

ROCK GROUP BIBLE STUDY

November 7, 2003

Handling Accurately the Word of Truth

2 Timothy 2:15

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth.

This verse is a command that has application to all believers. The emphasis is that we are to be diligent in how we handle the Word of God. We need to rightly divide or handle accurately and responsibly God's Word. We need to remember that God's Word is important and authoritative. It is God's revelation to mankind. It is inspired by God and in-errant in its original manuscripts. We need to be about the business of diligently studying and applying God's Word to our lives and recognize that it is through His Word that God guides us. Psalm 119:105 says, "*Thy word is a lamp to my feet, And a light to my path.*" Unfortunately many people find it quite difficult to study the Bible, because they just don't know how. So this week we are going to learn How to study the Bible for yourself.

· *What reasons do people typically give for not reading or studying the Bible?*

· *What is your struggle when it comes to studying the Bible?*

· *How valid are these reasons?*

· *Why should we study the Bible?*

-1 Peter 2:2, It is essential to spiritual _____!

-Hebrews 5:11-14, It is essential to spiritual _____!

-2 Timothy 3:16-17, It is essential for spiritual _____!

-2 Timothy 2:15, It is essential in our spiritual _____! It is commanded!!!!

· *How should we study the Bible?*

The most helpful way to study the Bible is to follow the three-step process of Observation, Interpretation and Application. By using these three key components of Bible study, you will be able to handle God's Word accurately.

STEP 1-OBSERVATION: In this step, you ask and answer the question, "*What do I see?*" or "*What is taking place in this passage?*" The moment you come to the Scriptures you ask, What are the Facts? You assume the role of a biblical detective, looking for clues. No detail is too trivial. When the psalmist prayed, "*Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Thy law*" (Psalm 119:18), he was praying for the power of observation. He was asking that the Spirit of God enable him that he might see clearly the truth that God has revealed. The component of observation,

if done appropriately, is the most time consuming part of the entire Bible study process.

Observation Exercise

7 Essentials to Observation:

1-Make Time! (In order to accurately handle God's Word, it requires spending an appropriate amount of time. Set aside a specific time to study the Scriptures.)

2-Look for Key Terms! (such as definitions and connecting words)

3-Look at the Structure of the Passage! (subject, object, main verb, tense etc...)

4-Identify the literary form! (Is it history, poetry, parable, letter etc...?)

5-Notice the atmosphere! (i.e. the setting or feeling of the passage)

6-Ask and answer questions of the text! (Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?)

7-READ, RECORD, & REFLECT! The key to observation is reading!!!

· *How should we read?*

1-Read Thoughtfully!

-Apply the same mental discipline as you would any subject in which you take a vital interest in.

2-Read Patiently!

- Don't expect results instantly and effortlessly
- Be patient with yourself.
- Be patient with the text.
- Don't immediately run to secondary resources.

3-Read Repeatedly!

- Read an entire book at one sitting.
- Start at the beginning of a book.
- Read in different translations.
- Read it aloud.
- Listen to it on tape.
- Follow a schedule or plan.

4-Read Selectively!

-Asking questions as your reading: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?

5-Read Prayerfully!

- Prayer and Bible Study should go hand in hand. We should pray before we read, while we read and after we read.
- Pray when you are having difficulty with a passage.
- Thank God when you are able to learn and apply a passage.

6-Read Imaginatively!

-Try to place yourself into the text. What would you think, feel, or do in the situation that you are

reading about?

-Use different translations and paraphrases.

7-Read Meditatively!

-Reflect on the text. (cf. Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:1-2; 19:14; 63:6; 119:23, 97; Colossians 3:2)

-Meditation means to repeatedly read, ponder and pray over a passage.

-Meditation is the careful contemplation of God's Word with the goal of applying its truth to my life.

-Meditation requires effort, time, a plan and quieting ourselves.

8-Read Purposefully!

-Look for the aim of the author.

-Some authors give you the purpose in a nice concise statement.

-Others require that you do a little more digging.

-Look for the purpose through the structure of the passage.

-Grammatical structure.

-Literary structure.

-Biographical structure.

-Geographical structure.

-Historical structure.

-Chronological structure.

9-Read Acquisitively!

-Read not only to receive, but to retain, not only to perceive, but to possess.

-Paraphrase the passage.

-Outline the passage.

-Use alliteration.

10-Read Telescopically!

-View the parts in light of the whole.

-Pay careful attention to CONTEXT!!!

-Evaluate a verse in light of the passage and the passage in light of the book.

-Evaluate the historical situation/context of the book.

· *What things should we look for as we read?*

1-Things that are emphasized!

-amount of space given to a particular subject or theme. (i.e. Genesis)

-stated purposes. (i.e. John 20:30-31)

-order of events. (i.e. Luke 6:14-16)

-movement from lesser to greater or vice versa. (i.e. 2 Samuel 11-12)

2-Things that are repeated!

-terms, phrases and clauses. (i.e. Ephesians 1)

-incidents and circumstances.

-patterns.

-NT use of OT passages.

3-Things that are related!

-movement from general to specific. (i.e. Genesis 1:1)

-questions and answers. (i.e. Romans 6)

-cause and effect (Psalm 1)

4-Things that are alike!

- Look for comparisons.
- Similes (uses like or as) Psalm 42; 1 Peter 2:2
- Metaphors (an idea or an object used for another) John 15:1; Isaiah 26:4

5-Things that are unlike!

- Look for contrasts.
- "But" signifies that a change of direction is coming.
- Some metaphors provide a contrast. (i.e. Luke 18:1-8)

6-Things that are true to life!

- What does this passage tell you about reality?
- emotions.
- struggles.
- ambitions.
- goals.
- responses.
- Etc...

STEP 2-INTERPRETATION: In this step you ask and answer the question, "*What does it mean?*" Your quest is for meaning. Unfortunately, too much Bible study begins with interpretation, and furthermore, it usually ends there. But before you understand, you have to learn to see (observation). Before you move on to the third step, application you must first understand the passage, interpretation. It is impossible to apply the Word of God accurately until you understand it. In fact the better you understand the passage, the better you can apply it. That's why David prayed, "*Give me understanding, and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart.*" (Psalm 119:34) Acting on what God has said assumes that you understand what He has said. That's why the second major step in Bible study is Interpretation.

· *Why do we need to interpret the Scriptures, why can't we just read it and do what it says?*

The answer is that time and distance have thrown up barriers, between us and the biblical writers, that block our understanding.

1-Language barriers-The Bible was not originally written in English.

2-Cultural barriers-Bible culture is not the same as modern day America.

3-Literary barriers-it is not just a book or a poem, but filled with different kinds of literature.

4-Communication barriers-We are finite creatures trying to understand an infinite God.

Because of these barriers, it becomes more of a challenge to interpret Scripture and we need to make sure that we handle the Scripture with care.

· *What are some hazards to avoid as we come to interpret Scripture?*

1-Be careful not to misread the text. (i.e. Psalm 37:4)

2-Be careful not to distort the text. (Making it say what you want it to say)

3-Be careful not to contradict the text. (Scripture never contradicts itself)

4-Avoid subjectivism (the meaning of the text is in the text not in our subjective response).

5-Avoid relativism (the Bible does not change meaning over time).

6-Avoid overconfidence (the minute that you think you have mastered the Scripture, your setting yourself up for a fall).

5 Keys to Interpretation:

1-**Examine the Content!** There is a direct cause-effect relationship between content and meaning. The content is the raw material, the database, with which you will interpret the text. Because of your work in Observation, you already know quite a bit about how to determine the content of a passage. Observation provides the basic content of the passage for you. This step is utilizing what you observed to make a determination about the passage.

2-**Experience the Context!** Or should I say, "Context! Context! Context!" I cannot over emphasize this step enough.

-*Literary Context:* Look at the verses before and after. Look at the passage within the chapter it falls. Look at the passage within the overall theme of the book. Look at the passage within the writings of the author.

-*Historical Context:* Where does this passage fit in history? What else is taking place in the world at this time? What are the social, political, and technological influences on the writer and on those whom he was writing?

-*Cultural Context:* The more you know about ancient cultures the more insight you will have into the text.

-*Geographical Context:* Geography is incredibly relevant to the interpretation of Scripture. Try to understand, the terrain, weather, distances, transportation routes, size of the city, layout of the town, or what the location was known for.

-*Theological Context:* Try to determine what the author and the audience knew about God. Seek to understand what other religious influences existed at the time. Look for where this passage fits in the flow of Scripture.

3-**Execute Comparisons!** In comparison we seek to compare Scripture with Scripture. The greatest interpreter of Scripture is Scripture itself. Since Scripture will not contradict itself, then this step provides a great safety net in understanding what a passage means.

4-**Encounter the Culture!** You have to see a passage against the right background. You must come to understand how the culture of the time influenced both the author and the audience. It sometimes clarifies why it was necessary for a particular passage needed to be written.

5-**Employ Consultation!** Consultation involves the use of secondary resources. They can shed light on the text that will help you make more sense out of what you're looking at. We should never think that we have all the answers. Many people have walked this road before and have been illumined by the Holy Spirit to understand this particular text. It only makes sense to check their work. Do not rely solely on other sources, but use them toward the end of the interpretation process or at particular steps of the process to supplement your work.

· ***What sources are most useful to consult?***

1-***Concordances:*** These are helpful in finding comparison passages. (Passages with a similar theme or word) A concordance is like an index to the Bible.

2-***Bible Dictionaries:*** These are helpful in explaining the origin, meaning, and use of key words and terms in the text. They can also be useful in understanding geography and culture.

3-***Bible Handbooks:*** These basically summarize the content in the Bible. They are helpful in understanding a book's context and sometimes aid in understanding the cultural context.

4-**Bible Atlases**: These are helpful by providing collections of maps showing places mentioned in the text, and perhaps some description of their history and significance. They aid in understanding the geographical context of a passage.

5-**Bible Commentaries**: These are helpful in understanding the content, context and culture of a passage. There are various kinds of commentaries. In my opinion the more detailed and in depth, the better.

Once you have come to understand what the passage means, then it becomes easier to put it into action in your life.

STEP 3-APPLICATION: In this step you ask and answer the question, "***How does it work?***" It is taking what you see and understand and putting it into action in your life. ***Application is the integration of Biblical truth into our lives to the point that it changes our thoughts, speech and actions.*** It is application, which completes the Bible study process. Yet it is the most neglected and most needed stage in the process. The Bible was not written to satisfy your curiosity, it was written to transform your life. The ultimate goal of Bible study, then is not to do something to the Bible, but to allow the Bible to do something to you. [Howard Hendricks, Living by the Book, p. 284]

People often get mentally excited by the truth, yet they fail to be changed by it. They find it intellectually fascinating, yet spiritually frustrating. As we seek to study God's Word our task is two-fold. 1) We must get into the Word of God for ourselves and 2) We must allow the Word of God to get into us, to make a permanent difference in our character and conduct.

4 Substitutions for Application: Often we think we are incorporating application as part of our Bible study process, but essentially we are substituting something else in the place of true application.

1-We substitute interpretation for application. We settle for head knowledge without it ever effecting our thinking, speech or actions.

2-We substitute superficial obedience for substantive life change. Here we apply biblical truth to areas where we are already applying it rather than to new areas where it is needed.

3-We substitute rationalization for repentance. The moment truth gets too close, too convicting we start to defend ourselves and rationalize sin rather than repent of it.

4-We substitute an emotional experience for a volitional decision. In other words, we study the Word, and we have an emotional reaction to it, but never make any real change in our life.

· ***How should we apply God's Word to our lives?***

One helpful method of applying God's Word involves identifying and bringing to bear relevant precepts, principles and promises that pertain to a specific decision or situation.

A **precept** is a specific injunction as to what god directs, or forbids, us to do. A precept may be thought of as a rule or command; it is God giving orders. An example of a precept is "Speed Limit 25 MPH."

A **principle** is a general truth meant to inform our outlook and behavior. A principle is an abiding, unchanging truth, a maxim; it is God describing the underpinnings of reality. An example of a principle is "A good driver is a defensive driver."

A **promise** is a declaration by God of something that He will do. A promise is a pledge, a vow; it is God giving His Word. An example of a promise is "speed limit strictly enforced (you will get a ticket if you exceed the speed limit)."

We can summarize the application of Scripture in four steps:

- 1) **GENERALIZE**. Once interpretation has been completed, write down the precept(s), principle(s) or promise(s) you have found.
- 2) **CONTEMPORIZE** the truth by beginning to relate the precept, principle or promise to areas of life and/or decisions to be made.
- 3) **PERSONALIZE** the truth, as you "walk through" the areas of your life or "think through" them, by looking for ways in which you could apply it. Visualize what you would do in applying the truth to your situation. What specific ways or actions can you employ to personally apply the truth.
- 4) **ACTUALIZE** this by doing it! **JUST DO IT!!!** Take the **PRINCIPLE** (or precept or promise) and relate it to a specific **PROBLEM** make a **PLAN** (a strategy of measurable steps) to address the problem by a certain date, and establish a means of **PROOF** that you did it (it always helps to establish accountability).

9 Questions to ask when you are trying to apply Biblical truth to your life:

After observation and interpretation, if you ask yourself these questions, you will be well on your way to applying Biblical truth to your life.

- 1-Is there an example for me to follow?
- 2-Is there a sin to avoid?
- 3-Is there a promise to claim?
- 4-Is there a prayer to repeat?
- 5-Is there a command to obey?
- 6-Is there a verse to memorize?
- 8-Is there an error to mark?
- 9-Is there a challenge to face?

BR> * Much of this study is a summary of Living by the Book by Howard Hendricks in combination with *Biblical Interpretation Class Notes* at valleybible.net. Please see these references for further study.