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Lesson 11

So this week I'd like to continue our study in How to study the Bible and I hope you had the time to visit our website and download the exercises that went along with last week's lesson.

Last week, of course we continued learning about the first step of Bible study which is the step of observation, where we ask the question; What do I see? And we learned three things to look for. We learned to look for things that were emphasized, things that are repeated and things that are related.

And tonight we're going to learn three more ways to observe or to answer that question; what do I see?

And the first way is to look for things that are alike and or unlike.

Two of my six grandsons are twins, but they look nothing alike. One has blonde hair and blue eyes, the other has brown hair and brown eyes. And when they're together, nobody would ever know they were twins because they don't look like alike.

But I grew up with a set of triplets. Dennis, Doug and Dwight Turnipseed. In fact, we went to church together from the time I was a young boy to when we all got married and moved away. And even after that time we've stayed in contact and have been friends.

But even though I was around them a great deal growing up, still I had a really hard time telling them apart, because they were identical. Not one

of them, especially when they were younger had any distinguishing features that would set them apart from the other two.

And when they were together, they would draw a lot of attention. People couldn't help but notice they were all three just alike.

Now, why is that?

Because the moment you see two of anything alike; and especially three things or people who are just alike—it draws your attention.

Well, the same thing holds true in the first step of observation when we come to study our Bibles. Similarities stick out. And so do contrasts. That's why the next two things we need to look for are things that are alike and things that are unlike. And so we've assigned those two things to the ring finger and the little finger.

So what exactly do we look for when it comes to **things that are alike?**

Well, the first thing would be similes. And the biblical writers give us a number of terms that flag similarities. The two most common expressions to look for are; **as and like**. Both indicate a figure of speech called a simile. And what is a simile?

A simile is a word picture that draws a comparison between two things.

For example, turn to Psalm 42. Psalm 42 begins like this: **“As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for Thee, O God”**

Now, what was the word we were to look for?

“As”.

Now, that's a grabbing image, isn't it? You can picture in your mind a deer who's hot and thirsty and panting for a drink of water. And so it

creates an atmosphere if you will, when the psalmist compares his longing for God to a hot, thirsty deer.

And then turn to 1 Peter 2:2. Here Peter uses a simile. He says: **“Like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation”**

Peter’s drawing a comparison between the appetite of a baby for its mother’s milk, and the appetite of the believer for the nourishment of God’s Word.

And then turn to Isaiah chapter 44 verses 6&7. Here’s a comparison that can’t really be made. It’s actually the Lord speaking and He’s asking a very pointed question through the prophet:

This is what the Lord says—

Israel’s King and Redeemer, the Lord Almighty:

I am the first and I am the last;

apart from me there is no God.

Who then is like me?

And of course the right answer is nobody. God alone is God, uniquely supreme and sovereign. But the word like, which ordinarily signals similarity, in this case really just heightens the contrast. And so we need to pay attention to similes which are triggered by the words as and like.

Next , we need to look for metaphors.

A metaphor is a device related to the simile. It’s where a comparison is made, but without using the words “as or like”.

For instance in John 15:1, Jesus says, **“I am the true vine, and My father is the vinedresser”**.

Now, He's obviously talking figuratively, not literally. But just the same, He's painting a word picture that illustrates His relationship to the Father, and, eventually as the passage develops, to believers as well.

And then in John chapter 3, Jesus uses an extended metaphor, when He talks with Nicodemus. He says repeatedly, **“You must be born again,”**.

And here of course, Jesus is making a comparison. He's saying, “Just as you were born physically, Nicodemus, and received the equipment necessary for this life here on earth, so you must also be born again spiritually to receive the equipment necessary for eternal life!”

Well, that stumped Nicodemus. He didn't understand because he was thinking only on the human level.

And so he asked in verse 4, **“How can a man go through the birth process again?”**

You see, he hadn't caught on that Jesus was using a metaphor. That's why Jesus told him this in the next verse.

“You've got to be born from above, Nicodemus, or you'll never make it into the kingdom”!

And then Jesus uses a simile in verse 14: he says, **“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up”**

Now Nicodemus was beginning to understand, because Nicodemus was a Pharisee, and he knew that scripture and he knew the significance of the bronze serpent in the wilderness. And that statement Jesus made of course was drawing a comparison between that incident in the wilderness and His own crucifixion to come.

And though Nicodemous didn't understand completely at the time, he did evidently put it all together and become a believer, because in John chapter 19 after Jesus crucifixion, we find Nicodemus helping in the burial of Jesus' body, which would have put Nicodemous in a very dangerous position, especially being a Pharisee himself.

So always keep in mind that similarities have a way of drawing attention to themselves. And we need to get into the habit of looking for them. You'll find them especially in the wisdom literature, particularly in Psalms. And whenever you find one, you need to mark it, because the writer is trying to communicate with you through that device or tool of comparison.

Next, we need to look for things that are unlike.

And one of the more common indicators that a contrast is about to occur is through the use of the word "but".

The word but is a clue that a change of direction is coming. This is just another example of how every word in the Bible is important.

For example in Matthew chapter 5 in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus repeatedly says, **"You have heard that it was said ... but I say to you"**.

In Galatians chapter 5 and verse 19 Paul writes, **"Now the deeds of the flesh are evident"** and then he gives us a list. And then in verse 22 he turns around and he says, **"But the fruit of the Spirit is ..."** and he gives us another list. So what has he done? He's set up a contrast between what the flesh produces and what the Spirit produces.

In Acts 1:8, a verse we looked at in detail, it also begins with the word "but". Remember how that led us to go back and look at the context, where we discovered the Lord in a discussion with the apostles? They wanted to

know if He was about to establish the kingdom. He replied that it was not for them to know the time for that. And then the word “But” ... and then comes all that we saw in verse 8.

Later in the book of Acts, Philip begins a citywide evangelistic crusade in Samaria, with great success (8:5–8). In fact, the response is so overwhelming that the apostles in Jerusalem send Peter and John on a fact-finding mission to check it out. After they finish and are headed back home, verse 26 says, **“But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, ‘Arise and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza.’ (This is a desert road)”**.

And again, that little word “but” signals a change of direction. It draws a contrast between Peter and John, who are headed from one city to another, and Philip, who suddenly finds himself commissioned to a wilderness ministry.

It would be as if I were preaching in some city on the east coast with the Franklin Graham and his team, and folks are coming to Christ and the Spirit is at work and we’re turning this particular city upside down with the gospel. And then one evening, the Lord says to me, “You need to get on a bus, and go west until I tell you when to get off.” I’d sort of feel demoted. Here’s all this exciting stuff going on in the big city, and I get sent to the minors.

But, not Philip. He obeyed, and the Spirit brought him to an official from Ethiopia. And he led the man to Christ, and the gospel spread to Africa. And the word “but” in verse 26 sets up all of this by painting a contrast.

So, the word “but” is one of the most important words you’ll ever come across in your study of Scripture. Whenever you see it, always stop and find out, **what is the contrast being made?**

And then again just as metaphors can point out things that are alike, they can also show us things that are unlike.

Remember the parable of the unrighteous judge that Jesus tells in Luke 18? A poor widow cries out day after day to a judge of little integrity, asking him to give her justice. But he turns a deaf ear. Finally, though, the woman’s persistence drives him to rule in her favor.

What are we to make of this story? After all, the unrighteous judge is in the position that God is in. Now, does that make sense? Well, the key is to notice that Jesus is setting up a contrast. He’s saying, in effect, **“If a corrupt and indifferent human judge finally gives in to the persistent pleas of a widow, how much more will the heavenly Father respond to the petitions of His children?”**

And so the whole parable turns on the skillful use of contrast.

Now, another use of contrast is irony.

Look at chapter 8 of Luke’s gospel. In this chapter, Jesus is traveling around the Galilee region, teaching and healing. Great crowds are following Him. In fact, Luke makes a point of showing how many people are around Him: the Twelve are there (v. 1); a group of women are along, supporting Him financially (vv. 2–3); and a “great multitude” follows after Him (v. 4).

But Jesus leaves this mob for a while to go across to the country of the Gerasenes, where He casts out the legion of demons . That’s in (vv. 26–39). But as soon as He comes back, everyone is there waiting for Him (v. 40).

And then the pace picks up at this point when an official named Jairus comes up and places a “911” call to Jesus: And he says, **“Lord! You need**

to come quickly. It's my daughter. She's really sick. In fact, she's not going to make it unless you get there fast."

Well, that throws the crowd into a frenzy. It's a life-and-death situation involving a little girl. Will Jesus get there in time? Well, everybody wants to find out, and so Luke is careful to tell us in verse 42 that "as He went, the multitudes were pressing against Him." These were the first ambulance chasers!

Well, at this point an irony, or an "ironic contrast" if you will occurs. A woman with a chronic problem of bleeding—somehow fights her way through the crowd and comes up behind Him. And upon touching the hem of His garment, she's healed. Well, when that occurred Jesus stops, and the surge of the crowd stops. And then He asks, **"Who is the one who touched Me?" (v. 45).**

And the question to almost everyone is thought to be a silly question. Especially to His disciples! And so they ask Him, **"Who touched you? They said, people have been touching you since we got off the boat."**

But Jesus wasn't talking about a physical touch. He was talking about a spiritual touch; the touch of faith. And this is the contrast that Luke wants us to see: In the midst of a crisis, in the middle of a crowd, this unknown woman privately and quietly approaches the Savior in faith—and He recognizes it. She stands out from the crowd, because of her faith. And so Luke sets this scene up so that we'll notice her, and hopefully benefit by her example.

So things that are alike and things that are unlike are represented by our ring finger and our little finger. And they both make use of our natural tendencies as humans to compare and to contrast.

So, as you study the Scriptures, listen to that voice inside your head saying, “Hey, this is like that passage I looked at yesterday,” or, “This section is different from anything else in this book.” Because those are clear signals that the author is using things alike and unlike to communicate his message.

And so we look for things that are alike and things that are unlike and lastly **we need to pay attention to things that are true to life.**

Now, as we’ve learned in the past, there are two essential components to quality observation. First, you have to learn how to read. Second, you have to learn what to look for. And last week and tonight so far we’ve seen five clues to look for when you open the Word of God. The sixth, and final, clue is represented by the palm of your hand: **Things That Are True to Life.**

Now, the issue here is authenticity: What does this passage tell us about reality? What aspects of this text resonate with my experience? Those are the questions we need to ask.

And this is where you need to use your sanctified imagination. You need to look for principles. We obviously live in a culture that is dramatically different from the cultures of the biblical era. Yet the same human condition that the biblical characters experienced, we also experience. We feel the same kinds of emotions they felt. We have the same kinds of questions they had. They were real, live people who faced the same kinds of struggles, the same kinds of problems, and the same kinds of temptations that you and I face.

So as I read about them in Scripture, I need to ask myself: What were this person’s ambitions? What were his goals? What problem was he

facing? How did he feel? What was his response? What would be my response if I were in his or her shoes?

And to answer those questions we need to look for things that are true to life; their life as well as ours.

Now, often we study or teach the Scripture as if it were some academic lesson, rather than real life. And no wonder so many of us are bored with our Bibles. We're missing out on the best lessons of God's Word by failing to pick up on the real life experience of the people we're reading about.

Let me mention a few individuals that I think might help us see the text in realistic terms. What I love about the Bible is that it always returns me to reality. It never paints its characters with whitewash. If necessary, it hangs the dirty laundry right out the front window to tell me what really happened.

Take Abraham for instance.

In Genesis 22:2, God says to Abraham, "Take your son, I mean your only son, I mean the one whom you love, the seed—and offer him up as a sacrifice."

So Abraham starts walking up Mount Moriah with his son, Isaac, who is about twenty-two years old. And Isaac says to him, **"Hey, Dad, we've got the wood. We've got the fire. But where's the sacrifice?"**

Well, Abraham already knows that his son is supposed to be the sacrifice. So how do you suppose he felt? How would you feel?

And then of course there's Moses.

Now, Moses was an incredible leader, probably one of the greatest leaders of all time. But he never gets into the Promised Land. Why? Because he struck a rock twice (That's in Numbers 20:1–13).

He had one bad moment; One act of bad temper, and he's eliminated from going in to the Promised Land.

Well, how did that punishment affect him? How do you think it might have made him feel toward God? What about toward life itself? How would I have responded? How do I respond now to the consequences of my own sin?

And then there's Noah.

Noah was a man of great righteousness. In a generation that was filled with sin and wickedness, Noah obeyed God and thereby saved his family from the Flood. And yet when we read on, we discover that he also got dead drunk (Genesis 9:20–21). And that no doubt causes us to stop and think, How was that possible?

Well, as always, the Scriptures paint the real life of men. They let us know that men like Noah; they weren't perfect; they were real live people.

Righteous? Honored by God? Absolutely! But also failing, and weak, and sinful. And that's something we can identify with is it not?

And then there's David.

And of all the biblical characters in the Old Testament, King David is probably one of my favorites to study. He is brilliant and gifted in so many areas. And I don't know about you, but whenever I study a person such as him, I almost feel inferior. Not only is he a great warrior, not only is he a great athlete, not only is he a great poet and musician, he's also a great leader. David seems to have it all. He's the one person in Scripture that God describes as "a man after [My] own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14).

Yet this great man of God is also a real life character. And scripture portrays him as that, when he's home one day instead of out on the

battlefield with his troops. And like many a man before him and after, it only takes one look at one woman to bring him down.

So what is the Spirit of God trying to say to us by including this part of David's story to us? What warning does it give us?

Another example is Peter, and he's my favorite character in the New Testament and probably many of yours. And the reason is because most of us are just like him.

And so every time we want to criticize him or write him off we realize, that he's just saying or doing exactly what we would have said or done.

For instance, in John 18:10, he's willing to take on a hundred men single-handedly in order to rescue the Lord. Yet when one young servant girl comes up and says, **"Hey, weren't you one of His disciples?"**

He keeps repeating, **"Who, me?"**

She says, Yea you. "I know you were one of them!"

"Drop dead, woman," he tells her. "I don't know what in the world you're talking about."

So finally she says, "I recognize your accent. You're a Galilean! And you were one of the disciples, weren't you?"

And then Peter starts swearing and cursing at this young woman.

Well, when we back up and look at that incident, we wonder, Who is saying that? Is this the same man who told Jesus, **"You can count on me."** But at the moment of crisis he falters—just like you or I might have. Why? Because Peter was human.

And there are many other Bible characters we could look at or point to that were also true to life.

So, there you have them: six more clues to look for every time you open your Bible.

1. Things are emphasized? (thumb)
2. Things are repeated? (index finger)
3. Things are related? (middle finger)
4. Things are alike? (ring finger)
5. Things are unlike? (little finger)
6. Things are true to life? (palm)