

CONTENTS

Preface	9
PART 1	
OBSERVATION	
Start with Observation	
1. Observing a Passage of Scripture	15
2. Observing a Verse (Psalm 93:1)	17
3. Observing a Verse (1 John 3:12)	19
4. Reading the Bible as for the First Time	21
5. Reading the Bible as for the First Time (Luke 15:11–32)	23
6. Reading the Bible as a Love Letter (Isaiah 55)	25
7. Reading the Bible as a Love Letter (John 3:16–17)	27
8. Reading Thoughtfully (Genesis 5:21–31; 7:11)	29
9. Reading Thoughtfully (Luke 17:11–19)	31
10. Reading Repeatedly (Exodus 20:1–21)	33
11. Reading Repeatedly (Romans 5)	35
12. Reading Patiently	37
13. Reading Selectively (Genesis 11:27–12:9)	39
14. Reading Selectively (Matthew 2:1–12; Luke 2:1–40)	41
15. Reading Prayerfully (Jonah 2)	43
16. Reading Prayerfully (Ephesians 3)	45
17. Reading Imaginatively (Daniel 6)	47
18. Reading Imaginatively (John 2:1–11)	49
19. Reading Meditatively (2 Samuel 6:1–8)	51
20. Reading Meditatively (Romans 8:28–39)	53
21. Reading Purposefully (Jeremiah 38)	55
22. Reading Purposefully (Colossians 1:15–29)	57
23. Reading Acquisitively	59
24. Reading Telescopically (Lamentations 3:22–33)	61
25. Reading Telescopically (Hebrews 12:1–13)	63

26. Working with a Paragraph (Jonah 4:5–8)	65
27. Working with a Paragraph (2 Corinthians 4:7–12)	67
28. Looking for Things That Are Emphasized (Proverbs 31:10–31)	69
29. Looking for Things That Are Emphasized (Luke 15)	71
30. Looking for Things That Are Repeated (Joshua 1)	73
31. Looking for Things That Are Repeated (Romans 7:7–25)	75
32. Looking for Things That Are Related (Numbers 21:4–9)	77
33. Looking for Things That Are Related (John 3:1–21)	79
34. Looking for Things That Are Alike (Isaiah 66:1–16)	81
35. Looking for Things That Are Alike (Matthew 23:23–39)	83
36. Looking for Things That Are Unlike (Numbers 13:25–14:31)	85
37. Looking for Things That Are Unlike (Acts 4:32–5:11)	87
38. Looking for Things That Are True to Life (1 Kings 11)	89
39. Looking for Things That Are True to Life (2 Timothy 1)	91
40. Working with a Segment of Scripture	93
41. How to Study a Section of Scripture	95
42. Making a Start with Your Chart	97
43. Working with a Segment of Scripture (Exodus 7–12)	99
44. Working with a Segment of Scripture (Revelation 2–3)	101

PART 2

INTERPRETATION

From Observation to Interpretation

45. Why Do We Need Interpretation?	107
46. Aids to Interpretation	109
47. Hazards to Avoid	111
48. Literary Genres of the Bible	113
49. Examining the Content (Habakkuk 3:17–19)	115
50. Looking for Context (Habakkuk 3:17–19)	117
51. Making Relevant Comparisons (Habakkuk 3:17–19)	119
52. Considering the Culture (Habakkuk 3:17–19)	121
53. Doing Further Consultation (Habakkuk 3:17–19)	123
54. Coming to Terms (Book of Habakkuk)	125

55. Figuring Out the Figurative	127
56. Figuring Out the Figurative (Judges 9:9–15)	129
57. Figuring Out the Figurative (Revelation 17)	131

PART 3

APPLICATION

From Interpretation to Application

58. Nine Questions to Ask	137
59. Asking the Right Questions (Ezekiel 33:1–10)	139
60. Asking the Right Questions (1 Thessalonians 5)	141
61. Truth That Transforms (Psalms 51)	143
62. Truth That Transforms (Hebrews 4:12–16)	145
63. A Transformed People (Exodus 31:1–11; 1 Kings 6)	147
64. A Transformed People (Ephesians 2:11–22)	149
65. The Process of Application (Ecclesiastes 3:1–14)	151
66. The Process of Application (Galatians 5:16–26)	153
67. Customized Christianity (Jeremiah 36)	155
68. Customized Christianity (Philippians 4:1–9)	157
69. Cultures in Context (Genesis 25:19–34; 27; 1–46)	159
70. Cultures in Context (Mark 1:21–45)	161
71. Stating Principles from Scripture (Leviticus 16)	163
72. Stating Principles from Scripture (2 Peter 3)	165
73. A Process of Life-Change	167

PART 4

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Introduction

74. Book of Ruth	172
75. Book of James	203

OBSERVING A PASSAGE OF SCRIPTURE

“What makes one person a better Bible student than another? He can see more, that’s all. The same truth is available to both of them in the text” (p. 51).

If you want to get more out of Bible study, it helps to know what you’re looking for. Use the following list of questions to help guide you in your search of Scripture. You probably won’t use every question for each passage you study, but at least they provide a good starting point. The more completely you can answer these questions, the better you will observe God’s truth, which then provides a strong foundation for interpretation and application.

- Who is the author of the passage?
- Whom is the author addressing? (God’s people? A specific church? Unbelievers?)
- What is the most important term and/or concept of the passage?
- What are the main verbs? What are the tenses of those verbs?
- Are there terms you need to define so you can better understand the passage?
- Are there people or places you need to identify?
- What do you already know about the people and places mentioned?
- Can you identify any cause-effect relationships in the author’s writing?
- In what ways does the passage apply to your own personal life? (If there isn’t an obvious application, is there a more subtle one?)
- What things from this passage might you want to study later in further detail?

NOTE You might want to make a copy of this page to place in each of the Bibles you use.

OBSERVING A VERSE

TODAY'S PASSAGE:

Psalm 93:1

TIME COMMITMENT:

30 minutes

“Remember, in Observation your main concern is, What do I see? Pay special attention to terms and grammatical structure. Also look at the context” (p. 65).

Let's try observing Psalm 93:1. Since we're choosing a psalm, the context of what comes before and afterward may not be as important as in a narrative passage. However, the more you read the psalms, the better you can detect similarities and contrasts.

But for now let's turn our attention to this single verse:

“The Lord reigns, He is clothed with majesty; the Lord has clothed and girded Himself with strength; indeed, the world is firmly established, it will not be moved.”

Begin by going through the questions on the “Observing a Passage of Scripture” sheet (p. 15). Not all of them will apply, of course. But note the present tense of the verbs. If the psalmist wrote in present tense, does that mean the verse is now past tense?

What would you say is the main theme of this verse?

Forget about religious language for a moment. What then comes to mind when you think about a “lord”?

In addition to the questions already provided, here are a few additional things to observe to get you started:

- What words or phrases are repeated? Why do you suppose they are so emphasized?

- God is described by the terms “majesty” and “strength.” What connection, if any, do these terms have? (Does one necessarily suggest the other?)

- Why did the author suddenly move from describing “the Lord” to writing about “the world”?

- We all know the earth is turning on its axis. So what does it mean that the world “will not be moved”?

- Does this verse evoke any positive feelings for you?

- Might this verse cause less positive emotions for some people (fear, anxiety, etc.)?

What other observations can you make from this single verse?

OBSERVING A VERSE

TODAY'S PASSAGE:

1 John 3:12

TIME COMMITMENT:

30 minutes

“Whenever you study any verse of Scripture, be sure to place it in its context. See it both in terms of what goes before and what follows” (p. 58).

First John 3:12 should provide ample opportunity for you to practice your observation skills. Here is the verse, with space provided for your notations:

“not as Cain, who was of the evil one, and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother’s were righteous.”

Here are a few suggestions:

- Again, begin by using the questions on the “Observing a Passage of Scripture” sheet (p. 15). This time you should find more significance in the author, the context, and the people mentioned. (Regarding context, any time a verse begins in midsentence, you have a clear mandate to take note of what precedes it.)

- Read the story the writer refers to (Genesis 4:1–16). What new insight does this shed on the verse?

- Determine why this verse is dropped into the center of a chapter focusing on God’s love.

- Try to think of examples in your own life in which you see a contrast between righteous and evil actions and the consequences that result.

- When, in your own life, have you acted as Cain did (to a lesser extent)? When have you suffered as Abel did? How does this verse speak to each of those situations?

What other observations can you make about this verse?

READING THE BIBLE AS FOR THE FIRST TIME

TODAY'S PASSAGE:

(See below)

TIME COMMITMENT:

30 minutes

“It helps to read the Bible in different versions. If you’ve been reading the same translation for years, try something fresh and contemporary for a change” (p. 69).

Today’s assignment might require a trip to the library or a nearby Christian bookstore. Or perhaps you can borrow some Bibles from friends or your church. But be prepared to find several different translations/paraphrases of the Bible to read and compare.

One of the best ways to read the Bible as for the first time is to look up portions of Scripture that are most familiar to you. But if you don’t have a particular passage in mind, try one or more of the following:

- The creation story (Genesis 2:4–25)
- Psalm 23
- A prophecy about the coming Messiah (such as Isaiah 9:6–7)
- The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1–12)
- Paul’s conversion (Acts 9:1–19)

Select one or more passages and read the same account from four different Bible versions. Some readings are likely to be quite similar. But if you contrast the King James Version with *The Living Bible*, for example, be prepared for a significant difference. In each case, try to put aside what you already know and let the text speak to you freshly, as if it were the first time you were reading it.

NOTE any discoveries or insights in the space below.

READING THE BIBLE AS FOR THE FIRST TIME

TODAY'S PASSAGE:

Luke 15:11–32

TIME COMMITMENT:

30 minutes

“It is often said that familiarity breeds contempt. Well, something else it breeds is ignorance. The moment you come to a passage of Scripture and say, ‘Oh, I know this one already,’ you’re in trouble. Instead you need to come to every text as if you’d never seen it before in your life” (p. 69).

Frequently the passages that are most in danger of being overlooked are those that are most familiar. So let’s take a look at one of the best-known portions of the Bible: the parable of the prodigal son. It’s found in Luke 15:11–32.

Read the parable as if you were an eight-year-old hearing the story for the first time. What questions or comments would you have?

Read it again from the following perspectives, each time noting the questions you might be likely to ask:

- A person from a foreign country (and different religious culture) hearing this story for the first time

- A person who is skeptical about the authority of the Bible

- A parent whose child has rebelled and left home

- Someone who has allowed the harsh situations of life to distance him or her from God

As you read through the eyes of these various people, the text might reveal a number of fresh insights you had not yet noticed.
