

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

BIBLE STUDY METHODS - OBSERVATION

A. Reminder of the importance of Bible Study

1. 2 Timothy 3:16-17, *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work,*
2. Hebrews 4:12, *For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*
3. *No spiritual discipline is more important than the intake of God's Word.* Donald Whitney

B. Added notes

1. *The biggest tragedy in evangelicalism today is that many Christians are under the Word of God, but they are not in it for themselves.* Dr. Howard Hendricks
2. The most important thing I learned at seminary, *I can study the Bible for myself.*

C. Components of Bible Study

1. It is personal
 - a. Think for yourself.
 - b. Evaluate the thoughts of others.
 - c. Fall in love with the Author - pursue an attitude of reverence toward Scripture through dependence on God.
2. It is inductive
 - a. Examination of the text is primary, *Two opposite errors beset the student of the Scriptures: the tendency to take everything second hand from others, and the refusal to take anything from others.* Charles H. Spurgeon
 - b. Emphasis on objectivity, *There are simply those who think they are impartial and those who know they are not.* Gamaliel Bradford
 - c. Conclusions based on observation of the text.
 - d. Never re-interpret a clear passage by means of a difficult passage.
3. It is methodical
 - a. Plan your steps.
 - b. Utilize all appropriate tools: terms, structure, form, and context.
4. It is experiential
 - a. The Bible records people's religious experiences.
 - b. These experiences are recorded to impact the reader.

D. Bible Study is a 3-step process

1. Observation - What do I see?
2. Interpretation - What does it mean?
3. Application - How does it work?

OBSERVATION

A. The importance of observation

1. The more time you spend in observation, the less time you will spend in interpretation, and the more accurate will be your results.
2. Sir William Osler, an eminent physician, always sought to impress upon young medical students the importance of observing details. While stressing this point in a lecture before a student group he indicated a bottle on his desk. *"This bottle contains a sample for analysis," he announced. It's possible by testing it to determine the disease from which the patient suffers." Suiting actions to words, he dipped a finger into the fluid and then into his mouth. "Now," he continued, "I am going to pass this bottle around. Each of you taste the contents as I did and see if you can diagnose the case." As the bottle was passed from row to row, each student gingerly poked his finger in and bravely sampled the contents. Osler then retrieved the bottle. "Gentlemen," he said, "Now you will understand what I mean when I speak about details. Had you been observant you would have seen that I put my index finger into the bottle but my middle finger into my mouth."*

B. Why people don't get more from their Bible study

1. People don't know how to read.
 - a. Invest in a book by Mortimer J. Adler, *How to Read a Book*.
 - b. Take steps to get more from reading the Bible
 - 1) Learn to read it better and faster.
 - 2) Learn to read it as for the first time.
 - 3) Learn to read it as a love letter.
2. People don't have rules for reading the Bible
 - a. Repeatedly - as often as possible
 - b. Patiently - don't rush the process
 - c. Prayerfully - before, during, and after
 - d. Meditatively - seek the spiritual
 - e. Acquisitively - ask questions and look for answers
 - f. Purposefully - theme of author in view
 - g. Telescopically - in light of the whole
3. People don't know what to look for
 - a. Emphasis (purpose, order, movement from lesser to greater)
 - b. Repetition (terms, phrases, clauses)
 - c. Related (general to specific, questions and answers, cause and effect)
 - d. Alike (as, like)
 - e. Unlike (contrast, opposite, but)
 - f. True to life (principles, problems, feelings, goals)

C. The Observation Process

1. Selection of text
 - a. Interest
 - b. Difficulty
 - c. Relevance
2. Time commitment
 - a. Daily
 - b. Weekly
 - c. Time per session
3. Overview
 - a. Read the text through several times.
 - b. Note key words for further study.
 - c. List issues that need further clarification.
 - 1) Doctrinal
 - 2) Thematic
 - 3) Practical
4. Ask basic questions
 - a. Who - is speaking, is being addressed, is the message for?
 - b. What - is happening, causes the event, is the result of the event?
 - c. When - is the event taking place, past, present, future, more than one event?
 - d. Where - is the event taking place, is the event being discussed, will the event be?
 - e. How - many people are involved, did the event start, does the event relate to me?
 - f. Why - is this event in the text, are individuals in the text, is this text relevant for me?
5. Gather data
 - a. Word studies
 - 1) English concordance
 - 2) Strong, Greek/Hebrew concordance
 - 3) Vines, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*
 - b. Grammar and syntax - to be examined next lesson

- c. Theological and historical
 - 1) Read several commentaries
 - a) Complete Bible commentaries like, *Bible Knowledge Commentary*
 - b) Commentaries on the specific Bible book.
 - 2) Read a Bible encyclopedia like, *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*
 - 3) Read several overview books
 - a) Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*
 - b) Wilkinson, *Talk Through the Bible*
 - d. Electronic resources: one of the best is Logos by Faithlife which allows one to acquire resources at reasonable cost.
6. Don't get lost in the forest of observation
- a. Importance of the why as we dig deeper into the how.
 - b. Discovered information should become personal.
 - c. Observation should ultimately lead to application.

D. Context

1. Definition - Context refers to the material which precedes and follows the word or phrase.
2. Importance
 - a. Words, phrases, and clauses can have multiple meanings and examining the context can help determine the meaning.
 - b. Thoughts are usually expressed by a series of words or sentences, in association not isolation.
 - c. False interpretation can arise from ignoring the context.
3. Illustrations
 - a. Immediate context
 - 1) Meaning of *faith* in each of these verses.
 - a) Jude 3, *Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.*
 - b) Romans 3:3, *What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God?*
 - c) James 2:17, *So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.*
 - 2) Context of the paragraph or chapter
 - a) John 7:37-38 with explanation in John 7:39, *37 On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" 39 Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.*
 - b) Hebrews 7:20 with explanation in Hebrews 7:21, *20 And it was not without an oath. For those who formerly became priests were made such without an oath, 21 but this one was made a priest with an oath by the one who said to him: "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, 'You are a priest forever.'"*
4. Note
 - a. The paragraph is the basic unit of thought, not a verse or chapter.
 - b. A paragraph may be different than the one in your Bible.

E. Grammatical Structure

1. Inflection - change in the form of a word to indicate a change in grammatical function
 - a. Case
 - 1) Nominative-noun or pronoun acts as a subject.
 - 2) Accusative-noun or pronoun acts as an indirect object.
 - 3) Genitive-noun or pronoun shows ownership.
 - b. Gender - masculine, feminine, neuter
 - c. Number - singular, plural

- d. Tense - past, present, future
 - e. Person
 - 1) First - I, we
 - 2) Second - you
 - 3) Third - he, she, them
 - f. Mood
 - 1) Indicative - statement
 - 2) Imperative - request or command
 - 3) Subjunctive - obligation or condition
 - g. Voice
 - 1) Active - subject performs the action.
 - 2) Passive - subject receives the action.
2. Clauses
- a. Temporal
 - 1) After, Rev. 11:11, *But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them.*
 - 2) As, Acts 16:16, *As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling.*
 - 3) Before, John 8:58, *Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am."*
 - 4) Now, Luke 16:25, *But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish.*
 - 5) Then, 1 Cor. 15:6, *Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.*
 - 6) Until, Mark 14:25, *Truly, I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."*
 - 7) When, John 11:31, *When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there.*
 - 8) While, Mark 14:43, *And immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders.*
 - b. Local - Where, Hebrews 6:19-20, *19 We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, 20 where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.*
 - c. Connectives
 - 1) Reason
 - a) Because, Romans 1:24-25, *24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, 25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.*
 - b) For, Romans, 1:11, *For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you—*
 - c) Since, Romans 1:28, *And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.*
 - 2) Result
 - a) So, Romans 9:16, *So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.*
 - b) Then, Galatians 2:21, *I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.*
 - c) Therefore, 1 Cor. 10:12, *Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.*
 - d) Thus, 1 Cor. 8:12, *Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.*
 - 3) Purpose
 - a) In order that, Romans 4:16, *That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all,*
 - b) So that, Romans 5:21, *so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

- 4) Contrast
 - a) Although, Romans 1:21, *For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.*
 - b) But, Romans 2:7-8, *7 to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; 8 but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.*
 - c) Much more, Romans 5:15, *But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many.*
 - d) Nevertheless, 1 Cor. 10:5, *Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.*
 - e) Otherwise, 1 Cor. 14:16, *Otherwise, if you give thanks with your spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say "Amen" to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying?*
 - f) Yet, Romans 5:14, *Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.*
- 5) Comparison
 - a) Also, 2 Cor. 1:11, *You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.*
 - b) As, Romans 9:25, *As indeed he says in Hosea, "Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.'"*
 - c) As-so, Romans 5:18, *Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.*
 - d) Just as-so, Romans 11:30-31, *30 For just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, 31 so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy.*
 - e) Likewise, Romans 1:27, *and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.*
- 6) Series of Facts
 - a) First of all, 1 Tim. 2:1, *First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people,*
 - b) Last of all, 1 Cor. 15:8, *Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.*
 - c) Or, 2 Cor. 6:15, *What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever?*
- 7) Condition - If, Romans 2:19, *and if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness,*
- 8) Emphatic
 - a) Indeed, Romans 9:25, *As indeed he says in Hosea, "Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.'"*
 - b) Only, Galatians 2:10, *Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.*

CONCLUSION

- A. The more time you spend in observation, the less time you will spend in interpretation, and the more accurate will be your results.
- B. Evaluate what you have observed and try to rank information according to importance.
- C. As you observe, consider how to apply what you see.
- D. Remember that observation is not the end of Bible study but the beginning.

HOMEWORK

1. Read *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes - A Scandal in Bohemia and The Student, the Fish, and Agassiz*. What can they teach you about Bible Study observation?
2. What do you think Jesus meant when he talked about those with "ears to hear" (see Matthew 11:15; 13:9, 43; Luke 14:35)? How does this relate to our need to "learn how to read" the Bible?
3. In what way was Joshua supposed to read the Word of God, according to Joshua 1:8? What would be the result?
4. List at least seven benefits of gaining God's counsel from the Word, as found in Proverbs 3:13-26.
5. Set aside a time to read all of the Gospel of Mark in one sitting, without interruption. After you have finished, answer the following:
 - What obstacles did you have to overcome in order to read Mark straight through?
 - What new insights into this Gospel did you gain from reading it all at once?
 - In what ways do you think this reading would help you study Mark in detail?

ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES - A SCANDAL IN BOHEMIA by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

One night--it was on the twentieth of March, 1888--I was returning from a journey to a patient (for I had now returned to civil practice), when my way led me through Baker Street. As I passed the well-remembered door...I was seized with a keen desire to see Holmes again, and to know how he was employing his extraordinary powers. I rang the bell and was shown up to the chamber which had formerly been in part my own.

His manner was not effusive. It seldom was; but he was glad, I think, to see me...he stood before the fire and looked me over in his singular introspective fashion.

"Wedlock suits you," he remarked. "I think, Watson, that you have put on seven and a half pounds since I saw you."

"Seven!" I answered.

"Indeed, I should have thought a little more. Just a trifle more, I fancy, Watson. And in practice again, I observe. You did not tell me that you intended to go into harness."

"Then, how do you know?"

"I see it, I deduce it. How do I know that you have been getting yourself very wet lately, and that you have a most clumsy and careless servant girl?"

"My dear Holmes," said I, "this is too much. You would certainly have been burned, had you lived a few centuries ago. It is true that I had a country walk on Thursday and came home in a dreadful mess, but as I have changed my clothes I can't imagine how you deduce it. As to Mary Jane, she is incorrigible, and my wife has given her notice; but there, again, I fail to see how you work it out."

He chuckled to himself and rubbed his long, nervous hands together.

"It is simplicity itself," said he; "my eyes tell me that on the inside of your left shoe, just where the firelight strikes it, the leather is scored by six almost parallel cuts. Obviously they have been caused by someone who has very carelessly scraped round the edges of the sole in order to remove crusted mud from it. Hence, you see, my double deduction that you had been out in vile weather, and that you had a particularly malignant boot-slitting specimen of the London slavers. As to your practice, if a gentleman walks into my rooms smelling of iodoform, with a black mark of nitrate of silver upon his right forefinger, and a bulge on the right side of his top-hat to show where he has secreted his stethoscope, I must be dull, indeed, if I do not pronounce him to be an active member of the medical profession."

I could not help laughing at the ease with which he explained his process of deduction. "When I hear you give your reasons," I remarked, "the thing always appears to me to be so ridiculously simple that I could easily do it myself, though at each successive instance of your reasoning I am baffled until you explain your process. And yet I believe that my eyes are as good as yours."

"Quite so," he answered, lighting a cigarette, and throwing himself down into an armchair. "You see, but you do not observe."

THE STUDENT, THE FISH, AND AGASSIZ
by the Student, from Appendix American Poems, Houghton, Osgood & Co., 1880

It was more than fifteen years ago that I entered the laboratory of Professor Agassiz, and told him I had enrolled my name in the scientific school as a student of natural history. He asked me a few questions about my object in coming, my antecedents generally, the mode in which I afterwards proposed to use the knowledge I might acquire and finally, whether I wished to study any special branch. To the latter I replied that while I wished to be well grounded in all departments of zoology, I purposed to devote myself specially to insects.

"When do you wish to begin?" he asked.

"Now," I replied. This seemed to please him, and with an energetic "Very well," he reached from a shelf a huge jar of specimens in yellow alcohol.

"Take this fish," said he, "and look at it; we call it a Haemulon; by and by I will ask what you have seen."

With that he left me, but in a moment returned with explicit instructions as to the care of the object entrusted to me.

"No man is fit to be a naturalist, said he, "who does not know how to take care of specimens."

In ten minutes I had seen all that could be seen in that fish, and started in search of the professor, who had, however, left the museum; half an hour passed, an hour, another hour; the fish began to look loathsome. I turned it over and around; looked it in the face--ghastly; from behind, beneath, above, sideways, at a threequarters view--just as ghastly. I was in despair; at an early hour I concluded that lunch was necessary; so with infinite relief, the fish was carefully replaced in the jar, and for an hour I was free.

On my return...slowly I drew forth that hideous fish, and with a feeling of desperation again looked at it. I might not use a magnifying glass; instruments of all kinds were interdicted. My two hands, my two eyes, and the fish; it seemed a most limited field. I pushed my fingers down its throat to see how sharp its teeth were. I began to count the scales in the different rows until I was convinced that was nonsense. At last a happy thought struck me--I would draw the fish; and now with surprise I began to discover new features in the creature. Just then the professor returned.

"That is right," said he; "a pencil is one of the best eyes. I am glad to notice, too that you keep your specimen wet and your bottle corked."

With these encouraging words he added,--"Well, what is it like?"

He listened attentively to my brief rehearsal and then, with an air of disappointment:

"You have not looked very carefully; why, you haven't seen one of the most conspicuous features of the animal, which is as plainly before your eyes as the fish itself. Look again; look again!" and he left me to my misery.

I was piqued; I was mortified. Still more of that wretched fish? But now I set myself to the task with a will, and discovered one new thing after another, until I saw how just the professor's criticism had been. The afternoon passed quickly, and when, towards its close, the professor inquired,

"Do you see it yet?"

"No," I replied. "I am certain I do not, but I see how little I saw before."

"That is next best," said he earnestly, "but I won't hear you now; put away your fish and go home; perhaps you will be ready with a better answer in the morning.

The cordial greeting from the professor the next morning was reassuring; here was a man who seemed to be quite as anxious as I that I should see for myself what he saw.

"Do you perhaps mean," I asked, "that the fish has symmetrical sides with paired organs?"

His thoroughly pleased, "Of course, of course!" repaid the wakeful hours of the previous night.

I ventured to ask what I should do next.

"Oh, look at your fish!" he said, and left me again to my own devices. In a little more than an hour he returned and heard my new catalogue.

"That is good, that is good!" he repeated, "but that is not all; go on." And so for three long days, he placed that fish before my eyes, forbidding me to look at anything, else, or to use any artificial aid. "Look, look, look," was his repeated injunction.

The fourth day a second fish of the same group was placed beside the first, and I was bidden to point out the resemblances and differences between the two; another and another followed, until the entire family lay before me, and a whole legion of jars covered the table and surrounding shelves; the odor had become a pleasant perfume; and even now, the sight of an old, six-inch, worm-eaten cork brings fragrant memories.

The whole group of Haemulons was thus brought into review; and whether engaged upon the dissection of the internal organs, preparation and examination of the bony framework, or the description of the various parts, Agassiz's training in the method of observing facts and their orderly arrangement, was ever accompanied by the urgent exhortation not to be content with them.

"Facts are stupid things," he would say, "until brought into connection with some general law."

At the end of eight months, it was almost with reluctance that I left these friends and turned to insects; but what I gained by this outside experience has been of greater value than years of later investigation in my favorite groups.