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## Lesson 5

Well, last time we talked about learning how to read better and faster and I gave you a couple of resources that were recommended in the book I'm using to teach this course, and I ordered them myself as well. And when I got the first one on How to Read a Book, after I read it or tried to read it, I wished I had ordered it sooner, because I probably wouldn't have recommended it. And you may have ordered it and liked it and it may be a great help to you, but it was just a little too detailed for me.

The second resource I recommended I understand to be a workbook, but I haven't received it yet; and so I don't know if it's going to be a help or not. I still agree with the author that if you can hone your reading skills that would be a great benefit in studying the Bible, but you might find some other resources out there that would be better than the ones he recommends or you might just practice reading more. Because obviously the more you do something, the better you're going to get at it.

We also talked about some other things like learning to read like it was our first time. In other words, don't start out by thinking you already know everything there is to know about a particular passage of scripture, no matter how familiar you think you are with it.

And then lastly we talked about learning to read the Bible like we'd read a love letter from our fiancée, because that's in essence what the Bible is. It's God's love letter to mankind.

And tonight I want to give you a few other things that will hopefully help you in this first step, which is of course the step of: anybody remember?

Observation. And observation is where we ask and answer the question; what do I see?

**So the next recommendation is to read thoughtfully.**

And in this step of observation you're to assume the role of a biblical detective. In other words, we're to search for clues as to the meaning of the text. But just like any good detective will tell you, there's more than one way to crack a case.

Sherlock Holmes, the master detective, could sometimes be found on his hands and knees, inspecting the floor for cigar ashes, or footprints or whatever else might be left behind. Other times he would brood for hours, rolling things over and over in his mind, straining for answers. At other times, he would use disguises, or act like he was handicap or cripple. Sometimes he would conduct experiments. Whatever it would take to solve the mystery, he would do.

And in much the same way, finding clues in the biblical text demands more than one approach. The Bible must be read to be understood. But there's more than one way to read it.

In fact, we're going learn ten different strategies to help us become better detectives if you will, of the Bible.

And the first one is to:

**Read the Bible Thoughtfully**

Now, thoughtful reading involves study. Not boredom, but study. When you come to the Bible, you need to put your thinking cap on. Don't

put your mind into neutral, but rather apply the same mental discipline that you would to any subject in which you're truly interested in.

If you're a person who likes to do your own work around the house when it comes to remodeling or fixing things; then you probably watch a lot of you tube videos or at least read a lot of how to articles on how to fix things or build things. And when you come to those sources of information, whatever they may be, you're intent on learning g something. And so you pay close attention.

Well, when we come to the Bible we need to use that same mental intensity to study Scripture! The truth is, the Bible will not yield its fruit to the lazy.

**Proverbs 2:1, My son, if you receive my words, And treasure my commands within you, 2 So that you incline your ear to wisdom,**

**And apply your heart to understanding; 3 Yes, if you cry out for discernment, And lift up your voice for understanding, 4 If you seek her as silver, And search for her as for hidden treasures; 5 Then you will understand the fear of the Lord, And find the knowledge of God. 6 For the Lord gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding; 7 He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; gives an interesting insight concerning the richness of God's Word.**

In other words, biblical wisdom is like mining for a precious metal. You're not going to find it laying around on the surface of the ground. You're going have to dig for it.

The truth of God is there, and that truth can and will transform your life, but you have to be willing to look for it intently.

So we need to read thoughtfully.

**Next, we need to read repeatedly.**

Listen, you have to worry about wearing down the scriptures. The Word of God is a well that's so deep and so rich that you could literally spend a lifetime studying it and never even scratch the surface. It's unlike any other book you'll ever read.

You know if you're an expert in a given field and you read a book in that field two or three times, then chances are you'll get all you're going to get out of it. And you cantata that book and put it on the shelf and move on to something else.

But that will never be true of the Bible. You'll never exhaust all the truth and wisdom from this book no matter how many times you read it. In fact, the more times you read something from the word of God, the more things you'll see and the more questions you'll have. And every time you read it, you'll see things that you've never seen before.

So here's some suggestions on how to read repeatedly.

First read entire books at one sitting.

Now, I know what you're thinking. You're thinking about books like Isaiah and Jeremiah, and you're saying, "Man, I'd die before I got through those books. But you have to remember those books are exceptions to the rule. Most books in the Bible are no longer than say two or three columns in a newspaper or magazine. And even the longer books are shorter than most novels. So do your best to read books of the Bible at one sitting.

And the advantage in that is that you'll be able to appreciate the unity of each book. That's what most people miss when they skip from passage to passage. They never get a sense of the whole. And the result is that their perception is fragmented. It's like switching from channel to channel on the

TV and catching a few scenes from this show and few from another but never watching an entire program. There's no way to really make sense out of it like that.

The truth is, books of the Bible were written to be read as a whole. And just like any other book, they only make sense when we read them that way.

And it doesn't do any good to start in the middle of a book. That'd be like starting in the middle of a novel. You could never really make sense out of it that way.

**Another thing that'll help you is to read the Bible in different translations.**

And I gave you an exercise last week to that. It was 1 Corinthians chapter 13. How many of you did that? Did it help? Did it at least help to make it a little more clear?

The danger if you just read something over and over in the same translation is that eventually you're probably going to put yourself to sleep. At least when you're using different translations, there's something new to consider and you're bound sooner or later to notice something new.

**And then it's also good every once and while to listen to the scripture being read.**

And there are all kinds of apps and downloads out there to choose from nowadays to help you do that. And the beauty of that is that you can be driving or working in the yard or doing whatever at the same time. But still the word of God is penetrating your mind and you're hearing the word of God.

And then another help is to read the Bible out loud. And though you might not really like to hear the sound of your own voice; if you'll do it; it'll force you to pay attention to every word.

Also it's a good habit for you as a parent to get in to with your children.

**Deuteronomy 6:7 instructs parents, especially fathers, to “teach [the words of Scripture] diligently to your sons and ... 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.”**

In other words, God's Word should be a big part of your conversation at home. It'll do your kids good to hear you read the Bible to them. That's something they'll remember as long as they live and something that will forever make an impression on them.

And then next, you need a set schedule to read the Bible. And that needs to be a priority in your life. Nothing else short of an emergency should ever keep you from keeping that appointment.

And the best time I've found is early in the morning. There's no other time when your mind has been rested and your ability to comprehend the scriptures and hear from God will be any better.

If the time you set aside to read the Bible is at night just before bedtime, chances are sleep is going to win out. It's really hard at night after a hard days work to get much out of reading or studying the Bible.

In fact, if you have a hard time sleeping or getting to sleep, there's not a better remedy than trying to read the Bible or pray.

It's helpful for some people to use a Bible reading schedule that'll take you through the entire Bible in a year or maybe two years or maybe ore in depth study that'll take you five years. But whichever you choose, you need to stick with it as much as possible.

You could also do something different like read a few Psalms everyday. If you would do that and stick to it, you'd read through the entire book Psalms almost five times in a year.

Or read a chapter of Proverbs every day. You'd finish the entire book every month. Or just concentrate on one book for one month: read a chapter of Ephesians or Galatians every day for an entire month or a chapter of 1 John every day for thirty days.

The point is, you need a schedule to help you mark your progress and there's not a better way to learn to read the Bible repeatedly than to have a set schedule of some kind.

**And then next we need to learn how to read patiently.**

There's an old saying that says, "nothing good happens fast". Now, I don't know if that's altogether true, but it does have some truth when it comes to studying the Bible.

Unless you're really a great reader and have comprehension skills way above average, the chances are, you're not going to spend five minutes a day reading the Bible and come away with very much. And so we need to learn how to be patient when it comes to our time in the word of God.

Now, for most people, that's a hard assignment. We live in an instant society. The things we used to want tomorrow, we now want right now. And the things we used to need right away, we need yesterday. And so it's no surprise that if we do decide to open our Bibles, we expect results immediately and without much effort. And if we don't get that result in short order, then we get frustrated and give up.

But the fruit of the Word takes time to ripen. And if you're impatient, then you're probably going to bail out early and miss out on the harvest. And I think a lot of people come to the Bible the same way they come to church. They come looking for entertainment instead of enlightenment.

And a lot of people will give up on trying to follow the steps that we're learning and they'll go straight to a commentary or to an app or to a website and they won't go through this process, because they're too impatient.

And again, there's nothing wrong with using commentaries and other secondary sources—but they need to come after you've done your due diligence to find out what the text says.

Now, the author gives us a few suggestions on how to develop this patience and his first suggestion is to make up your mind to work with one book for one month or maybe even six weeks.

And in that time, you should be able to read through it several times, observe its structure, identify the key terms, investigate the central characters, do some background work with secondary sources, and then decide on some practical ways to apply the truths you find in the book to your life. And we'll be discussing in more detail how to do all of these tasks in lessons to come.

The point is, in a month's time, you can make a lot of headway in learning a book of the Bible. And though one book may not seem like very much, it's probably more than most of you know right now. And in a year's time, you can have twelve books under your belt; and in five-and-a-half years, you'll have all sixty-six. And so in less than six years you could have a pretty good understanding of the entire Bible.

But here's the key. You have to get started. If you keep putting it off, you'll never get there, because you'll never get started.

Another suggestion is to zoom in and zoom out. In other words, start with the big picture first by reading the entire book. And then hone in on things you observe that are important. Look for a progression of events or a series of ideas or phrases that are repeated and then zoom in a little closer



on something that stands out or seems to be more prominent. And then when you find it, spend some time on it. Spend a week or so on that one event or idea.

Now, a month may seem like a long time to spend in one book, but it's really not that much time. I mean think about how many observations we made from Acts 1:8. We had over thirty observations and we didn't spend but just a few minutes on it.

Now, an example of what I'm talking about would be for instance to read the book of Genesis. When you do, you're going to find that the first eleven chapters go through the creation of the universe, the Flood, and the confusion of tongues at Babel.

Then the next thirty-nine chapters cover four generations, which are led by four men—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. And that's the big picture of Genesis.

But some events worth zooming in on would be of course the creation in chapters 1 & 2, or the Flood in chapters 6–10, or the sacrifice of Isaac in chapter 22, or Jacob's prophecy concerning his sons in chapter 49 and there are others of course, but those are just a few.

Now, once you spend some time on one of these smaller events, you could zoom in even further and study one particular feature in one of those events. For example, within the creation account, God establishes marriage. That's in chapter 2 verses 18–25.

But when you get into to it, it's going to lead you elsewhere in the Bible to scriptures like Matthew 19:4–6 where Jesus talks about marriage and then to Ephesians 5:31, where Paul talks about marriage.

After you've zoomed in to study a particular event or concept or word, then always make sure you zoom back out to recall the big picture. Because

you don't want to end up with a lot of disconnected fragments; you want to end up understanding how it all fits together to support the overall message of the book.

**Next, learn to read selectively.**

And this involves asking six questions of the passage.

**The first question is who.** Who are the people in the text? When you find out who they are, find out all you can about them. Also what others are saying about them. For instance, take Rahab. What did others say about her? They called her a harlot. And she went through all of scripture with that label.

Or what about Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. Every time he's introduced in the scripture, it's, Andrew, Peter's brother. He's never referred to by himself.

Another thing to look for is, what does the person say? And if just look at Peter, you'll find that he said a lot of things, most of which he shouldn't have.

**Next, we need to ask what?**

What exactly is happening in this text? What are the events? In what order? What happens to the characters? If it's a passage that argues a point: What is the argument? What is the point? What is the writer trying to communicate?

What's wrong with this picture? Any what you can think of.

**And then where?**

This gives you the location. Where is this story taking place? Where are the people in the story? Where are they coming from? Where are they going? Where is the writer? Where were the original readers of this text?

Where is one reason you need a set of maps or an atlas whenever you study the Bible. That's why at the end of many Bibles you'll find several maps to show you where the biblical events took place.

If you're studying Paul's missionary journey, trace it on the map. If you're studying 1 Corinthians, find the city of Corinth on a map.

### **And then ask when?**

When did the events in the text take place? When did they occur in relation to other events in Scripture? When was the writer writing?

In other words, we need to always determine what time it is.

Was it in the morning? Was it still dark?

Was it before Christ was born or after? Was it before the church was born or after? What time is it? Zoomed in and zoomed out.

### **And then why?**

And why questions never end. Why is this included? Why is it placed here? Why does this follow that? Why does this precede that? Why does this person say that? Why does that person say nothing? Why is a question that digs for meaning and never stops digging.

### **And then lastly wherefore?**

Or so what? What difference would it make if I were to apply this truth? Wherefore is the question that gets us started doing something about what we've read.

Remember, the Word of God was not written just to satisfy our curiosity; it was written to change our lives. And so with any passage of Scripture, we need to ask, So what?

Now, when we get to the step of application, we're going to learn a number of ways to answer that question.

So those are the questions. Who? What? Where? When? Why? And Wherefore?

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## Lesson 5 Exercises

### **Read Thoughtfully**

Here is a project that will help you cultivate the skill of reading Scripture thoughtfully. It involves the little book of Philemon in the New Testament. Only twenty-five verses long, Philemon records Paul's advice to an old friend whose slave, Onesimus, had run away. Onesimus encountered Paul in Rome, became a believer, and now Paul sends him back to his master with the letter in hand.

Read Philemon according to the principles of thoughtful reading. Barrage the text with questions. What can you find out about the relationships between Paul, Philemon, and Onesimus? Reconstruct the situation. What feelings might be involved? What practical considerations? What questions remain unanswered as you read this letter? What problems does it create? What issues does it speak to? Why do you think it is significant enough to be included in the Bible? What issues do we face today that this book might speak to? How would you communicate this book and the insights you gain from it to someone else?

### **Read Repeatedly**

Are you convinced of the value of repeated Bible reading? Here's an exercise to dispel any lingering doubts: Read through the entire Old Testament book of Esther once a day for seven days in a row. It should take

about half an hour or so each day. Use some of the suggestions in this chapter, such as reading it in different versions, reading it out loud, or perhaps even listening to it on audio cassette. Of course, you should also use the other skills of Observation I mentioned earlier. See how many new things you can see on each successive day. Make a list of your observations, or record them in your Bible. At the end of the week, see if you can reconstruct the story clearly and accurately by telling it to someone else. Also, what insights have you gained from the story?

### **Read Selectively**

(Who? What? Where? When? Why? Wherefore?)

The six questions of selective Bible reading are especially fun when you study the stories of Scripture. Luke 24:13–35 records one of the most fascinating—the account of Jesus meeting two of His disciples on the road to Emmaus following His resurrection. Read that passage two or three times, and then probe it with the six questions presented in this chapter. Don't forget to write down your observations.