

Verse:

Observations/Questions	Definitions	Correlations	Interpretations/Applications

Bible Study Method

There are many treasures to be found in the Scriptures that require digging deeper. This method, called “Search the Scriptures” was developed by the Navigators to be used for this “treasure hunt” of God’s Word. It provides rich understandings which can lead to deeper meditation. If the verse being studied is memorized, it provides opportunity throughout the week to become a part of the student’s way of thinking and living.

The above chart can be used to record these treasures, or they can simply be listed in the order suggested below.

Observations

According to Webster, observation is “an act of recognizing and noting a fact or occurrence...” or “a judgment or inference from what one has learned.”¹ This skill does not come easily. It requires much diligence and hard work. We must approach observation with a desire to know God’s truth, whether it agrees with what we thought before or not. We must persevere beyond what we see at first glance. A good example of observing is the way a scientist examines an object which he uses in an experiment. He looks at it from every angle and notices as many things about it as he possibly can.

Following are some questions to ask in the process of observation:

- Who – “Who are the people involved?”
- What – “What happened?”
- Where – “Where did it take place?”
- When – “When did it happen?”
- Why – “Why did it happen?”
- How – “How quickly, how well, what method?”²

Following are some things to watch for:

- Grammar
 - Subjects*: “Who or what is the focus of the action?”
 - Verbs*: What action is taking place?
 - Are the verbs active or passive?
 - Are they all the same tense?
 - Connectives*: If – look for a condition.
 - But* – look for a comparison or contrast.
 - And* – look for a connective reason.
 - Therefore* – look for purpose.

Comparisons *As, like, even*. It may be a comparison between two things somewhat different, as in the comparison between life and a race, or a spiritual mother and a nursing mother.

Contrasts *But, nor, not*. Consider how two things are different. Look for things which are similar in one respect and different in another.

Cause and effect *If – then* statements

References A New Testament passage may be quoting an Old Testament passage.

¹ Frederick C. Mish, ed., *Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition* (Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, 1995), 802.

² *Search the Scriptures* (Navpress: Colorado Springs, Colorado, 1976), 15.

Questions

This stage of the process helps you to identify what you need at this point in your life and creates a hunger for God to speak to you. It also directs and focuses your study by revealing what it is you want to understand from this particular passage. Questions draw out the deeper meanings of the passage. Don't be afraid to ask questions you think you might not be able to answer. God may not tell you the answer today but He is never "stumped." This is how you learn to go deeper. There is no limit to the number or type of possible questions for any particular passage. Most of your questions will be answered in the interpretation section, and some in the definition or correlation section. Make sure you watch for answers in your quiet time, as you read other books, listen to sermons, or just during the day. Claim the promise in Jeremiah 33:3 that if you call on Him He will answer you.

Following are some examples of possible questions:

- What do I need to understand about God in the midst of my current circumstances?
- Where do I see God at work in my life and what do I need for Him to reveal to me?
- Where do I need to grow, repent, change, be encouraged, etc.?
- How does this fit in with the rest of the chapter?
- What is the symbolism of this?
- What is the significance or importance of this?
- What character of God does this display?
- What condition or command is set forth?
- What is the opposite of this?
- How does this fit with what might "seem" to be an opposite principle in scripture?

Word Definitions

Specific meanings of key words as they were intended in the original language bring a new level of insight to bible study. Modern use of words often limits the fullness of the original intent. Start by looking up key words, but remember that sometimes a key word may seem insignificant at first. Trace words back to their roots and, if appropriate, compare the use of the word in other scripture passages. Remember that God had reasons for using each specific word. *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* or *Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible* are good sources for discovering the meaning of words in the original Hebrew or Greek.

Correlations

Correlation is the process of relating the passage studied to the rest of the chapter, the whole book, or all of scripture. The remaining part of the Bible is always the best commentary on any passage. Since the Bible was written by a perfect and orderly God it all fits together perfectly with no contradictions. We may not understand everything at a given point of time but there is truth that transcends any apparent contradiction. Begin examining cross reference with a sense of anticipation that you will find commentary on your questions.

There are several types of external cross references:

Parallel – say virtually the same thing as the verse studied, but often add more facts.

Contrasting – seem to contradict the verse considered. Resolving the apparent conflict will give you deeper insight.

Corresponding – either quote another verse from the Scriptures or refer to some event from Scripture.

Illustrative – historical accounts which clearly illustrate a principle stated in Scripture.³

³ Ibid., 32-33.

Helpful correlation questions:

- Where do you find examples of this in scripture?
- How does this relate to... (something studied earlier)?
- Where else in Scripture does it say this same thing?
- What other verse would give more insight to the meaning of this word?
- What character or event in Scripture exemplifies this principle?

How-to's:

- Begin by using the cross references listed in the margins of your study Bible.
- Ask God to call to mind other passages that may give insight.
- Using a topical Bible or concordance, take key words and check other scripture references that relate, writing down only those that are helpful for what you are pursuing. *The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge* (Fleming H. Revell Co., Publishers) is a helpful resource for finding cross references. It is available in many on-line bible study programs.

Notes

The note section is provided for any study information that was gathered but didn't fit in preceding columns. Often there will be pertinent historical or geographical information which can be noted here. The politics of the times, the culture, the social setting all help to paint an accurate picture. Most information found in Bible dictionaries or encyclopedias would be appropriate here. This is also a good place to record insights gained from other sources such as radio programs, books, songs, or sermons.

Interpretations

Interpretation is the step of determining the meaning of the verse or passage. It involves describing biblical truths discovered through the study process as they would apply to anyone. The process of interpretation involves lots of *thinking*. It is starting to put together the pieces of the puzzle of information you have gathered through observations, questions, definitions, correlations and other notes. Your goal is to determine and write the clear meaning of the passage. You may also want to explain how it fits with the rest of scripture.

Pictures

The purpose of a picture is to visually represent the main thought or idea of the passage. Drawing a picture helps to establish the message in a person's memory to facilitate meditation. The picture is primarily for the benefit of the one doing the study, so the method should be the one most meaningful to the artist himself. The method can be anything from stick men to progress cartoons, from modern art to Rembrandt.

Applications

Application is putting God's Word into practice—recognizing the voice of the Lord, and responding accordingly. This is where the Word becomes very personal and brings about change in the life of the one studying. Application prevents you from developing mere intellectual knowledge of God. There may be some applications which involve attitudes or habits which will change over a period of time, but it is important to include at least one application each week which is so specific that you would know by the end of the week whether you had completed it and whether it had changed your life. Asking good questions at the beginning of your study will lead to specific applications at the end. Some good questions to assure this are:

- What will I do?
- When will I do it?
- How will I do it?
- How will I check to see that it is done?

The following list may help you find applications that you have been missing:

- **Faith:** What does the Bible passage teach me about personal faith? What do I learn about God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit and my relationship to them? What specific truths should I believe? Why should I believe them?
- **Attitudes:** What do I learn about good or bad attitudes? What are the results of each kind? What should be my attitudes? How can I change negative ones? What do I learn about emotions? Is there help suggested for destructive emotions such as fear, worries, hates, resentments, jealousies?
- **Actions:** What should be my actions? Are there errors to avoid? Are there any actions I need to change?
- **Sins:** What sins are pointed out in my life? Are there some which I need to confess to God? To my fellowmen? Which do I need to forsake?
- **Examples:** What examples are there to follow? Not to follow? Why?
- **Challenges:** What are some admonitions which I should make my own? How can I follow these admonitions in a concrete way? In my relationships in my home? In school? In work? With others?
With friends?
- **Promises:** What promises can I claim for my own? Are there any conditions which I must fulfill to claim these promises? Are there any specific prayer promises to claim?⁴

There are many on-line resources which can be helpful in this kind of in-depth bible study. These include www.blueletterbible.org, www.studylight.org, and www.e-sword.net.

⁴ Ibid., 67-68.