

Session 3 – Observation

The first step of IBS is observation, which answers the question, “What does the section say?”

Observe

Most Americans live a fast-paced, way-too-busy lifestyle. It’s difficult to relax, slow down, and observe details. Yet this is exactly what you want to do in this step. The text itself provides many more details than you might expect. Read the text slowly and carefully; take your time. Using a more literal translation,¹ observe every word, every phrase, every clause, every sentence, and the relationships between them. Try to see as many details in the text as you can. Let the section explain itself; this requires “recognizing and noting details in the wording of the text and their significance for its meaning.”²

As you read the section carefully and see the details, take time to write them down. If you have questions, write them down as well.

Practice

1 Pt 1:22-25 – Me

1 Pt 2:1-3 – Class

Translation Comparison

There are several tools that you can use to help you observe. The **first tool** is translation comparison. Read through the section carefully in 4 different translations: NASB, ESV, HCSB, and NET.³ Let the translations complement each other and help you see and understand the section. This may answer some of your questions; it may raise new ones. Write down what you learn.

Practice

NASB - Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander,

HCSB - So rid yourselves of all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all slander.

NASB - long for the pure milk of the word

HCSB - desire the pure spiritual milk

¹ NASB, ESV, or LEB.

² MacDill, *The 12 Essential Skills For Great Preaching*, 43.

³ A website/mobile app like BibleGateway.com can be helpful.

Questions

The **second tool** is asking questions. Ask and answer these questions from your section; write down what you learn. Begin by asking the six “reporter” questions:

- “Who?” helps us to find out who are the people in the section. “Who questions” may relate to people who lived at the time the book was written, to biblical figures who lived in the Old Testament, to God (the roles of the Father, Son, or Spirit), or to someone else.
- “Where?” helps us to find out where are the locations in the section. “Where questions” may relate to New Testament locations, Old Testament locations, or even non-earthly locations. The locations may be cities, regions, countries, or empires.
- “When?” helps us to find out when the events in the section happened. Some events happened in eternity past, some during Old Testament times, some during New Testament times, some have not yet happened, and some will occur in eternity future.
- “What?” helps us to find out what things are. Some are spiritual things, some are physical things, and some are conceptual things (i.e., ideas, values).
- “Why?” helps us to know the reason for something. “Why questions” get at the intentions of people and God.
- “How?” helps us to explain something in more detail. How questions can cover a wide variety of situations.

Finish by asking the two “character” questions:

- What does this section teach me about the character of man?
- What does this section teach me about the character of God?

Practice

Reporter questions – Gal 2:11-14 – Me; Php 3:2-6 – Class

Character of God 1 Pt 1:22-25 – Me; 1 Pt 2:1-3 – Class

Literary Devices

The **third tool** is looking for literary devices. Look for these items and write down what you learn.

- Cause and effect is when one thing makes another thing happen. In 2 Timothy 2:12 Paul used three cause and effects in a row, “If we endure, we will also reign with Him; if we deny Him, He will also deny us; if we are faithless, He remains

faithful.”⁴ Sometimes there are words that indicate the cause and effect relationship, such as “if...then,” “so that,” or “therefore.”

- Sometimes the author raises a question and then answers it himself. He is leading his readers to the right answer. In Romans 6:1 Paul asked, “What should we say then? Should we continue in sin so that grace may multiply?” In the next verse he answered it, “Absolutely not!” Some questions are rhetorical, meaning the answer is so obvious that no explicit answer is necessary.
- A comparison (or contrast) is when the author compares (or contrasts) one thing to another thing, thus further explaining some aspect of the first thing. In 1 Thessalonians 5:2 Paul used a comparison, “For you yourselves know very well that the Day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night.” In 1 Thessalonians 5:7-8 he used a contrast, “For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, we must be serious.”
- When an author repeats a word or phrase, it often signals an important theme in the passage. The repeated words can be different parts of speech (i.e., verb, noun, adjective, or adverb). In his eulogy to God beginning in Ephesians 1:3, Paul signaled the primary theme with repeated words, “*Blessed* be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has *blessed* us in Christ with every spiritual *blessing* in the heavenly places” (ESV).
- Commands are imperatives, instructions that must be obeyed by the reader. In Paul’s letters, they are more prominent in the second half. In Ephesians 4:25-27, Paul commanded, “Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.”
- Promises are guarantees of God’s actions. Sometimes they are conditional and sometimes unconditional. In Philippians 4:6-7, Paul reminded his readers of God’s promise of peace, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Practice

Handout matching exercise...

⁴ All quotes from HCSB.

Outline

The **fourth tool** is outlining the section. Create an outline of the main points of the section. Connect this outline to your outline for the book.

Practice

1 Peter 1:13-21 – Me

Philippians 1:12-18a – Me

Ephesians 2:1-10 – Class