

Getting the Most Out of Your Bible Study

STEP #1: OBSERVATION

In many ways this is the most important step in your Bible study. You cannot understand what you do not see/observe and you cannot apply/obey what you do not see/observe. It very well could be that many of the passages of Scripture which seem confusing to you or seem to make no sense, seem that way because there is something there you are not seeing. Sharpened observation skills will reveal a depth to God's Word that just grows richer and richer the more you study.

I. You Must Learn to Observe.

- One great way to sharpen your observation skills is to practice as you go about your normal day.
 - ◆ For Example: (Try to observe these this week) – Read the excerpt at the end to see a master observer at work.
 - ◆ How many stop lights do you pass from your house to church or work?
 - ◆ How many steps are there to the basement (if you have one) in your house?
 - ◆ What color are your spouse's/children's/parent's eyes?
 - ◆ What side of the face does your husband shave first or your wife put makeup on first?
- The more habitual you become at observing things in your everyday life the more observant you will become as you read and study God's Word.
- Let's Practice: Box exercise.

II. You Must Learn to Read Observantly.

Adler, Mortimer & Charles Van Doren. *How to Read a Book: The Classic Guide to Intelligent Reading*. New York, NY: Simon & Shuster, 1972.

- Never begin your daily Bible study without pen/pencil and paper. You will want to take note of everything you see along the way. If you are one to write in your Bible (and you shouldn't be afraid to do this) then mark things as you observe them.
- Something that may help your study is to read from a translation that is less familiar to you. This will force you to pay closer attention to the words.
 - ✓ Stick with true translations and not paraphrases. A paraphrase can be helpful, but not at the observation or interpretation stage. A paraphrase has already made the interpretation for you.
 - Translations: King James, New American Standard, New King James, English Standard Version, New International Version (*less literal in places*).
 - Paraphrases: New Living Translation, etc.

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- Ten Tips for **Observant** Bible Study:
 - ✓ Read **Thoughtfully**
 - ❖ Don't check your brain out when you begin your Bible study. The purpose isn't to get through a certain amount of material, but to let the material get through you! Engage the text of Scripture with careful thought.
 - ✓ Read **Repeatedly**
 - ❖ Don't just read the passage once. Go over it again and again. As you do you will become more and more aware of what is in the text.
 - Read entire books in one sitting. For some of the longer books this will take some time, but for most of the books of the Bible this can be done in thirty minutes or less. Then go back in your daily reading and read through the book section by section. This will help you understand the overall context of the book.
 - Read the same passage in more than one translation. This will help you see the text in different ways.
 - ✓ Read **Patiently**
 - ❖ Again remember that the goal is not to get through the most material, but to let the text get through you.
 - Stay in the same book for one month or longer.
 - For books that have longer chapters (i.e. Luke) read sections smaller than a chapter at a time.
 - ✓ Read **Inquisitively**
 - ❖ Ask the text questions as you read. Some helpful questions to get started:
 - **Who?**
 - Is talking/writing, being addressed.
 - **What?**
 - Are the main points of the passage? What is being said?
 - **Where?**
 - Are the events taking place?
 - **When?**
 - Are the events taking place?
 - **Why?**
 - Are these events happening? Why is this being said at this time by this person?

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- **Wherefore?** – or **so what?** (This is probably more for the application stage, but something we should always be asking of the text – what does this passage mean for me?)

- ✓ Read **Prayerfully**
 - ❖ Your Bible study and prayer are not necessarily two separate activities. Your understanding of God's Word is completely dependent on the working of His Spirit. It is illogical to go to His Word without soliciting His help.

- ✓ Read **Imaginatively**
 - ❖ This is where other translations can help you. If it is one you are not normally familiar with, the way the text is written will challenge you to see God's truth in a way you may not have considered before.
 - ❖ Vary your location. Having a set time and place for daily Bible study should be your norm. However, sitting outside on the porch or under a tree, or somewhere different occasionally can help you think about what you are reading more imaginatively.

- ✓ Read **Meditatively**
 - ❖ Don't just do your daily quota of Bible reading, close the Bible and walk away. Some suggestions for meditation in our anti-meditation world:
 - Pray at the close of your study time asking God to bring what you have studied back to your mind throughout the day.
 - Write a couple of the key verses that you observed from that day's reading on the 3 X 5 card and take it with you to review during your day.
 - Memorize a verse a week from the book you are studying through.

- ✓ Read **Purposefully**
 - ❖ This is extremely important for coming to a proper understanding of the passage you are studying.
 - Observe the Grammar: If we believe God inspired every word of Scripture then we need to pay attention to every word.
 - ◆ The Verb: is it an action, passive, etc.
 - ◆ The subject: who is doing the action or who is the action being done to?
 - ◆ The object: who or what is being acted upon?
 - ◆ Modifiers: adjectives, adverbs, etc.
 - ◆ Prepositional Phrases: often add important detail to the passage.

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- ◆ Connectors: but, and, therefore, etc. What is being connected and how are they related.
- Observe **Literary Style** (Genre): You need to know what kind of passage you are reading in order to know how to understand it. We will discuss this much more in the interpretation stage.
- ✓ Read **Acquisitively**
 - ❖ Don't just read to cover the material, read to retain.
 - Read with a goal in mind:
 - ◆ To come up with an outline of the book
 - ◆ To study the life a particular Bible character.
 - ◆ To understand the key point of the book.
- ✓ Read **Telescopically**
 - ❖ Understand the part in light of the whole.
 - This is where reading the entire book at one sitting can help. You should always keep the context of the book in mind when reading each section.
 - ❖ Historical background can help.
 - Probably the two most helpful resources for this: (We will look at the use of tool much more later under interpretation.)
 - ◆ Arnold, Bill T. and Bryan E. Beyer. *Encountering the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999.
 - ◆ Elwell, Walter A. and Robert W. Yarbough. *Encountering the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1988.

PRACTICE FOR NEXT WEEK:

1. Read the section on the next two pages.
2. Answer the questions under I.
3. Read Deuteronomy 6 in each of the three versions given here at least once over the next week. Don't worry about taking any notes unless you want to, just come prepared and very familiar with the chapter next week.

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A Lesson in Observation from the Master Detective

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of the Four*

Sherlock Holmes

<http://www.literature.org/authors/doyle-arthur-conan/sign-of-four/chapter-01.html>

"I have heard you say it is difficult for a man to have any object in daily use without leaving the impress of his individuality upon it in such a way that a trained observer might read it. Now, I have here a watch which has recently come into my possession. Would you have the kindness to let me have an opinion upon the character or habits of the late owner?"

I handed him over the watch with some slight feeling of amusement in my heart, for the test was, as I thought, an impossible one, and I intended it as a lesson against the somewhat dogmatic tone which he occasionally assumed. He balanced the watch in his hand, gazed hard at the dial, opened the back, and examined the works, first with his naked eyes and then with a powerful convex lens. I could hardly keep from smiling at his crestfallen face when he finally snapped the case to and handed it back.

"There are hardly any data," he remarked. "The watch has been recently cleaned, which robs me of my most suggestive facts. "

"You are right," I answered. "It was cleaned before being sent to me."

In my heart I accused my companion of putting forward a most lame and impotent excuse to cover his failure. What data could he expect from an uncleaned watch?

"Though unsatisfactory, my research has not been entirely barren," he observed, staring up at the ceiling with dreamy, lack-lustre eyes. "Subject to your correction, I should judge that the watch belonged to your elder brother, who inherited it from your father."

"That you gather, no doubt, from the H. W. upon the back?"

"Quite so. The W. suggests your own name. The date of the watch is nearly fifty years back, and the initials are as old as the watch: so it was made for the last generation. Jewellery usually descends to the eldest son, and he is most likely to have the same name as the father. Your father has, if I remember right, been dead many years. It has, therefore, been in the hands of your eldest brother."

"Right, so far," said I. "Anything else?"

"He was a man of untidy habits -- very untidy and careless. He was left with good prospects, but he threw away his chances, lived for some time in poverty with occasional short intervals of prosperity, and finally, taking to drink, he died. That is all I can gather." I sprang from my chair and limped impatiently about the room with considerable bitterness in my heart.

"This is unworthy of you, Holmes," I said. "I could not have believed that you would have descended to this. You have made inquiries into the history of my unhappy brother, and you now pretend to deduce this knowledge in some fanciful way. You cannot expect me to believe that

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you have read all this from his old watch! It is unkind and, to speak plainly, has a touch of charlatanism in it."

"My dear doctor," said he kindly, "pray accept my apologies. Viewing the matter as an abstract problem, I had forgotten how personal and painful a thing it might be to you. I assure you, however, that I never even knew that you had a brother until you handed me the watch."

"Then how in the name of all that is wonderful did you get these facts? They are absolutely correct in every particular."

"Ah, that is good luck. I could only say what was the balance of probability. I did not at all expect to be so accurate."

"But it was not mere guesswork?"

"No, no: I never guess. It is a shocking habit -- destructive to the logical faculty. What seems strange to you is only so because you do not follow my train of thought or observe the small facts upon which large inferences may depend. For example, I began by stating that your brother was careless. When you observe the lower part of that watch-case you notice that it is not only dented in two places but it is cut and marked all over from the habit of keeping other hard objects, such as coins or keys, in the same pocket. Surely it is no great feat to assume that a man who treats a fifty-guinea watch so cavalierly must be a careless man. Neither is it a very far-fetched inference that a man who inherits one article of such value is pretty well provided for in other respects."

I nodded to show that I followed his reasoning.

"It is very customary for pawnbrokers in England, when they take a watch, to scratch the numbers of the ticket with a pin-point upon the inside of the case. It is more handy than a label as there is no risk of the number being lost or transposed. There are no less than four such numbers visible to my lens on the inside of this case. Inference -- that your brother was often at low water. Secondary inference -- that he had occasional bursts of prosperity, or he could not have redeemed the pledge. Finally, I ask you to look at the inner plate, which contains the keyhole. Look at the thousands of scratches all round the hole -- marks where the key has slipped. What sober man's key could have scored those grooves? But you will never see a drunkard's watch without them. He winds it at night, and he leaves these traces of his unsteady hand. Where is the mystery in all this?"

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DEUTERONOMY 6

New English Translation (NET)

¹ Now these are the commandments, statutes, and ordinances that the LORD your God instructed me to teach you so that you may carry them out in the land where you are headed as your possession;

² and that you might so revere the LORD your God that you will keep all his statutes and commandments that I am giving you—you, your children, and your grandchildren—all your lives, to prolong your days.

³ Pay attention, Israel, and be careful to do this so that it may go well with you and that you may greatly increase—as the LORD, God of your ancestors, said to you, you will have a land flowing with milk and honey.

⁴ Listen, Israel: As for the LORD your God, the LORD is one.

⁵ You must love the LORD your God with your whole mind, your whole being, and your whole strength.

⁶ These words I am commanding you today must be kept in mind,

⁷ and you must teach them to your children and speak of them as you sit in your house, as you walk along the way, as you lie down, and as you get up.

⁸ You should tie them as a sign on your forearm and fasten them as symbols on your forehead.

⁹ Inscribe them on the doorframes of your houses and gates.

¹⁰ Then when the LORD your God brings you to the land he swore to your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—to give you large, excellent cities you did not build,

¹¹ houses filled with choice things you did not provide, hewn out cisterns you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant—and you eat to your satisfaction,

¹² be careful lest you forget the LORD who brought you out of Egypt, the place of slavery.

¹³ You must revere the LORD your God, serve him, and take oaths using only his name.

¹⁴ You must not go after other gods, those of the surrounding peoples

¹⁵ (for the LORD your God, he who is present among you, is a jealous God), lest the anger of the LORD your God erupt against you and he destroy you from the very earth.

¹⁶ You must not put the LORD your God to the test as you did at Massah.

¹⁷ Keep his commandments very carefully, as well as the stipulations and statutes he commanded you to do.

¹⁸ Do whatever is proper and good before the LORD so that it may go well with you and that you may enter and occupy the good land that he swore to give to your ancestors,

¹⁹ and that you may expel all your enemies just as the LORD said.

²⁰ When your children ask you later on, “What are the stipulations, statutes, and ordinances that the LORD our God commanded you?”

²¹ you must say to them, “We were Pharaoh’s slaves in Egypt, but the LORD brought us out of Egypt in a powerful way.

²² And he brought signs and great, devastating wonders on Egypt, on Pharaoh, and on his whole family before our very eyes.

²³ He delivered us from there so that he could enable us to have the land he had promised our ancestors.

²⁴ And the LORD commanded us to obey all these statutes, that is, to revere him, for our good forever, to preserve us as he has to this day.

²⁵ Our very righteousness consists in carefully keeping this entire commandment before the LORD our God, just as he demands.”

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New King James (NKJV)

¹ "Now this *is* the commandment, *and these are* the statutes and judgments which the LORD your God has commanded to teach you, that you may observe *them* in the land which you are crossing over to possess,

² "that you may fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, you and your son and your grandson, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged.

³ "Therefore hear, O Israel, and be careful to observe *it*, that it may be well with you, and that you may multiply greatly as the LORD God of your fathers has promised you -- 'a land flowing with milk and honey.'

⁴ " Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD *is* one!

⁵ "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

⁶ " And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart.

⁷ "You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.

⁸ "You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.

⁹ "You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

¹⁰ " So it shall be, when the LORD your God brings you into the land of which He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give you large and beautiful cities which you did not build,

¹¹ "houses full of all good things, which you did not fill, hewn-out wells which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant -- when you have eaten and are full --

¹² "*then* beware, lest you forget the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.

¹³ "You shall fear the LORD your God and serve Him, and shall take oaths in His name.

¹⁴ "You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who *are* all around you

¹⁵ '(for the LORD your God *is* a jealous God among you), lest the anger of the LORD your God be aroused against you and destroy you from the face of the earth.

¹⁶ " You shall not tempt the LORD your God as you tempted *Him* in Massah.

¹⁷ "You shall diligently keep the commandments of the LORD your God, His testimonies, and His statutes which He has commanded you.

¹⁸ "And you shall do *what is* right and good in the sight of the LORD, that it may be well with you, and that you may go in and possess the good land of which the LORD swore to your fathers,

¹⁹ "to cast out all your enemies from before you, as the LORD has spoken.

²⁰ " When your son asks you in time to come, saying, 'What *is the meaning of* the testimonies, the statutes, and the judgments which the LORD our God has commanded you?'

²¹ "then you shall say to your son: 'We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand;

²² 'and the LORD showed signs and wonders before our eyes, great and severe, against Egypt, Pharaoh, and all his household.

²³ 'Then He brought us out from there, that He might bring us in, to give us the land of which He swore to our fathers.

²⁴ 'And the LORD commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as *it is* this day.

²⁵ 'Then it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to observe all these commandments before the LORD our God, as He has commanded us.'

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New American Standard (NASB)

¹ "Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the judgments which the LORD your God has commanded *me* to teach you, that you might do *them* in the land where you are going over to possess it,

² so that you and your son and your grandson might fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged.

³ "O Israel, you should listen and be careful to do *it*, that it may be well with you and that you may multiply greatly, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, *in* a land flowing with milk and honey.

⁴ "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!

⁵ "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

⁶ "These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart.

⁷ You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up.

⁸ "You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead.

⁹ "You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

¹⁰ "Then it shall come about when the LORD your God brings you into the land which He swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you, great and splendid cities which you did not build,

¹¹ and houses full of all good things which you did not fill, and hewn cisterns which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant, and you eat and are satisfied,

¹² then watch yourself, that you do not forget the LORD who brought you from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

¹³ "You shall fear *only* the LORD your God; and you shall worship Him and swear by His name.

¹⁴ "You shall not follow other gods, any of the gods of the peoples who surround you,

¹⁵ for the LORD your God in the midst of you is a jealous God; otherwise the anger of the LORD your God will be kindled against you, and He will wipe you off the face of the earth.

¹⁶ "You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested *Him* at Massah.

¹⁷ "You should diligently keep the commandments of the LORD your God, and His testimonies and His statutes which He has commanded you.

¹⁸ "You shall do what is right and good in the sight of the LORD, that it may be well with you and that you may go in and possess the good land which the LORD swore to *give* your fathers,

¹⁹ by driving out all your enemies from before you, as the LORD has spoken.

²⁰ "When your son asks you in time to come, saying, 'What *do* the testimonies and the statutes and the judgments *mean* which the LORD our God commanded you?'

²¹ then you shall say to your son, 'We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and the LORD brought us from Egypt with a mighty hand.

²² 'Moreover, the LORD showed great and distressing signs and wonders before our eyes against Egypt, Pharaoh and all his household;

²³ He brought us out from there in order to bring us in, to give us the land which He had sworn to our fathers.'

²⁴ "So the LORD commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God for our good always and for our survival, as *it is* today.

²⁵ "It will be righteousness for us if we are careful to observe all this commandment before the LORD our God, just as He commanded us.