

5 RULES FOR OBSERVANT READING

(Lesson #2, April 22, 2018)



Introduction:

The ability to see is a learned skill. Each of us can grow in this area. We can learn to see more and become more observant. The genius of Dr. Louis Agassiz, the renowned 19th century naturalist of Harvard College, was his awareness that the basis of scientific inquiry is the process of seeing. His greatest contribution to science was teaching his students to observe. The ability to see is a developed process, and the same is true for good Bible study. Develop the ability to observe as you read!

I. WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO OBSERVE?

Observation asks the question “What do I see?” What specifically are you trying to observe?

A. Terms

You are looking for _____. For example, the keyword in the Gospel of John is *believe*.

1 Cor. 13 _____

1 Peter _____

B. Structure

There is structure to the Bible like there is to a building—footers, frame, siding, etc. The Bible is not just a hodge-podge collection of books thrown together without rhyme or reason. Each book has structure, two kinds:

1. _____ Structure

If you want to learn how to study the Bible effectively, you must learn to read it with grammar in mind.

a. Verbs—action words that tell us who is doing what

- b. Subject/Object—the subject of the sentence does the acting and the object is acted upon.
(Php 2:3) "...but in lowliness of mind let each [subject] esteem [verb] other [object] better than themselves."
- c. Modifiers—descriptive words such as adjectives and adverbs. They enlarge the meaning of the words they modify.
- d. Prepositional Phrases—tell us where the action is taking place.
- e. Connectives—and, but, therefore...
- f. The more grammar you know, the more you will get out of the passage.

2. Literary Structure

- a. There are questions and answers. There is _____ and resolution. There is cause and effect. And so on.
- c. This literary structure also includes biographical information, geographical, historical, chronological structures.

C. _____.

You cannot treat all Scripture the same, ignoring the different genre. There is a vast difference between the Hebrew poetry of the Psalms and the tight, logical arguments of Paul's epistles. There is love poetry, allegory, apocalyptic, narrative, parables and many more.

D. Atmosphere

Discovering the atmosphere involves picking up the setting and feelings from the biblical text. Transport your senses into the passage. If there is crime, feel the injustice of it. If there is a sunset, see it. If there is an odor, smell it. If there is an argument, feel the tension.

This is an exercise for the imagination, not just for the intellect. It doesn't take professional training to catch the drama-of-the-moment in the passage.

II. RULES FOR READING THE BIBLE

A. Rule #1: Read the text _____.

1. One sitting, from the beginning, out loud, by schedule.
2. Benefits of a Bible reading schedule:
 - a. Mark your progress.
 - b. Systematic approach to the Scriptures.
 - c. Helps you in accomplishing your task.

B. RULE #2: Read the text patiently.

1. Stamina—Don't _____ Too Soon!
Most people quit too soon, before they hit pay dirt!
2. Self-Discovery—Don't Run To Others Too Soon!
Don't run to a commentary right away. You will miss the joy of self-discovery.

The Joy of Self-Discovery!

Here's what I found about Esther:

Did she have a life of ease?

- (2:5-6) Orphan Jewish girl
- (2:6) Displaced from her own country
- (2:8) In custody to be groomed for the king – for a year!
- (2:13-14, 17) One of the king's many concubines in his harem. What was a concubine?
- (4:16) Called to put her life on the line
- (cp. 1:3 and 2:12) Esther became queen in 479 B.C. In 465, Ahasuerus was assassinated in the palace (their home). 14-year marriage. What happened to Esther when her husband was assassinated?



3. Zoom Out / Zoom In / Zoom Out

- a. Back away from the specifics and get the _____ picture by reading a book in its entirety. Try to see the general progression of the book.
- b. Zoom in on what seems important. Study that portion in more detail.

C. RULE #3: Read the text imaginatively.

1. Visualization. Picture what you are reading.
2. Translations. I refer to different translations as commentaries because they can spark the imagination. I will often read from the NKJV, NASB, NIV, ESV, and The Message (via E-Sword).
3. Personalization, Put the text in your _____ words.
Example: (Daniel 5:6) "Then the king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another."

My version—fright came on his face, he was scared to death, his legs became wobbly, and his knees were knocking!

D. RULE #4: Read the text inquisitively.

1. Here are six questions to ask the Bible that will help you every time you use them:
 - a. "Who?"
 Who are the people involved, and . . .
 - (1) What is said about them?
 - (2) What do they say?
 - b. "What?"
 - (1) What is happening here?
 - (2) What is the argument?

(3) What is the author trying to communicate?

c. “Where?”

(1) Where is the writer?

(2) Where are the readers?

(3) Where is this taking place in relation to Jerusalem?

Need: A good Bible atlas such as:

Baker’s Bible Atlas, by Charles F. Pfeiffer

Oxford Bible Atlas

d. “When?”

(1) Always determine what time it is.

(2) When did this take place or when was this spoken in relation to other events?

(3) What happened before and after it?

(4) What day is it?

(5) When will these things take place?

e. “Why?” Why digs for meaning.

(1) Why is this included? Why is it here?

(2) Why did it happen?

(3) Why did God allow it?

f. “_____?”

(1) We can paraphrase this, “So what?” What difference does it make? It was written to change our lives . . . so what difference will it make?

(2) This question gets us started doing something about what we have read.



2. Identify the main divisions of the book.

The Bible was not written with chapter and verse divisions.

3. Record your _____.

a. Use a notebook or computer to journal your

observations.

- b. Make your comments brief and descriptive.
- c. In addition to the Who, What, Where, When, Why, and Wherefore questions, look for:

(1) Repeating information (terms, phrases, characters, events).

Examples:

- Terms – “believe” in John
- Phrases – “by faith” in Hebrews 11
- Characters – Barnabas in Acts
- Events – crossing of the Red Sea

(2) Related information (cause/effect, question/answers, general/specific).

Examples:

- Structure in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:1, 2, 5, 16)
- God’s questions to Job (Job 38:3)
- Persecution’s impact on the church (Acts 8:4)

(3) Comparative information (alike/unlike, using similes, metaphors, etc.). Word pictures are all throughout the Bible.

Examples:

“As the deer pants...,”

“As newborn babes...,”

“I am the vine...,”

“Now the deeds of the flesh...but the fruit of the Spirit...”

(4) True-to-life information. How did the characters in the narrative handle life and what was happening to them?

Examples:

- Mark quitting
- Abraham offering his son
- Noah building a boat in the desert

4. Examine the cross-references.

5. Look up the meaning of terms.
 - a. Bible Dictionary—helps you determine the meaning of biblical words
 - b. Bible Concordance—helps you locate a passage
 - c. Bible Handbook—related to a dictionary, sort of a one-volume Bible encyclopedia
 - d. Bible Encyclopedia—an extensive work on subjects found in the text. For example, “Sanhedrin” discussed with these topics: terminology, history, composition, powers, and procedures, in the New Testament.
 - e. Bible Atlas—unfolds the geography of the Bible
 - f. Bible Commentaries—offers the insights of others who have mastered the text.

6. Notice the smallest details.

E. RULE #5: Read the text reflectively.

1. Concentration
2. Meditation
3. Infatuation

How do you read a _____ letter? The sports page?

ANSWERS
 Page 1—keywords, love, suffer, Grammatical
 Page 2—climax, Genre
 Page 3—repeatedly, quit
 Page 4—big, own
 Page 5—Wherefore, observations
 Page 7—love

