

Lesson 4- Making Detailed Observations

One of the main objectives of this course is to equip you with the skills necessary to effectively study and apply God's Word. We are taking an inductive study approach. Do a search on the meaning of inductive bible study and chances are high you will find it described as the process of observation, interpretation, and application. As the title of the lesson suggests, we will be making more observations this week, moving from big picture observations about the whole book to more detailed observations about the smallest segments of our outlines.

Step 4 - Do a detailed observation of the smallest segment

So far, it seems that the only part of that inductive bible study process we have been doing is making observations. We have made observations about the book as a whole by identifying the recurring ideas, structures, and how all of these relate to one another. When you were creating your outline for the Epistle to the Philippians last week, you were making subtle interpretations. After you identified all the smallest segments of the text that communicated a singular idea, you then grouped those ideas into larger sections, and possibly did something similar with those larger sections. If you shared your work with others in the class, you can see that none of you outlined the book in the same exact manner with the same exact section titles, etc. It is quite likely that each of you even focused on slightly different themes.

This begs an important question. If we are approaching the text from a historical-grammatical approach, then we are taking the stance that the text has an *intended* meaning, directed by God himself. If there is an intended meaning as determined by God, shouldn't we all get the same outlines, ideas, etc.? If we differ on any of these, shouldn't at least one of us be wrong?

These questions should not be taken lightly. God's truth is so broad, so thorough, so encompassing, that we could never grasp it all. Think of how many different sermons, by different preachers, you may have heard on the same text. Were they all the same? No. God directed those men to attend to certain ideas and nuances of the truth he intended to convey. Three years from now, you will probably change your own work as well.

We begin the interpretative process when we ask questions about our observations. In Lesson 2, you were given a list of questions to ask about the grammatical structures you identified in the book. Those questions plant the seeds of the interpretative process. Right now, this larger system we are learning is mechanical and clumsy, like all new things we learn. Your attention is

focused on completing these new steps. As you become more familiar with this system, you will move more quickly and smoothly through all the steps and you will genuinely be employing all parts of the observation-interpretation-application process simultaneously as you move through the steps of the system.

Step 4 of the IBS method we are learning feels more like the type of bible study to which you are probably accustomed. In this step, we look at a portion of Scripture ranging in length from one to three, maybe four verses. You big picture folks out there may get bogged down here. Calling this step “detailed” may seem like an understatement. On the other hand, those of you who cannot see the forest for the trees will love it.

Breaking Down the Segment

Even though this step deals with the smallest portion of our text with a singular thought or idea, we are going to break it down even more. We will make observations about the whole segment, then make observations about individual clauses, and even make observations about individual words along the way. We will continue to apply the grammatical structures we used in making our book outlines to even these smaller segments. And, most importantly, we will pose questions about every observation we make.

Begin your detailed observation by making observations of the entire segment. Once you have completed your observations about the entire segment, break the segment down into individual clauses. This part of the process will conjure up memories of middle school language arts as you identify not only the clauses, but whether they are dependent or independent. As you make your observations about the individual clauses, note your observations about individual words within those clauses. Are there important prepositions or conjunctions that signal relationships between clauses? What is the tense of the verb used? What is the subject or object of that verb? And don't forget to ask questions, even about those minute details.

Format and organize your work in the way that helps you most. You may find a two column format works well for you with observations in one column and questions in another. It might be easier logistically to simply list them sequentially as you move the text. The sample detailed observation provided for you is a two column version. This writer prefers the two column format because he can scan through the columns to review his observations in an uninterrupted flow.

Homework

This week, complete a detailed observation of Philippians 3:10. Remember to bring your work with you next week to share with your classmates.