

THE JOY OF DISCOVERY: CYCLE ONE

STAGE 1

OBSERVATION

Introduction

Learning the skills of observation is challenging. Oletta Wald has noted, "Careful observation requires concentrated thinking, and few of us really want to learn how to think! Someone has said that five percent of the people think. Fifteen percent of the people think they think. Eighty percent of the people would rather die than think," (*Joy of Discovery*, Oletta Wald, p. 17).

1A Defining the Process

1B Definition: Observation is awareness of --

1C

2C

2B Purpose: To raise significant questions. Significant questions are those when answered will help with the understanding of the text.

3B Requirements

1C

2C

3C

4B Illustration: The following advertisement of Mortimer J. Adler's book, How to Read a Book, appeared in the New York Times, under a picture of a puzzled adolescent reading his first love letter.

How to Read a Love Letter

This young man has just received his first love letter. He may have read it three or four times, but he is just beginning to read it as accurately as he would like.

He will ponder over the exact shade of meaning of every word, every comma. She has headed the letter "Dear John." What, he asks himself, is the exact significance of those words? Did she refrain from saying "dearest" because she was bashful? Would "My dear" have sounded too formal?

Jeepers, maybe she would have said "Dear So-and-So" to anybody!

A worried frown will now appear on his face. But it disappears as soon as he really gets to thinking about the first sentence. She certainly would not have written that to anybody!

And so he works his way through the letter, one moment perched blissfully on a cloud, the next moment huddled miserably behind an eight-ball. It has started a hundred questions in his mind. He could quote it by heart. In fact, he will--to himself--for weeks to come.

2A General Guidelines

1B

2B

3B Match the following from John 3:16.

A. Observation

B. Interpretation

C. Application

1. God loved the world.
2. The person who trusts Jesus Christ as his personal Savior receives eternal life.
3. The term "world" refers to people on the earth.
4. God gave his son to live and die on the cross.
5. God gave his son.
6. It was his love that motivated God to provide a plan of salvation for guilty sinners.
7. Unless unbelievers trust Christ as their Savior, they will perish

1C Observations

- 1.
- 2.

2C Interpretation

- 1.
- 2.
3. The term "world" refers to people on the earth.

3C Application

- 1.

2.

- 4B Think imaginatively about what is in the text and what is not in the text. Sometimes what is omitted is as significant as what is included.

3A The Procedure

1B Write it down! The fundamental means for making observations is to write down what you observe.

1C Rational

1D

2D

2B Guidelines

1C

2C

3C

STAGE 2

INTERPRETATION

Introduction

One of the major problems in interpretation is that those who study the Bible want to impose their interpretation on the passage. They forget that the divine author, God himself, has predetermined the meaning of the text in the process of interpretation. The goal for the interpreter then is to determine divine author's intended meaning. The process for doing this is called interpretation.

1A Definition: The technical term for interpretation is "hermeneutics." It comes from the Greek word *hermeneuin*, which means, "to explain, interpret, or translate."

1B Generally, hermeneutics refers to the principles used to understand a written or an oral message.

2B Hermeneutics is considered to be both *an art and science*. It is a science because we use rules, principles, methods, and strategies. Yet, communication cannot be reduced merely to a prescribed set of rules. No prescribed system of rules will help you to understand the meaning and implications of the three words, "I love you." That requires a sensitivity that goes beyond the mechanics of a language.

2A Considerations

1B Historical: Any given passage has a story behind it. Thus to determine an author's meaning, it is essential to identify the general historical period and the leading features of that period that help in understanding the text.

1C General

1D For example, 2 Chronicles 28:22-23 reads, "Now in the time of his distress this same king Ahaz became yet more unfaithful to the Lord. For he sacrificed to the gods of Damascus which had defeated him, and said, "Because the gods of the kings of Aram helped them, I will sacrifice to them that they may help me." But they became the downfall of him and all Israel."

2D In order to understand these two verses, it is necessary to know that the general historical period is the Divided Kingdom. It is also important to know the historical situation in the Northern Kingdom, Syria (Aram), and Assyria.

2B Cultural: Many passages deal with cultural practices that may be unfamiliar to a modern day reader. It is often necessary to study the religious and secular customs in order to determine the meaning of the text.

For example, in the story of Jesus turning water to wine, John says, "Now there were six stone waterpots set there for Jewish custom of purification, containing twenty or thirty gallons each" (John 2:6). It was customary for guests entering a home to ceremonially wash their hands and feet. A large number of guests were obviously present at the wedding since all six water pots were empty.

3B Contextual: The four realms of context are--

1C

2C

3C

4C

4B Grammatical: Grammatical interpretation involves lexical and syntactical analysis.

1C Lexical. Lexical refers to the meaning of individual words. It is the defining of terms. For example, "green" may mean--

1D

2D

3D

2C Syntactical. Syntactical is an analysis of the way words are arranged. This is sometimes crucial in determining meaning, especially in epistolary literature where the placement of clauses and phrases determine meaning.

For example, in his prayer for the Ephesians Paul says, “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints...” (Eph. 1:18-19). A careful analysis of the syntax reveals that inheritance is not referring to a reward for believers but that the saints are God’s inheritance.

5B Theological: Unfortunately, this aspect of interpretation is often overlooked. Theological involves determining the doctrinal understanding of the writer and his audience at the time of writing.

For example, to understand Joshua 11:20, it is necessary to understand God’s sovereignty and justice and man’s free will and sinfulness. “For it was of the Lord to harden their hearts, to meet Israel in battle in order that he might utterly destroy them, that they might receive no mercy, but that he might destroy them, just as the Lord had commanded Moses.”

3A The search for interpretative meanings.

1B Questions build the bridge between interpretation and observation. Interpretative questions probe for the meaning of observations. Good questions stimulate thinking and help identify words, phrases and statements which require further study. A well-known verse suggests the importance of questions.

***I had six faithful friends,
They taught me all I knew,
Their names are How and What and Why,
When and Where and Who.***

2B Traina has distinguished two types of questions.

1C Secondary/subordinate

1D

2D

3D

4D

*Note that the answer to secondary questions can usually be found by detailed observation of the text.

2C Primary

1D Definitive or explanatory--What does this mean?

2D Rational--Why is this said? Why is it said here?

3D Implication--What does this imply?

*Note that the answers to primary questions usually cannot be found by observation of the text. Cross-referencing or additional sources may be needed to answer these questions.

3C All questions may not be applicable for every passage. In addition, you may need to modify these questions when studying a particular passage.

4A Cross-referencing.

1B It is true that the Bible is the best commentary on itself. Therefore, the first place to look for answers to questions is related passages. This is accomplished by cross-referencing.

2B Types of cross-referencing

1C Words

Example: "Desire" (cf. Gen 3:16 and Gen. 4:7).

Tool: Concordance

2C Verses

Example: Mt. 13:13-15 (cf. Isa. 6:9, 10)

Tool: Treasury of Scripture Knowledge

3C Quotations

Example: "gods" (Jn. 10:35 cf. Ps. 82 6)

Tool: Bible/Study Bible with Cross -References

4C References/Allusion

Example: "Jacob's ladder" (cf. John 1:51 and Gen. 28:12)

Tool: Study Bible/Commentary/Treasury of Scripture Knowledge

5C Ideas

Example: "Substitution" (c. 2 Cor. 5:21 and Isa. 53:4-6, 10)

Tool: Bible Dictionary/Encyclopedia; Commentary; Study Bible; Treasury of Scripture Knowledge

STAGE 3

CORRELATION

Introduction

One dictionary defines correlation as the attempt “to bring two or more things into relation with one another; the act of relating.” Correlation is the final aspect of interpretation and the preliminary aspect of application. It involves determining relationships--the relationships of verses, paragraphs, chapters, books, and life. The goal is to determine the coherent and consistent whole of the passage. The question we want to answer is, “Where does it fit?”

1A Definition: Correlation is identifying the relationship of the text to--

1B

2B

3B

2A Need: Correlation is necessary for three reasons.

1B

2B

3B

3A Kind: The Interpretative Summary

1B Definition: The interpretative summary is the most basic method of correlation. It is a concise statement of the essential idea of the passage based on the interpretation of the details of the passage.

2B Procedure

1C

2C

3B Example: Romans 3:21-26

STAGE 4

APPLICATION

Introduction

Zuck captures the importance of application when he writes the following:

Many statements in Scripture indicate that the Bible is given to us for more than satisfying our curiosity about what God is like, what He has done in the past, or what He will do in the future. Its intended impact on lives is seen in that the bible convicts (Heb. 4:12-13), regenerates (2 Tim. 3:15; 1 Peter 1:23), nurtures (2:2), cleanses (Ps. 119:24, 105), prevents sin (v. 11), renews (vv. 50, 93, 107, 149, 154, 156), strengthens (v. 28), sustains (vv. 116, 175), gives wisdom (vv. 98, 130, 169), and delivers (v. 170).

The Scriptures are called a fire, to consume false teaching (Jer. 23:29); a hammer, to shatter people's hearts (v. 29), food, to sustain one's soul (Ps. 119:103; Jer. 15:16; 1 Cor. 3:2; Heb. 5:13-14; 1 Peter 2:2); a light, to guide our paths (Ps. 119:105); and a sword, for offense against Satan (Eph. 6:17; cf. Luke 4:4, 8, 12). In Psalm 119 the psalmist used many verbs to speak of his response to God's word: *walk according to, keep, obey, follow, trust in, seek out, delight in, meditate on, consider, rejoice in, see, understand, hope in, teach, speak of, remember, not forget, not forsake, not depart from, not stray from, not turn from, believe in, consider, long for, love, stand in awe of, tremble at, sing of, and choose* (BBI, p. 280).

1A Prerequisites

1B Know the meaning of the text through historical, cultural, grammatical, and theological interpretation.

2B Determine whether the contemporary situation falls within the implications of the interpretation of the passage. What you want to do here is look for shared experiences. What experiences do you have in common with those to whom the passage was written?

3B Bridge the gap between the biblical world and the contemporary world with a biblical principle.

4B Determine what is normative for today (the contemporary culture in which we live).

2A Specific and Personal Requirements

1B

2B

3B Applications must be--

PERSONAL

SPECIFIC

MEASURABLE

1C The point is “your application must move beyond intentions no matter how good they may be.

2C Illustration: The parable of the two sons (Matt. 22:28-32).

4B Applications generally focus on one of two levels.

Emotional Attitude Belief

Volitional Action Behavior

Conclusion

Application is the ultimate goal of Bible study. It is intensely personal, and challenges us to put into practice the results of observation, interpretation, and correlation. James captured the importance of application when he wrote, “do not merely listen to the Word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says” (James 1:22).

Example for classroom practice: 1 Thessalonians 5:26