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## Lesson 18

So to remind you where we're at and what we've hopefully learned so far. Let me give you a really quick review.

We started out in the very beginning talking about the necessity of knowing how or learning how to read. And I'm not going back into the details of that lesson; it along with all the others is on our church website if you need to go back and review or if you missed a lesson entirely.

And then we proceeded to the first step in how to study the scriptures and that's the step of observation; and this where we ask and answer the question; what do I see?

And here we look for things that are emphasized; things that are repeated; things that are related; things that are alike and unlike; and things that are true to life.

And then we learned how to summarize our observations and how to use charts to help us organize what we observe.

And then we moved to the second step which is interpretation. And here we ask the question; what does it mean? Not what does it mean to me, but what did God through the writers of the Bible intend for it to mean period.

And one of the first keys to understanding what the text really means is to determine what kind of literature we're dealing with. In other words, is it an exposition, an argument or statement of facts; or is it a narrative or a

biography? Or maybe it's a parable, or poetry, or proverb? And then lastly it could be prophetic and or apocalyptic?

And we went through and briefly explained each one of those the last time we met.

And so tonight, continuing in the step of interpretation, we're going to look at five keys to interpretation.

When the psalmist prayed to God in **Psalm 119:34**, **“Give me understanding, that I may observe Thy law, and keep it with all my heart”**, he was talking about his ability to interpret the scriptures. He realized that in order to properly apply the scriptures to his everyday life, he had to first understand the meaning of the text. And that only after the Spirit of God would open the eyes of his heart would he be able to find that meaning and thus be prepared to act on what God had said.

And of course that should be all our aim when we come to the Scriptures. We should all desire to understand the scriptures so that there might be a change for the better in our life! And if we truly have that desire and will put forth the effort to knock on that door of understanding, God will be faithful to open that door. So we're going to look at five keys that'll help us do just that.

**The first one we're going to consider is content.** And this one we've already discussed back in the first step of observation. And if you'll remember, this where we looked for terms, and for structure, and for literary form, and for atmosphere. And where we asked questions like: who, what, where, when, why, wherefore. We also looked for things that are emphasized, repeated, related, alike, unlike, and true to life. And we did all that in an effort to answer the question, What do I see?

And if we've done a good job in this step, then we've already uncovered the content of the passage. That's why I told you in the very beginning; The more time you spend in Observation and the better you observe, the less time you'll have to spend in interpretation, and the more accurate will be your result. And of course the opposite is true as well. The less time you spend in observation, the more time you're going to have to spend in interpretation, and the less accurate will be your result.

**The second key is context.** And context refers to that which goes before, and that which follows after.

Most of us are familiar with this already. In fact, it happens all the time in real life, especially in politics where people take what someone has said and use it out of context. In other words, people repeat what somebody has said, but they don't include the whole conversation. And the portion they do include or repeat makes it sound like somebody has said something they didn't really say.

And the same thing happens many times when people quote the Word of God. In fact, every major cult you'll ever run across is built on the violation of context. They distort the Scriptures or make them say something they don't really say or mean, by using only portions of a verse or chapter. And almost all doctrinal error could be corrected, or eliminated by just asking that the verses before and after be read as well.

Now, there are several kinds of context.

There's **literary context**, which is what I was just referring to. That's just making sure we read the verses prior to the verse we're studying as well as the verses after the verse we're studying. And most times we need to at least read the entire chapter; and even better if we read the entire book.

And then there's the historical context; which is more or less self explanatory. And this is where we ask questions like, when is this taking place? Or where does this passage of scripture fit within the course of history? Or what else was taking place in the world during this time? And so on and so forth!

And then there's **the cultural context**. And the more we know about the ancient cultures in the Bible, the more insight we're going to be able to glean from the text. And that can include things like the language, the religion, the architecture, the food, dance, festivals, folk art, what they wear, their education; their literature; the crops and animals they raise, their manners and values and customs, their beliefs, behaviors, ideas and philosophies. All these things and more make up the culture of a people group or nation.

Next is the **geography**. Where they live; the weather; the terrain, the location with respect to other nations. One example, off the top of my head, would be when Jesus stilled the storm on the Sea of Galilee. It was the geography of the land that caused and still causes these storms to occur in that area.

And then there's **theological context**.

**And here we ask** the question; what did the author know about God? What was his relationship with God? What was the relationship of his audience or his readers to God? How did the people worship God during this time? How much Scripture did the writer and his audience have access to during the time of this writing? What other religions and worldviews were competing for influence at the time of this writing?

Where does this passage of scripture fit with respect to the timing of other Scripture?

If you're studying Noah in Genesis, for instance, you're in a time period before the Ten Commandments, and also before the Sermon on the Mount, and you're also before John 3:16.

And so Noah didn't have a biblical text to work with or learn from, but still the Bible tells us in **Genesis 6:8, that, "Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord"**.

So what does that tell us?

**And then another key is comparison.**

If you know anything about the Reformation, you know that it was all about putting Scripture back into the hands of the lay people. Before the Reformation, it was only the clergy in the Catholic Church who claimed to have the ability and the authority to handle the scriptures. And though the Reformation was a good thing, it was never meant to give people the right to distort the Scriptures.

With the right of private interpretation; comes also the responsibility to accurately handle and interpret the scriptures. In other words, private interpretation gives us a license to interpret, but not a license to distort.

And one of the best ways to prevent that is by comparing Scripture with Scripture, because the greatest interpreter of Scripture; is Scripture itself.

Donald Grey Barnhouse, one of the greatest Bible expositors of all times, said: **"You very rarely have to go outside of the Bible to explain anything in the Bible."**

And that's coming from a man who was incredibly well-read and who knew how to use a wide variety of secondary sources. But he also understood the importance and the priority of the Word of God. And he realized; that the more you compare Scripture with Scripture, the more the real meaning of the Bible becomes apparent.

And so with that truth in mind, this is where a good concordance comes in handy. A concordance is a tool that will let you look up a word and not only find out all the places in the Bible it's used; but it'll also give you the meaning of that word within that particular context.

Now, most concordances are for a particular version of the Bible. Some are written for more than one, but most are good for only one version and most are written for KJV or the NIV. And they're not interchangeable.

Now, let's just take a word for instance, the word "Believe".

That's a word used a lot of different times in the Bible. But it doesn't always mean the same thing. And when you look it up in a concordance, depending on the version of the Bible your concordance is for, the first thing you're going to see after the word is a number in parenthesis. And that's going to be the number of times that particular word is used in the entire Bible.

The word "believe" in a NIV Bible and concordance will have the number (160) out beside it. That's how many times it's used in the Old and New Testament in that version of the Bible. Now, that number's going to vary from translation to translation.

Next, you're going to find a list of references. Everywhere in the Bible the word "believe" is used you're going to find the address of that verse listed.

And then out beside that reference, you're going to be able to read at least part of that verse in which that word believe is used. And then to the right of each reference you're going to see another number.

That number is going to refer you to the back of the book or the back of your concordance. And if it's an Old Testament passage of scripture, then you're going to go the section that's labeled Hebrew to English dictionary.

And then you're just going to go down the list of numbers until you find the number you're looking for.

So let's say I'm studying John chapter 2 and verse 23 in the NIV translation.

**John 2:23, Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, many people saw the signs he was performing (or doing) and believed in his name.**

Now, if I go to my concordance and look up the word "believed", to the right of it is the number 66. That's how many times it's used in the entire Bible. And then if I look down the list I'll find a portion of that verse John 2:23.

Then to the right of that partial passage of you'll find another number. That number here is the number 4409.

Now, what language was the NT written in? Greek right? So if you go to the back of your concordance, and since it's a New Testament word and scripture; you're going to look in the "Greek to English" dictionary. If it had been an Old Testament word and passage of scripture, then you would have gone to the "Hebrew to English" dictionary.

So you when look up 4409 in the Greek to English dictionary you're going to find a word written with Greek letters. Chances are that's going to be Greek to you. But just to the right of it, you're going to find the transliteration of that Greek word in bold italics. Now, the transliteration is how the Greek word sounds when it's pronounced in English.

In this case it's the word "pisteuo". (Pis'-tu-o)

Next we're given the part of speech. In this case it's a verb.

And then it gives us the number of times that word was used in the original Bible text. This word was used 241 times.

And then that next number points you back to the root word or to the organizing word, unless it is the root word, and then it'll have an arrow pointing to all the other related words.

And in this case it points us to the #4412 which is the word “pistos”. Which means faithful and trustworthy and reliable and believing.

And then there's a period and then the definition.

The definition here is to believe, to put one's faith in, trust, with an implication that actions based on that trust may follow. It can also mean to commit or entrust.

And then we're given a list of how it's translated into the English and the number of occurrences for each translation.

So let me show you how a concordance can help.

Let's just stay with this example. We're looking at the word “believed” in **John 2:23. The verse reads like this: Now while he (Jesus) was in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, many people saw the signs He was performing and believed in his name.**

So many people saw the miracles He was performing and they “believed” (pis-tu-o). In other words they put their faith and trust in Jesus and were truly committed to follow Him because of what they saw Him do. In other words, their belief was genuine.

But now, it doesn't say they all believed like that does it? No, it says, many. That leaves room for some to not believe.

And we know that by what Jesus says next, they **didn't** all believe in a genuine way.

**In verse 24 But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all people. 25 He did not need any testimony about mankind, for he knew what was in each person.**



That word for entrust that Jesus uses here is the same word that John uses for believed in verse 23. Only here it's translated entrust or commit. In other words, He wouldn't commit Himself to the them because He knew their belief wasn't genuine.

In other words, He knew their belief was only superficial. They only believed in their head and they only believed in their head because they saw the miracles. In other words, they just knew the facts.

It was obvious He had done the miracles; and those facts were known to all who saw Him do them. But the truth is; facts in and of themselves don't save a person from hell. They're a necessary basis for salvation, but facts alone won't save anyone.

For a person to have saving faith, they must also believe in way that causes them to not only believe the facts, but to also embrace that truth or act on those facts; in other words to use those facts to act on their belief on a personal basis.

That's what the word *pisteuo* means.

Let me give you an example.

Suppose you come to me and you say, "Pastor, I hate to tell you this, but I've just been told by the doctor that I have a terminal disease and I'm going to die."

And you go on to explain to me about this disease and when you're through; I say to you, "Hey, I've got some great news! I've got a doctor friend of mine here in Birmingham who's just come up with a cure for this disease you have. And I say, if you'll go see him, I'll guarantee you he can cure you.

And you say, Well, that's awesome!

And then I ask you, "Do you believe what I just told you?"

And you say, Absolutely!

So I shake your hand and hug your neck and I congratulate you on being cured!

Well, you're going to look at me like I'm crazy. You haven't even seen the doctor yet!

And you're going to think I'm nuts because you know that no amount of information, no matter how good it might sound, is going to be able heal you.

You've got to at least go there and submit yourself to the treatment. Just knowing or having or believing the facts in your head, that's not enough. That's part of it, but that's not all of it.

That's why John says in verse 25, "He knew what was in a man." Jesus knew it was just a superficial belief that these people had.

And if you follow that word believe throughout the Gospel of John, you'll find that on three other occasions in chapters 3 and 4, the Lord's omniscience allowed Him to discern what was "in a man". Nicodemus in chapter 3 and the woman at the well and the nobleman in chapter 4.

And so using a concordance to compare the usage of the same word in different passages of scripture is a good way to use scripture to interpret scripture.

It's also a good tool to use to study a character in Scripture. Take for instance the life of Moses; if you use a concordance and look up Moses you're going to find that most references to him are in the Book of Exodus. And that's where you're going to find most of his life story, but also you'll find him in Acts chapter 7 and in Hebrews chapter 11. And there you'll find out what God thought about him as well as the things God thought were significant in Moses' life.

And so a concordance is an invaluable tool when it comes to the study of God's Word.

The next key in understanding the text is to **consider the culture**. The values, the beliefs, the customs, traditions, the various occupation and religions of a society are all things we need to pay attention to. Even things like architecture, technology, artwork, the type of tools they used, the language or languages they spoke, symbols, gestures, social and family values, signs, even certain objects can be important when we're studying a particular text.

**And then another key is consultation.** Consultation involves the use of secondary resources. Gary in fact just this past Sunday was asking me about a good Bible Dictionary. And in this lesson I'm going to mention to you a few things that might help you and so they'll be posted on the website if you're interested. But secondary sources are a great tool to shed light on the text and help you make a little more sense out of what you're looking at.

A lot of smarter folks than me have walked this road before us and in the process they've left behind a lot of valuable helps. And so we need to take advantage of them whenever practical. We don't need to use them to the exclusion of our own studying, but they can be a great addition as a quote secondary source.

So let me give you five that'll help you. There are many more but let me just mention five.

The first one which I've already mentioned is a **concordance**. And next to a study Bible, a concordance is probably the one tool you can't do without. It's sort of like an index to the Bible. It lists all of the words of the

text alphabetically, and then it has references for where they appear, along with a few words to give you some context.

And so it's good for doing word studies. It's good for making comparisons. It's good for locating a passage when you can't remember its reference. It's also good for character study like we mentioned earlier.

Now, the two most common concordances are Strong's and Young's. But whichever one you get, make sure it coincides with the translation of the Bible you normally use and make sure it's an exhaustive concordance rather than an abridged one. An exhaustive concordance is one that lists each and every instance of each and every word of the text.

The next best tool would be a good **Bible dictionary**. W. E. Vine has a good one. The New Bible Dictionary, by Dr. J. D. Douglas is a good one. Zondervan has a good one. Easton I think it is is a good one and I'm sure there are many others.

And then next a **Bible handbook** would be good to have. It's similar to the dictionary but more like a one-volume encyclopedia.

The author mentioned Eerdmans' Handbook to the Bible as a good one, Halley's Bible Handbook, Unger's Bible Handbook, and the World of the Bible . Bible handbooks are good for looking up information about things like currency or weights or units of exchange or measurements. Or maybe you want to know what kind of shoes or clothes they wore, or the food they ate. All those things and many more you'll find in a Bible handbook.

And then a **good map book or atlas** always comes in handy. Geography is probably is one of the most helpful sciences when it comes to Bible study. It's good to know for instance, where the cities are located that

Paul visited and that Jesus visited. It's good to know where they were located in ancient times as well as where those locations are today.

The Moody Atlas of Bible Lands is a highly recommended one. The McMillan Atlas another. Zondervan again has one. And I'm sure there are plenty more out there.

**And then lastly Bible commentaries are a great help.**

And you can get them for the entire Bible or for the New or Old Testament or you can get them for individual books. And Bible commentaries offer you the insight of people who have sometimes spent their entire life studying the Scriptures. Some spend their entire life studying just one book of the Bible.

And though a commentary can't do your studying for you, it can help you in evaluate your own study.

Now, that said I want to give you a few cautions. First you need to know something about the person who wrote the commentary. You need to make sure they line up doctrinally. You need to make sure they're qualified and trustworthy.

Vernon McGhee is one of the more simpler ones to read. John MacArthur is probably one of the most detailed commentaries you're going to read, but there's none better in my opinion. Oliver B Greene is a good one, but you're probably not going to find his books any longer.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary, along with the Expositor's Bible Commentary was recommended by the author of this textbook, but I'm not familiar with either of those.

At any rate, there's no end to the number of Bible commentaries available, especially on individual books such as the Psalms, the gospels, Romans, and so forth. And so I'd suggest you get a good study Bible like a

David Jeremiah or John MacArthur and then maybe take one book of the Bible at a time and buy you a commentary on that book and get busy.

I'm going to be preaching through the book of Daniel for the next few months so that might be a good one to start with.

The main thing is to get started. And I can assure you, it can get addictive and hopefully it will.

So those are just a few of the resources you can get. There are plenty more. There are also Bible study programs out there that you can spend thousands of dollars on. But at the end of the day, the most fulfilling way I've found to study the Bible is to open the Bible itself up in the quiet of the early morning, before things get hectic and with just me and the Lord and my Bible, and maybe a pencil or highlighter and just read a few verses over and over. And then think on them and meditate on them. And you'd be surprised what the Lord will reveal to you. And I get more out of doing that than all the other ways put together.