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The Mission
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Lesson 10

A lot of us are getting older and so we have to frequent the doctor more often than we use too. And when we go, most of the time they'll do some kind of testing on us. Blood tests, urine tests, x-rays, MRI's, Pet Scans, etc. And when the results come in, a professional looks at those results and tries to determine what is wrong, if anything.

Now, if I looked at those results, that'd be like me trying to read Greek or Hebrew. I wouldn't have a clue what I was looking at. But when that professional looks at the results of that test; they can determine something.

Why? Because they know what to look for and when they see it, they know what it means.

And the same principle applies to Bible study. We can spend hours paging through the Word of God, but if we don't know what we're looking for, it will just be a complete waste of time. That's why, in this first step of Observation, you ask and answer the question, What do I see? You assume the role of a biblical detective and searching for clues, in which no detail is trivial. But we have to know what to look for. And so that's what we've been learning; and that's what we're going to continue to learn tonight.

Now, tonight I want to give you six clues to watch for in Scripture. And God has provided a good tool to help you remember them—your hand. There's a clue for each of the fingers, and then one for the palm of your hand.

So, starting with your thumb, the first clue to look for is: **Things That Are Emphasized.**

The Spirit of God uses a number of tools to emphasize ideas, events, people, and other material in Scripture. And I'm going to give you four of those tools to think about and to use.

First, is the amount of space given to any one thing.

A particular book in the Bible can emphasize something simply by devoting a large portion of space to it.

We've seen that in Genesis. It has fifty chapters. The first eleven cover the creation, the Fall, the Flood, the tower of Babel, and other details. All of those major events are compressed into just eleven chapters. But then in contrast, the writer devotes the next 39 chapters to the lives of four individuals: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.

So what should that tells us?

That should tell us that the emphasis, or the most important thing to God in this book, is not the physical world itself, but rather the people, and especially the family of God, which is the people God has chosen to be His family.

We see the same thing when we come to the gospels. For example, of Matthew's 1,062 verses, at least 342 of them—one-third of the book—give us the words of Christ Himself. And that has a major bearing on the purpose of the book. In the same way, some of gospels give more space to the crucifixion than they do other events in the life of Christ.

In the letters of Paul, we often find a section of doctrine followed by a section of practical implications based on that doctrine. For instance, in Ephesians, chapters 1–3 tell us what God has done for us. Then chapters 4–6 tell us what we need to do as a result. That's a pretty even balance

between theology and practice. Kind of like how a football team wants to balance their running game with their passing game. And the same pattern is found in Colossians.

However, in Romans the ratio is eleven chapters of doctrine to five of application—which gives us some idea of the emphasis Paul wants to make there.

So whenever you observe a portion of Scripture, ask, How much space is given to this subject? What is the writer emphasizing?

The next thing we find emphasized many times is the purpose.

And sometimes the writer does that by just telling us straight out what they are up to. A prime example of that can be found in John 20:30–31:

Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Here in the Gospel of John we're given seven signs to show that Jesus is indeed the Christ, and the Son of God, and that He is therefore worthy of a person's trust.

Or take the Book of Proverbs. Solomon tells us up front why we ought to read the book:

**Proverbs 1:2–6, To know wisdom and instruction,
To discern the sayings of understanding,
To receive instruction in wise behavior,
Righteousness, justice and equity;
To give prudence to the naive,
To the youth knowledge and discretion,**

**A wise man will hear and increase in learning,
And a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel,
To understand a proverb and a figure,
The words of the wise and their riddles.**

These things are promised to be the benefits of reading and studying the Book of Proverbs. And the rest of the book follows through on these promises. So by stating his purpose at the very beginning, Solomon more or less frames our thinking as we approach the rest of the book. And so whatever else you might expect from the book of Proverbs, you can know for sure that it is going to emphasize wisdom.

A third way to emphasize something is order, or to give it a strategic placement in the material. In other words, this comes before that; or this follows that.

For instance, in Genesis 2, God places Adam and Eve in a garden “to cultivate it and keep it,” that’s in 2:15. And then in chapter 3 the couple sins, and God drives them out of the Garden and curses the earth. That’s in 3:17–24.

And that order becomes important when we talk about a person’s work,. Some folks believe that we have to work because of the curse. But if you read it properly you find out that they were working even before they sinned. And so the order of events is important.

Another illustration comes from the life of Christ, in Luke 3 and 4. In chapter 3 you have the baptism of the Savior. In chapter 4 you have the temptation. Notice the order: in the baptism He is approved by God; in the temptation He is tested by Satan. The order is significant.

Or take a third illustration, also from Luke. Chapter 6 verses 14–16 recount the choosing of the Twelve. Look carefully at the order: Simon

Peter and Andrew; James and John; Philip and Bartholomew; Matthew and Thomas; James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; Judas the son of James; and Judas Iscariot. Who is mentioned first? Who is paired with whom? Who is last?

By choosing where to locate people, events, ideas, and so on, a writer can call attention to something. So look for the order given. It can give us major insights into the text.

And then another way to emphasize something is by moving from the lesser to the greater, or vice versa.

And really this has to do with order as well. Many times a writer will build up to a climax, where he presents some key information. For instance in the life of David, in 2 Samuel chapters 11–12, we have recorded one of the more crucial events in the life of David—his sin with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah. Those chapters are where the story of David really climaxes. Everything before leads up to them, and everything after sort of goes down from them.

Or take Acts chapter 2. When you study the book of Acts, you'll discover that chapter 2 is the pivot point. It's the one chapter without which you couldn't have the book. Everything grows out of what happens there. It is Luke's way of emphasizing that material.

So the first clue to look for when you come to the Scriptures is that which is **emphasized**. The writers have gone to great trouble to hang a sign out that says, "Hey, this is important. You need to pay attention to this." Look for the amount of space, the purpose, the order and the pivot point.

Second, and we've talked about this before, we need to look for things that are repeated.

There's probably no tool of teaching more powerful than repetition. If I want to make sure that you catch on to something I have to say, I'll repeat it over and over, again and again, time after time. Repetition reinforces. That's why the second clue to look for whenever you come to the biblical text is **things that are repeated.**

Have you ever noticed how often Jesus repeats things to His disciples? The gospels record at least nine times that He said, "**He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.**" And when John was recording the Revelation, what do you suppose the Lord told him to write to the seven churches? That's right: "**He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.**"

That's a lot of emphasis on one statement! You get the impression that Jesus wanted His disciples (and us for that matter) to pay attention to what He had to say. By constantly using that formula to flag His words, He gave His listeners clues about the significance of His teaching.

Let me mention a few categories of repetition to look for.

First we need to look for terms, phrases, and clauses. Scripture constantly repeats terms, phrases, and clauses to emphasize their importance.

For example, in Psalm 136:1-2 we read,

Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good.

His love endures forever.

Give thanks to the God of gods.

His love endures forever.

The psalmist repeats His love endures forever no less than twenty-six times in this psalm. Now, why did he do that? Did he not have anything else to say?

No, he was emphasizing the fact that God's love endures forever. And by the time you get through this psalm, if you don't know anything else, you know, that God's love endures forever. And in effect, the psalmist is saying, "What else do you need to know?"

Or take **Hebrews 11**, I preached a series of sermons from this scripture not long ago. It's called God's Hall of Fame—or the Hall of Faith. It's another classic illustration of things repeated. The phrase "by faith" appears eighteen times. The writer is talking about different people living in different times under different circumstances. But all of them are living in the same manner; "by faith".

Again, look how important the little word "if" is to **1 Corinthians 15**. Paul uses it seven times in verses 12–28, where he is talking about the importance of Christ's resurrection to our faith. It emphasizes the fact that everything we believe is conditioned on the resurrection and **if** that's untrue, everything about Christianity is untrue.

Another thing scripture repeats is characters. Barnabas is a good example. We really don't know too much about the man. His given name was Joseph, but the apostles called him Barnabas, meaning Son of Encouragement. That's in Acts 4:36.

And that's really the most important thing about him: he was an encourager. Whenever somebody in the early church needed a hand, up would pop Barnabas to help him out: He helped Saul in Acts 9:27; he helped the believing Gentiles at Antioch in Acts 11:22; he helped John Mark in Acts 15:36–39. And so the writer Luke brings Barnabas into the story at these very strategic points as a model of spiritual mentoring.

And then sometimes a writer makes his point by **repeating a particular incident or set of circumstances.**

In the book of Judges, for instance, the writer begins each section with the words, **Then the sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.** That verse sets up a situation in which God raises up judges who usually lead the people back to God—but never permanently. Sooner or later they fall away, and the cycle repeats until the end of the book, where it gets to the heart of the problem: In **chapter 21 and verse 25 it says, “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes”.**

Another example of **repeated circumstances** occurs in Matthew. Throughout his gospel, Matthew builds a tension between Jesus and the Pharisees. Over and over the Lord does or says something that offends these religious leaders. And so Matthew uses these incidents to call attention to the power struggle going on between the old system of self-righteous legalism; and the new way of salvation in Christ.

And then of course many times we see patterns repeated. Most Bible teachers and students have recognized the parallels between the life of Joseph and the life of Jesus. Well, just the same, there are parallels between the experience of Israel and that of Jesus.

Or take Saul and David in 1 and 2 Samuel: whatever Saul does wrong, David does right.

And then sometimes repetition occurs in the use of repeated passages of scripture; where there's a New Testament use of an Old Testament passage. And the reason is because God through the Holy Spirit wants to emphasize that particular portion of God's Word.

Take the story of Jonah for instance. In the early days of the Christian church, some people didn't even want the book of Jonah included in the

canon of Scripture. But then Jesus refers to it in Matthew chapter 12 which makes that thought of none effect.

Or look at the book of Hebrews. It would be hard to imagine what that book would have to say were it not for its heavy reliance on Old Testament Scripture.

In short, whenever you study the Bible and notice that something is repeated—or said more than once—you need to mark it down. It's not just because the writers couldn't think of anything else to say. It's their way of pointing out matters of crucial importance.

So our thumb was things that are emphasized. Our pointing finger represents things that are repeated and our middle finger is going to **represent things that are related.**

And by related, I mean things that have some connection, some interaction with each other.

Now, just because two things are next to each other, that in itself doesn't make them related. They've got to work off of each other in some way. In other words, there must be a tie that somehow binds them together.

Now, there are three kinds of relationships we need to look for when studying Scripture.

First, is the movement from the general to the specific.

And this is a relationship between the whole and its parts, between a category and its individual members, between the big picture and the details. Whether we realized it or not, we've all seen this relationship many times before.

Let me give you an illustration out of **Matthew 6**, which is part of the Sermon on the Mount. The chapter begins in verse one,

6 “Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

Of course you will have a reward, when you do your righteous act to be seen by men, but that will be your reward. Your reward won't come from God or be observed by the Father, Jesus says.

And then He moves from that general principle to three specific illustrations.

First is in the area of giving and that's in verses 2–4.

2 Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. 3 But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.

And then in the area of praying in verses 5–15.

5 “And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men.

And for time's sake I'm not going to read it all.

And then the last specific area was that of fasting in verses 16–18.

16 “Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. 17 But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 18 so that you do not appear to men to be

fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

Another example of moving from the general to the specific can be found in Genesis 1. In verse 1 we're given an overview or the big picture of creation: **"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."**

But if it ended there, we wouldn't have a clue as to how God actually created the heavens and the earth. We would just know that He did.

But we do know the specifics, because the rest of the chapter fills in those specifics: on day one in verses 3-5, He created light. On day two in verses 6-8, He separated the water from the skies. On day three, in verses 9-13, He formed the dry land and vegetation and so on.

And so whenever you come across a broad, or general statement in the Scripture, look to see whether the writer follows up with the specific details that will give you more insight.

And then another relationship to look for is **questions and answers.**

One of the most powerful tools of communication we use is the question. If I ask you a question, it more or less forces you to think? But if somebody just asks you a question and never gives you the answer, well that can be really frustrating. And sooner or later if that continues, you're going to start to wonder whether he even knows what he's talking about.

Well, the Bible supplies both—It asks the questions, but then it also supplies the answers.

The book of Romans is a classic example. It is written like a legal document, as if Paul were a lawyer. And he's constantly raising questions and then answering them.

For example, look in **Romans 6:1**: “**What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?**” And then he answers that question: “**By no means!**”

In verse 15 he again uses a question: “**What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?**” And again the answer is, “**By no means,**” and he goes on to spell it out in detail.

Now, sometimes the question itself carries so much weight that it needs no answer. As in all the questions that God asks Job throughout the book of Job? They’re all questions that carry their own answers.

Just like all the pointed questions that Jesus asks His disciples like in **Matthew 6:27**, “**Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?**” Or, “Why are you so timid? Or how is it that you have no faith?” Or like on the night before His crucifixion when Jesus was in the garden praying and they fell asleep. He asks, “**So, you men could not keep watch with Me for one hour?**”

That wasn’t a question that needed an answer was it?

So we need to pay attention to questions and answers.

Next we need to look for cause and effect relationships.

This is the principle of the billiard balls. You strike the white ball or the cue ball with your pool stick and (that’s the cause). That ball hopefully hits a colored ball with the intention of knocking that ball into a pocket on the table and (that’s the effect). And in Scripture we find all kinds of cause-effect relationships.

One for instance is in the latter part of **Acts 8:1**: “**On that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem.**”

Now, the natural question to ask, is what day? And when you check the preceding context, you find that it was the day when Stephen had been martyred.

In other words, the persecution against Christians had intensified, and all the believers except the apostles had been scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.

But then verse 4 says, **“Those who had been scattered went about preaching the word.”**

In other words, the **persecution was the cause, and the preaching of the Gospel was the effect.**

The believers didn't stand around, complaining and crying and asking, **“What in the world is God doing to us now? We've prayed that God would use us, and now all we get is persecuted!”**

No, they used that persecution and that pressure as a means of leverage to get the gospel out to the ends of the earth.

And so the persecution was the cause and preaching was the effect.

And of course there are plenty more examples we could point to but we're out of time.

So those are three more things we can observe as we study the Bible.

Things that are emphasized, things that are repeated and things that are related.

Next week we'll look at three more.

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Lesson 10 Exercises

Things That Are Emphasized

Here are two sections of Scripture that you can observe for things emphasized.

1 and 2 Samuel

Develop an overview chart of these two books showing the relative space devoted to the principle characters, Samuel, Saul, and David. (You should have developed a similar chart at the end of chapter 17, page 132. There's a good example of the kind of chart I'm talking about at the bottom of page 186.) Which character was most important to the writer? What does that tell you about the purpose of 1 and 2 Samuel?

Acts 1:8

What is the order of the places mentioned? What relationship do these places have to each other? (We looked at this in chapter 6.) How does the order of these places in Acts 1:8 compare with the expansion of the gospel in the rest of Acts? See if you can determine the relative amount of space Dr. Luke devotes to each of these places, and the amount of time the apostles give to each one. What significance might this have for the purpose of Acts?

Things That Are Repeated

Repetition is one of the most frequently used means of emphasis in the Bible. Let me suggest several projects that will help you unlock portions of the Word by looking for things repeated.

Psalms 119

In this psalm, David refers to the Word of God in every verse. Observe the psalm carefully, and catalogue all of the things that David says about Scripture.

Matthew 5:17–48

Observe how Jesus uses the formula “You have heard ... but I say ...” in this portion of the Sermon on the Mount. What structure does this phrase give to the passage? Why is it significant for Jesus to say this?

Arithmetic In Acts

Use a concordance to look up all of the “arithmetic” phrases in the book of Acts—numbers of people being “added” to the church, the believers “multiplying” themselves. There are even a few “divisions” and “subtractions.” Can you find them? How does Luke use these terms to describe the growth of the early church?

1 Corinthians 15:12–19

Investigate the importance of the little word *if* to Paul’s argument

Things That Are Related

One of the primary goals of observation is to see relationships in the biblical text. Test your observational skills on these three passages.

Matthew 1:1–18

Most people just skip over the genealogies. They are bored by the monotonous repetition of “So-and-so begat So-and-so.” But genealogies are actually important ways that the biblical writers communicate their meaning.

Read through the list of names mentioned in Matthew 1. What relationship do these people have to Jesus? To each other? What four individuals stand out conspicuously? Why? What can you find out about the people mentioned here? Compare this list with the genealogy that Luke records (Luke 3:23–8). What is different? What is the same? What do you think Matthew’s list has to do with the purpose of his book?

Amos

You'll need an atlas to discover the significance of the relationships in the Old Testament book of Amos. Find all of the places mentioned in chapters 1–4. Where does the prophet finally land in chapter 5? What's the relationship? What is Amos doing by mentioning these places in this manner?