood in a paragraph, by itself it may be obscure.

The paragraph or section in which it is found is its context.

D. Understanding the context:

1. Think of all the possible meanings you can for the verse (or word, phrase, sentence).

a) Write them down (This does not mean you should speculate or conjure up fanciful meanings.)

b) It is always good to think clearly about the possible meanings of the verse and any difficulties in it.

2. Read the verse in the context:

a) First read the verse straight through; do not spend time trying to resolve problems.

b) Read it twice and the third time note connections between words or thoughts.

3. Study the verse more closely and any main words that are repeated:

a) Do not include common ones like "**and**" and "**the**".

b) Be alert for any word in the verse which is repeated in the verse's context. It may indicate a major theme and the relations between the parts.

4. Try to answer the question: What does this verse mean in its context?

CORRELATION

"Association of passages, facts and doctrinal principles"

A. Formal Association:

1. This involves correlation in terms of topics.

a) This may be individual books of the Bible or the whole Bible may be surveyed in terms of their theology, relationship to man in general, salvation, Christ, the Holy Spirit or moral ethics.

b) The drawback about the above method is that we tend to read into the passage our own biases and cultural expectations, rather than just seeking the truth.

B. Informal Association:

1. This means seeking passages that relate or support the particular passage being studied.

2. Make a conscious effort to discover those ties which bind every fact to every other fact, and in so doing one will engage in the ideal expression of informal correlation.

Summary

1. Both methods of synthesis are important but they must be used carefully.

2. Constantly look for connections between various Biblical passages, and between Scriptural statements and the data one finds outside the Scriptures.

3. With consistent attempts to see the Bible as-a-whole and life as-a-whole.

4. Refer to the middle of the your study as a way of cross-referencing.

INTERPRETATION

"What does it mean?"

We will now begin to seek understanding of the things we observed

A. The purpose of interpretation:

The primary purpose of interpretation is to discover what the author meant by what he said. It is to recreate or recapture the attitudes, motives, thoughts, and emotions of the writers and of those concerning whom they wrote.

To re-create the Scriptures, then, is to expound them in such a way as to cause the written word to become the living word. Therefore the problem of interpretation is the problem of re-creation.

Note: Interpretation is built on thorough observation.

B. Methods of interpretation:

1. There are two important elements of interpretation:

a) Analysis:

-this is a study of the parts or the details of a passage.

b) Synthesis:

-this is a study of how each part fits into the whole.

Note: What we are doing here is moving between the parts of details and the whole picture (re-create).

In analysis you take the passage apart and in synthesis you put it back together again. This is true whether we are talking about a word within a verse, a verse within a paragraph, a paragraph within a chapter or a chapter within a book.

We must learn to see both the forest and the trees.

When we have an understanding of the whole we are led to expect certain things; e.g. tree; we expect roots, trunk, branches, sap, etc. The more we refine our understanding of the whole the more specific the details we expect: tree, citrus, orange, navel.

ANALYSIS:

1. Now that the key words have been identified we must research their meaning.

Meaning and use of words:

a) The meaning of a word can be found in a **dictionary** or **concordance**.

b) The concordance or dictionary will give several meanings. We must choose from the many definitions the one which best fits the context of the passage.

c) The context of the passage is developed based on the observations and interpretative questions (we will address interpretative questions latter).

d) In-order to decide which meaning to select, do the following:

-check cross references, that is, review how the word functions in a similar passage.

-review other Bible translations outside of the one you are using.

2. Interpretative questions:

a) Primary Function:

Interpretive questions arise from observations (Terms, Structure, Literary form, Atmosphere) and form the essential bridge to interpretation.

b) Primary Questions:

**Definitive - What does this mean? Give explanation.

**Rational - Why is this said and why is it said here? Give reason.

**Implication - What does this imply? Give significance.

c) Secondary Questions:

**Identifying - Who or what is involved?

**Modal - How is this accomplished?

**Temporal - When is this done?

**Local - Where is this done?

SYNTHESIS:

1. A passage is only fully understood when these three questions are answered in the fullest respect:

a) What is the author talking about?-----**SUBJECT**

b) What does the author intend to say about the subject?-----**COMPLEMENT**

c) Why does the author speak?

Note: This is a compiling of the observations.

2. A complete synthesis includes **SUBJECT / COMPLEMENT / PURPOSE** elements of meaning.

3. After the **subject, complement** and **purpose** is outlined we need to summarize all three areas into a

****BIG IDEA****

a) WHAT THE PASSAGE IS TALKING ABOUT?

b) The big idea is the main topic.

-do you need to prove it? If so how?

4. Outline the passage: review example

a) The outline should reflect the movement of the lesson.

b) Be certain all the parts are related to one another.

5. Summary:

The mark of a good summary, a good understanding of the whole, is whether it gives a reasonable, natural account for the particulars. When you write a summary you can judge its worth by the way it makes room for all the details of the passage.

If it covers all the ideas easily and naturally without being forced; if it does not include anything that is not in the passage then it is probably a good summary.

APPLICATION

"How does it work?"

A. Principle Function:

This is the stage of Bible Study where we determine the functional meaning of a text.

B. Purpose:

Application involves the **will**; by an act of our will we choose to do something. It is in obeying the voice of the Lord and receiving what He says and putting it into practice.

Application does not happen by osmosis or by chance; application is by intent.

The real purpose of Bible Study is not to satisfy curiosity but to change lives in order that we may be more like Jesus (1 Tim. 1:5)

C. Method for applying Bible principles:

1. We need to answer four questions:

- a) How does it work?
- b) How does the truth of this passage function in my life?
- c) What does it mean to me?
- d) So what?

D. An alternative method to applying the Scriptures:

The Christian life is best understood as a series of new relationships (2Cor. 5:17) involving:

1. Your relation to God:

- Fellowship to enjoy
- Commands to obey
- Promises to claim
- Prayers to express

2. Your relation to yourself:

- Past background and heritage
- Present experience
- Personal values, priorities, standards
- Future expectations

3. Your relation to others:

- In the home
- In the church
- In society
- In the world

4. Your relation to the enemy:

- A person to resist
- Devices to recognize
- Sins to avoid
- Armor to wear

Note: D. L. Moody says in reference to 2 Tim. 3:16-17: "The Scriptures were not given to increase our knowledge, but to change our lives."

Notes taken from:
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