

Personal Spiritual Growth Lesson 4A

The Word (Part 2)

Let's continue with Lesson 4 on the Word, part two. In the first part of our lesson regarding the Word of God, we introduced the Word/Hand illustration. There are five ways to take in the Word of God.

We can hear it, we can read it, we can study it, we can memorize it, and we can meditate on it. And when we have all five of these methods of taking in the Word of God fully utilized, we have a firm grasp on the Word of God. We can stand firm against temptation, We can identify false teaching, because we have a personal knowledge of the Word and a practical application of the Word of God in our life.

In part one, we explained the Word/Hand picture and we talked about hearing the Word and reading the Word. We started to introduce the importance of studying the Word of God. We will take time to go deeper with studying the Word of God.

In step one, I'd like to introduce a simple three-step process for studying the Word of God.

It's called observation, interpretation, and application.

GTN offers a three-day course on how to study the Bible that will go much deeper than this. Having an understanding of these three steps though will help in your personal study of the Word of God. We will begin on page 22.

First I will summarize the process and then we will work through an actual example. This three-step process will guarantee life change, there's no doubt. It comes from a book written by Howard Hendricks.

He was a professor at Dallas Theological Seminary and the book he wrote was called Living by the Book. It may be the best book on how to study the Bible. Let's just talk through these three steps, observation, interpretation, and application.

Observation is the first step. We ask the question, what do I see?

What do we see in the text as I read it? Here we are just asking questions. We are like a detective. We are asking lots of questions of the text. We are asking, what are the facts? We become a Bible detective looking for clues.

Who is the author? When was this book written? Where does the story take place? Who is the primary audience? Who are the characters? What do you know about the culture? What things are emphasized in the passage? What is repeated? What things are related to one another? What things are alike? What things are different? What things are true to life? We are looking at the words that are used, the tense of verbs. So that's observation. It's usually something that we overlook and spend much too little time with as we study a passage.

When we start to read a passage, we want to go right to the next step of what does it mean. The more time we spend in observation, the less time we'll have to spend in interpretation and the more accurate our interpretation will be. The ultimate goal whenever we study the

Word of God, is to understand what God intended to communicate to a real audience at a real time in the past.

And the closer we can get to that understanding, we are able to build a bridge to what God wants to communicate to us now through any passage? How do we relate what was true to that original audience to our life today? We get closer to the original meaning of any Bible passage as we spend more time in observation.

The second step is interpretation. In the second step we ask the question, what does it mean? We asking questions of the text to look for meaning, to find answers, and then we are looking to integrate our answers into a meaningful whole.

Observation produces lots of questions. We begin to research them. As we move to interpretation, we begin to synthesize the results of our research. The goal is to write a summary statement for the passage. In one or two sentences, this is what the passage means. This will eventually provide an outline from which to teach a lesson or to preach a sermon.

In this step consider the type of writing? Are we reading prophecy or poetry? Is it history or narrative? The genre of Bible literature instructs me on how to read and interpret the passage. This helps us understand what God was communicating to the original audience. We also consider the context of the passage. We look at what comes before and after the passage. How does it fit in the whole book? How does it fit in the New Testament or the Old Testament? Understanding more about the culture at that point in history is crucial. There are many resources to help with this.

There are commentaries, Bible dictionaries, encyclopedias. If you have access to these, they will help to provide background information. A good study Bible will include helpful notes and word studies.

Once again, the goal of interpretation is to summarize the main point of the passage. To be able to summarize it in one or two sentences and identify a few sub points that reinforce the main point.

We will work through a short bible passage in a moment.

Step one is Observation. What do I see?

Step two is Interpretation, what does it mean?

Step three is Application. Application answers the question, how does it work?

How do we put the truths from the passage into practice in our life? We are asking, how does this work for me and for others in practical ways? Here are seven helpful application questions to consider at this step in the process.

1. Is there an example to follow?
2. Is there a sin to avoid or to confess?
3. Is there a promise to claim in the passage that I just studied?
4. Is there a prayer to pray or to be repeated? There are prayers all throughout the scriptures.

5. Is there a command to obey? Obedience is the greatest demonstration, the evidence of the faith that we have. Jesus said, blessed is the man who hears these words and puts them into practice.
6. Is there a condition to meet? You may want to look for statements like if you do this, then this will happen.
7. Is there a verse to memorize? Not just to hear, to read, to study, but to memorize and then even to meditate on the Word of God.

There are also a few reminders at the bottom of page 22. Helpful hints for studying a Bible passage.

- You can get a notebook and a pen. That's a nice thing. You don't need a lot of investment. It doesn't cost you a lot. Just time, a Bible, something to write on, and something to write with.
- Read a passage.
- Write down all of your observations related to the text.
- Look up different cross-references. Is there a reference to another passage in Scripture?
- Record your questions.
- Find answers to those questions. Through commentaries, the study of other passages related to the passage you're studying.
- Look up keywords in a concordance. If you have access to a concordance on your phone or in hardcopy. A concordance provides a listing of every word in the Bible. You'll be able to see the meaning of a word and how it is used in other places in the Bible.
- Utilize Commentaries, Bible dictionaries, and other study guides. Ultimately you're trying to get to the place to define the meaning of the passage? What was the author communicating to the original audience? Your goal is a summary statement and sub points that summarize the passage that you're studying.
- Then begin to ask application questions. How do I put these truths into practice in my life? What needs to change in my life? What am I convicted by? What am I encouraged by? What do I need to do as a result of studying that passage?
- Don't leave your quiet time with the Lord until he has put something on your heart.

This is the simple 3-step Bible study process of observation, interpretation, application.

If you turn to page 23, here's an opportunity to give this a try.

We will use a short passage, Joshua 1:1-9.

And as you begin to use observation, interpretation, application, it's going to be helpful to begin with observations related to the context of the passage.

The book of Joshua follows the five books written by Moses, and I've included just a few background questions that might help us study the first nine verses in chapter 1.

Here are a few questions to get started.

- What role did God call Moses to play?
- Why did the nation of Israel not immediately enter the promised land following the exodus from Egypt?
- What were the people of Israel like?
- Were they an easy group to lead?
- What was the relationship between Moses and Joshua?
- What do we learn in Exodus, Numbers and Deuteronomy?
- Why was Moses not allowed to lead the people into the land?
- Why did Moses have to review the covenant with the people on the edge of the Jordan as they prepared to enter the land? Remember, it's important to know, after 40 years of wandering because of unbelief, the people of Israel didn't trust God to enter the land just weeks after they left Egypt. They could have quickly entered into and taken possession of the land, but at Kadesh Barnea, they rebelled against God. They didn't trust God, They did not believe that he would provide for them. God said, you are going to wander in the wilderness for 40 years. Moses continued to lead them during those 40 years. At the end of the 40 years, when all of the men, 20 years of age or older had died in the wilderness, it was time for Moses to prepare the people to enter the promised land. As the book of Joshua starts, the people are on the east side of the Jordan, in the plains of Moab, and that's where the book of Deuteronomy takes place. Moses reviews the covenant with this new generation, reminding them of the covenant promises of God, reminding them that God was the one who led them out of Egypt, God was their deliverer, God was their provider. This is where Joshua 1 begins. We learn that Moses died, and Joshua is called by God to lead the people into the promised land.

Let's read Joshua 1:1-9 and then stop the recording. Take a few minutes to make some observations. When you continue with the audio recording, we will discuss observation ideas. And then continue with interpretation and application.

Joshua 1:1-9

"After the death of Moses, a servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua, son of Nun, Moses' aid, Moses my servant is dead. Now then you and all these people get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I'm about to give to them. To the Israelites, I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. Your territory will extend from the desert of Lebanon, from the great river, the Euphrates, all the Hittite country, to the Mediterranean Sea, in the West. No one will be able to stand against you, all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I'll be with you. I will never leave you, nor forsake you. Be strong and courageous. You will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to your ancestors to give them. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you, do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Keep this book of the law always on your lips, meditate on it day and night, so you may be careful to do everything written in it, then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you, be strong and courageous, do not be afraid, do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."

That is our passage for study, Joshua 1:1-9.

Take this opportunity to make observations on page 23. What do you see? Remember you are asking questions ... who is the author, when was it written, where does the story take place, who is the primary audience, who are the characters, what do you know about the culture, what is emphasized, what is repeated, what things are related, what things are alike, what things are different, what things are true to life?

Stop the recording and take a few minutes to make your observations on these nine verses.

Pause ...

Let's see how you did.

- The author is Joshua, most believe he was trained by Moses. He was commissioned by God previously to replace Moses as a leader.
- Where did this place? On the plains of Moab, waiting to cross the Jordan River to enter the promised land.
- Who was the audience? There were millions of Israelites, maybe up to six million Israelites, men, women and children. They've survived the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. All those 20 years of older have died in the wilderness as God's punishment for their unbelief and rebellion at Kadesh Barnea.
- Who are the main characters? Moses, Joshua, the Israelites and God. God is speaking in this passage.
- What did Joshua witness in his life? He saw the trouble Moses had as a leader, he witnessed rebellion on the part of the people, grumbling on the part of the Israelites, he witnessed the faithfulness and power of God through many miracles and sustaining Israel for 40 years in the wilderness, there's a lot that he saw that could give him courage and strength.
- What words and phrases are repeated? I notice that "be strong and courageous" was repeated three times.
God's promise was "never to leave him", that was repeated twice.
God's promise to "bring them into the land" was repeated two times.
- How might Joshua have been feeling? It seemed like he might have been fearful, uncertain or doubtful.
- How might Joshua provide a picture of Jesus? Joshua's name even means salvation, Was Joshua going to be a deliverer, a Savior? He replaced Moses as the deliverer of the people of Israel.
- How might we be more like the Israelites? Rebellious? Lacking faith? Grumblers? They/we miss what God is doing, not taking to heart all the miracles, God's faithfulness.
- Are we more like the Israelites and less like Joshua?

So this gives us a taste of observation. The more time we spend in observation, the better we will understand the context of the passage.

Step two is Interpretation. What does it mean?

- In this step we consider what we have already observed.
- We look closely at what comes before the passage. The first five books of Moses and even what comes after in Joshua.
- Consider what's consistent with how God has communicated in other parts of the Bible related to this passage.
- What's the main point. What is the main idea of this passage? We want to summarize that main point in one sentence plus a few sub points that reinforce the main point.

Let's pause the recording again and think through what this passage means? What was God looking to communicate to Joshua, to the people of Israel, and to us today as well? And then write that out in a sentence with a few sub points.

When we return, I'll share my summary statement for Joshua 1:1-9.

Pause ...

How did you do? Hopefully you have, you have a sentence that summarizes the main point of this passage plus a few sub points.

If you're doing this with some others you could share your sentence and sub points with them.

Here is my one sentence summary and sub points you can see on page 24.

As God was with Moses so he will be with Joshua to achieve God's purposes and promises, as Joshua walks in faith, courage, and obedience.

Sub points:

- *Joshua can trust in the promises of God.*
- *Joshua can be strong and courageous knowing that God is with him.*
- *Joshua can walk in obedience to the Word of God as a demonstration of his faith in God.*

I can now use this outline plus my observations to teach or preach on this passage and stay focused on what God is saying in His Word, not what I want to say.

The third step following observation and interpretation is application. We answer the question: how does it work, how do I put this into practice?

We can use the 7 application questions in your handout.

- An example to follow
- A command to obey
- A sin to confess
- A promise to claim
- A prayer to repeat
- A condition to meet

- A verse to memorize

These are all good questions to be asking at this point.

So again, let's pause the recording and come up with a few points of application for you from this study of just the first nine verses of Joshua 1.

Pause ...

How did you do? Hopefully there were a few personal applications you could take away. On page 24 I included a few applications that I was thinking about.

Is there an example to follow? And I thought, in Joshua, we could follow Joshua as an example of faith and obedience and servanthood as he leads the people of Israel. I could also learn from Israel to not be a grumbler and to be more aware of how faithful God is in my daily life.

There was a sin to avoid and confess. At times I have an unbelieving, a rebellious heart like the Israelites.

Is there a promise to claim? Similar to Matthew 28:20 and Hebrews 13:5, Jesus says, "I will never leave you or forsake you". That's a promise that I can cling to, even when things get really difficult.

Is there a prayer to repeat? I said, yes! Father, help me to remain strong and courageous whenever fear begins to take control of my heart, knowing that you will never leave me or forsake me.

Is there a command to obey? Keep God's Word in your heart. Meditate on it daily. When I become fearful, I must remember God's promises and his presence.

Is there a condition to be met? If you remain faithful to the Word of God, you will be prosperous and successful spiritually. It's not a promise of financial success. You'll be effective and you'll be prosperous in a spiritual way as you grow in relationship with God.

And was there a verse to memorize? I thought Joshua 1:8-9 is a wonderful verse that kind of sums up much of the teaching for these first nine verses.

So that is a summary of studying the Word of God using the three-step process of observation, interpretation, application.

The more time you spend in observation, the more accurate your interpretation will be and the more on target your applications will be. So spend time. Don't rush through studying the Word of God.

Let's continue with Memorizing God's Word.

Spending time observing will lead to the next two aspects that I'll just touch on briefly here on page 25. As you are studying verse by verse, you are actually beginning the process of memorizing Scripture. There are wonderful benefits of memorizing scripture.

You can see in Psalm 119 verses 9 and 11. How can we keep our way pure? By living according to your word. I've hidden your word in my heart so I won't sin against you.

You can see the same idea in Joshua 1, Do not let this book of the law depart from your mouths. Meditate on it day and night. If you hide the the Word in your heart and you meditate on it and you put it into practice, you will be prosperous and successful in a spiritual way in your relationship with God.

And there are some guidelines that you can use to focus on memorizing the Word of God. The key thing is to review, review, review, and review. You may need to set a goal where each week to memorize one verse a week out of your study of the Bible. As you add verses, you will want to review the prior week's verses until are in your mind.

On page 26, there are five verses from each of the lessons we have discussed. You might pick to memorize.

Maybe it's 2 Corinthians 3:18 about being transformed.

Maybe it's 1 Timothy 4:7 - 8 about training.

Maybe it's John 15:5. about abiding in Christ. He is the Vine and we are the branches.

Maybe it's Galatians 2:20, living a life centered on Christ.

Or even Ephesians 5:18, don't get drunk on wine which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.

I would encourage you to pick, take one of those verses. You can pause the recording now

- Write down the topic of that verse you selected.
- Write the scripture reference?
- Write out the verse word for word. This engages another part of your mind. Not just thinking about it, but the kinesthetic, the movement of writing takes your learning to a deeper level as well.
- Repeat the verse a number of times. Work on smaller sections of the verse.
- Share the verse you memorized with someone else.

Pause

You are well on our way to memorizing one of those verses. By the end of this course there will be 10 to 15 verses that you will be close to memorizing.

We have talked about hearing the Word of God, reading the Word of God, studying the Word of God, and memorizing the Word of God. The part of the Word/Hand picture is represented by the thumb. We can meditate on God's Word.

William Bridges says, a man may think on God every day and meditate on God no day.

It's not just enough to think, there's more to meditating than just thinking about something. There is a huge difference between New Age meditation and Biblical meditation. In New Age meditation, you are emptying yourself, you empty your mind.

The goal of Biblical meditation is to disconnect from the world, to fill yourself up with God, to fill yourself up with the truth of God's Word. And we can see this principle in Joshua 1:8, "do not let this book of the law depart from your mouth. Meditate on it day and night."

Psalms 1 says, blessed is a man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers, but his delight is in the law of the Lord and on his law he meditates day and night.

Meditation is like the picture of a cow eating and chews its food. It takes it into his stomach and then brings it back up again and chews it some more and then swallows it and brings it back up again.

It's like taking the Word of God in and chewing on it. Thinking about it, talking about it with others, thinking about it through the day, praying through it. It's engaging all of the aspects of what we have been talking about in this lesson. Meditation can be applied as we hear the Word of God, as we read the Word of God, as we study the Word of God, and as we are memorizing the Word of God.

Here are some helpful thoughts for meditation. Select a passage, repeat it in different ways, emphasizing different words at each time. You can rewrite the passage in your own words. Look for different applications of the passage that you're memorizing and meditating on.

Spend time praying through the passage and don't rush. You're not in comparison to anyone else, you are not trying to catch up to anyone else. This is your personal relationship with God.

You are training yourself in a relationship with God. You are not comparing yourself to anyone else.

And at the bottom of page 27 you see this picture of the hand grasping the Bible and you know that every Word of God is breathed out by him and it is useful, has a purpose. It's good for teaching and correcting and rebuking and training in righteousness so that you will be effective for every good work that God has for you. So I would just end our time with a prayer.

Father, give us a renewed hunger for Your Word. Make us lifelong students of the Word of God. Show us great and mighty things in Your Word that we do not know. May we crave Your Word. Increase our appetite and desire to feed ourselves. May we grow to be mature and be able to teach others as we make disciples.

Thanks for hanging in there. We're about halfway through this course. Our next lesson will focus on growing our relationship with God through prayer. God bless.