

# Bible Study Basics

Course Lecturer: Dr. Sid Buzzell

---

**If you have not already done so, it is important that you first review our [Leader's Packet](#) for specifics on how to open, facilitate, and close your group sessions.**

This Leader's Guide walks you step by step through this lesson. Use as much of the suggested material as you find helpful. Some sections have more than one discussion question or idea so you can choose an option that fits your group. Feel free to add other ideas as well. You may also choose to extend this particular lesson to two or more sessions.

The Leader's Guide contains information that isn't covered in the Listening Guide so the group session adds value to those who have completed the Listening Guide.

## Step by Step Through the Study

---

As you prepare for the session, you will find information you need to lead the discussion questions in this Group Leader's Guide.

## Introduce the Lesson

**Introduce the lesson** by reading or paraphrasing the following overview of Lesson 1. “In Lesson 1 we explore three of the many benefits of Bible study and examine our own motives for learning how to be better Bible students.”

*Ask if there are questions about the session or about preparation for the session.*

## Review the Lesson Objectives

**Review the Lesson Objectives** below and briefly comment on any that you feel need elaboration.

*By the end of this study, you should be able to*

1. State your own reasons for studying the Bible.
2. Name three Bible passages that present reasons for studying the Bible, and explain the reason found in each passage.

While we provide comprehensive **lesson** goals, it is important that your group members also reflect on their own **personal** goals. Even if they choose to elaborate on one of the lesson goals that you provide, it helps to have their own reason for studying the lesson. The group will also have time to reflect on these personal goals at the end of the lesson to see how they have or have not been fulfilled or perhaps have changed.

*After you have explained the two levels of lesson goals, ask if anyone would like to share in a sentence their personal goal for the lesson.*

## Introduction

1. Open the session by introducing yourself and asking group members to do the same. Ask each to share a general fact about themselves — family, where they attended high school, their favorite course or activity in high school, if they could live anywhere in the world where would they live and why, etc. Tell the group this is a general “get to know you” introduction, and you will talk about how we relate to life’s spiritual dimensions later in the session.
2. Discuss the course purpose from the syllabus (printed below). You will introduce the session purpose in a few moments.

*The Bible is where God instructs His people about His nature and His will. Jesus said He wants each of us to “have life and have it to the full” (John 10:10 NIV). The Bible is where God describes that life and teaches us how to live it. In the Bible Study Basics course we learn some foundational skills that help us understand and live by God’s holy Word.*

3. Talk through the course goals listed below (we will review the lesson goals later).

Upon completion of this course, you should be able to

- *Discover the many benefits of studying the Bible, as well as your own reasons for wanting to do Bible study.*
- *Be familiar with various Bible study tools and how to use them.*
- *Understand how inductive Bible study works.*
- *Apply macro-observation to a Bible book.*
- *Apply micro-observation to a Bible passage.*
- *Understand and apply interpretation skills to a Bible passage.*
- *Understand how to apply the messages expressed in the Bible to our present-day lives.*

Ask group members to talk about their

- *Current Bible-study practices: Casual reader, regular, weekly, daily, etc.*
- *Bible-study experience: From “never studied the Bible” to “took a course in it.”*
- *What do they think is the difference between reading and studying the Bible?*
  - ◊ *Reading is processing our initial response to what we see on the page.*
  - ◊ *Studying is clarifying the details of the Bible passage so we can accurately interpret and apply what we see in the text. It involves three steps of*
    - » *Observation: What exactly and precisely do I see in the passage?*
    - » *Interpretation: What exactly does this passage mean?*
    - » *Application: How do I obediently respond to this passage’s truth?*

Discuss group members’ personal expectations for the six group sessions.

- *Strictly an academic study of how to read the Bible?*
- *A desire to participate in a skill-building process and committed to serious Bible study?*
  - ◊ *You many want to say that either option is acceptable, or that this is a group that is committed to participate in the process of studying the Bible, or it is open to those who aren’t sure how they want to relate to Bible study but are interested in being part of the group study.*
- *It is helpful to discuss what the group members’ expectations are and are not for this group study.*
- *Unlike many study groups, this one may involve a mutual commitment to practice the skills you discover and may also involve expectations, encouragement, and mutual accountability.*
- *However the group functions, it’s wise to make that decision as the group leader and as a group.*

This Group Study Guide walks you step by step through this lesson. Use as much of the suggested material as you find helpful. Some sections have more than one discussion question or idea so

you can choose an option that fits your group. Feel free to add other ideas as well. You won't have time to conduct every exercise in the guide so select the ones that best fit your group. You may also choose to extend this particular lesson to two or more sessions.

## Discussion

### Introduction

Ask the group if they can name the two primary ways we can read the Bible.

*(Listening Guide question 1)*

- *We can read it devotionally or academically.*
- *Although this is a course on Bible study, emphasize that Bible study doesn't replace our devotional reading.*
- *Bible study makes an essential contribution to devotional reading by teaching us how to better understand what we read.*
- *Note the paragraph in Lesson 1 under "Introduction" that says, "We can approach the Bible academically or devotionally, but we are in danger of misreading it if we detach either approach from the other. Academic study alone can lead to indifferent scholasticism. Devotional reading without attention to what the Bible text means can lead to a distorted misunderstanding of God and His message."*

Discuss the two reasons given in Lesson 1 for why we should read the Bible well.

*(Listening Guide question 2)*

- *It is essential to developing spiritual depth and maturity.*
- *It guards against being misled or misleading others about God's truth.*

Talk about the two things you will learn to do with the Bible in this course.

*(Listening Guide question 3)*

- *To correctly interpret what the Bible is saying.*
- *To correctly apply God's truth to our life.*

Talk about what you will learn in this lesson: "Why it's important to study the Bible."

*(Listening Guide question 4)*

- *Ask the group why it matters so much that we understand the Bible clearly and correctly.*
  - ◇ *It matters to God because He doesn't want to be misrepresented.*
  - ◇ *It matters to us because we don't want to live or teach the Bible improperly.*
  - ◇ *It matters to others because if we speak as people who know the Bible we could mislead them by*

*our false statements.*

Give a brief overview of the course's six sessions:

- *Session 1: Why Bible study is important*
- *Session 2: "Getting Started" introduces us to the tools of Bible study and gives a basic introduction to the process.*
- *Session 3: "Macro-Observation" teaches us how to get the big picture of a Bible book.*
- *Session 4: "Micro-Observation" teaches us how to study a single Bible passage.*
- *Session 5: "Interpreting a Bible Passage" teaches us how to understand what a Bible passage means.*
- *Session 6: "Hermeneutics and Application" teaches us how to apply the ancient messages of the Bible to life in our contemporary world.*

Ask the group why we would say that this course never ends.

*(Listening Guide question 6)*

- *It is a launching pad that equips us to be better Bible readers. It introduces us to skills that we can sharpen and develop over time as we use them.*

Jesus said the greatest commandment is that we love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. To love God that way, we must know Him as He is revealed in his Word.

Discuss how we read God's Word.

*(Listening Guide question 8)*

- *With our mind: We engage our intellect so that we gain a better understanding of God and His truth for our life.*
- *With our heart: The Bible tells us about God's love, compassion, grace, forgiveness, and other attributes. We cannot accurately understand God's message without responding to it emotionally.*
- *With our will: We read many statements that urge us to action, either to do things or to stop doing things. The biblical mandates demand a response.*

Ask the group members if they have identified a reason why they are taking this course.

Then list the reasons given in the lesson:

- *Learn to live by God's teachings*
- *Learn to know God better*
- *Learn more about biblical history*
- *Teach a Bible class*
- *Contribute more to a Bible study group you participate in*
- *Prepare for vocational ministry*
- *More effectively share your faith with skeptics or unbelievers*
- *Explore answers to your doubts about the Bible*
- *◇ Add others the group members listed*

A helpful exercise would be to write these on a flip chart or to make a copy for each person. Ask them to prioritize the reasons for themselves. Then ask for individuals to share their top two or three priorities.

Discuss the reasons the group gave for studying the Bible.

Before looking at the three Bible passages in the lesson, ask the group if any Bible passages come to their mind that would encourage a person to read it.

Emphasize that in the following section of Lesson 1 you will discuss only three of many passages that state the Bible's valuable contribution (some others are Joshua 1; Psalms 1, 19, 119; 2 Peter 1:20–21).

## The Bible is Essential to Knowing and Loving God (Deuteronomy 6:4–7)

Ask the group members to read this passage from their Bible (or you may want to read it aloud).

### Ideas for Discussion

- *Write down two or three facts they found in the passage that would encourage someone to read the Bible.*
- *Summarize the passage's meaning in a sentence of two.*
- *In groups of two, ask one to explain to his or her partner what the passage means.*
- *Discuss their findings and summarize as a whole group.*

To introduce the value of learning how to “study” a passage, ask the following questions:

### Ideas for Discussion

- *Who is speaking these words? (Moses)*
- *To whom is he speaking? (The children of the Israelites who left Egypt. Their parents had died during the forty years of wandering in the desert recorded in the book of Numbers.)*
- *When did Moses give this speech? (Just before Israel entered Canaan, a land inhabited by people who worshiped numerous other gods.)*
- *Why was the speech given? (To remind Israel that they were unique and had a special, loving relationship to their God; and to stress how important it was for Israel to live by God's words and to teach the coming generations to do the same.)*

Read the passage again and ask the group if this information changes how they understand it. If so, in what specific ways?

You may find it helpful to read or paraphrase the content of this paragraph from Lesson 1 to the group and discuss it.

*This passage, Deuteronomy 6:4–7, is one of the Bible's most foundational statements of faith, and it presents three facts about what it means to be God's people. First, we must know who our God is and we must know that He is unique. He alone is God. Second, we are commanded to love the Lord our God*

*with all our soul, heart, and strength. Third, we must keep God’s Word at the center of our intellectual, emotional and volitional activity. We are commanded to diligently teach God’s Word to our children and model it day and night in all our actions. We must consciously remind ourselves to make it part of every aspect of our life.*

Discuss the question: “What three facts does Deuteronomy 6:4–7 tell us about what it means to be God’s people?”

- *We must know who our God is and what e is like.*
- *We are commanded to love Him with our whole being — intellect, emotion, and will.*
- *We are commanded to teach God’s Word to our children and model it for them.*

Ask how the first two commands of Deuteronomy 6 relate to the third.  
(*Listening Guide question 13*)

- *If we don’t love God ourselves and if His Word is not in our heart (the center of our being), we either will not teach it to our children, or we may appear hypocritical if we teach what we don’t live.*
- *If we want our children to know the Bible well, we must know it and live what it teaches.*

## The Bible Is Essential to Serving God (2 Timothy 3:16–17)

Ask the group members to read 2 Timothy 3:16–17.  
(*Listening Guide question 14*)

### Ideas for Discussion

- *List a few facts in the passage that would encourage someone to study the Bible.*
- *Summarize its meaning in one or two sentences.*
- *In the same groups of two that discussed the Deuteronomy passage, have the person who didn’t explain the Deuteronomy passage’s meaning to the other explain this passage.*

Discuss the two amazing claims about the Bible in this passage.

- *God Himself inspired the Bible’s writers.*
- *The Bible is profitable to its reader in five amazing ways.*

Ask the group if they can identify the five ways the Bible is profitable.

Then read each of the five “profitable” things and ask what each means. You have a brief summary below, and each is briefly explained in Lesson 1.  
(*Listening Guide question 15*)

- *The Bible is good ...*
  - ◇ *For teaching: It tells us God’s will for us.*
  - ◇ *For rebuke: It tells us when we have violated God’s will for us.*
  - ◇ *For correction: It tells us how to “fix” what we are doing in violation of God’s will.*
  - ◇ *For training in righteousness: It helps us grow in righteousness.*



◇ *So God's servant is thoroughly equipped: It enables us to make a positive difference.*

Explain how the events are sequenced as pictured in the visual diagram in Lesson 1.

Ask who wrote 2 Timothy and to whom. (The apostle Paul wrote to a pastor named Timothy.)

What was their relationship? (Paul had mentored Timothy for almost twenty years.)

When was it written? (AD 67, just before Paul was martyred for his faith.)

Where were Paul and Timothy? (Paul was in prison waiting for his execution; Timothy was pastoring the church in Ephesus, one of the churches he and Paul had planted years earlier.)

Why was it written? (To encourage and instruct Timothy as a pastor. Read 2 Timothy 4:9–13, where Paul was asking Timothy to come visit him in Rome.)

What purpose does this passage play in Paul's letter to Timothy? (Timothy was a bit timid and Paul was telling him that his source of authority was not in himself but in the power and authority of God's Word. Read 2 Timothy 4:2 — the key to Timothy's ministry was to preach God's inspired and profitable Word.)

Read 2 Timothy 3:16–17 again and ask if the information about the passage changes how they understand it.

## The Bible Is Essential for Growing Up in God (1 Peter 2:2)

Ask the group members to read 1 Peter 2:2 and write down two or three facts they observe and to summarize Peter's point in one or two sentences.

Discuss their findings and summaries.

Discuss the imagery Peter used there.

*(Listening Guide questions 16 & 17)*

### Ideas for Discussion

- *Ask the group how they define their spiritual age. How long has each of them been a Christian?*
- *Now have them define their spiritual maturity as a growing Christian. Does their spiritual maturity age match their spiritual chronological age?*
  - ◇ *Are they a babe, an adolescent, or an adult? Ask them to explain why they identify themselves as they do.*
  - ◇ *Given the amount of time they have followed Christ, do they consider their age and maturity to be appropriately matched?*
  - ◇ *How closely does their spiritual age/maturity mix match their physical age/maturity mix?*



Who wrote these verses? (The apostle Peter) Remind them that Peter had his own growth issues. After being with Jesus for about a year, Jesus said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan” (Mark 8:33); at Jesus’s trials Peter denied Him (Mark 15:66); and Paul confronted Peter for failing to stand by his convictions (Galatians 2:11). But Peter was still a leader among the apostles, and he wrote two New Testament books. The point: Peter understood the need to grow.

To whom was the book written? Read 1 Peter 3:13–17 and discuss why these people needed to be mature. (They were suffering for their faith and needed to be able to “give an answer” [3:15].)

When was the book written? (Around AD 60, after Nero began persecuting Christians. It was written from Rome.)

Read the verses again and ask if the background knowledge adds anything to how they understand the passage.

## A Second Passage on Growing Up in God (Hebrews 5:11–14)

Read Hebrews 5:11–14 and ask the group to list three facts they observed in the passage and to summarize what it says in one or two sentences.

Discuss their findings and summaries.

Discuss their response to this teaching in Hebrews.

(*Listening Guide questions 18, 19, & 20*)

### Ideas for Discussion

- *Do you believe most Christians are maturing and able to receive God’s deeper truths?*
- *How would most Christians you know answer the questions:*
  - ◊ *Are you a regular student of God’s teachings contained in the Bible?*
  - ◊ *Do you feel you are able to read and understand the Bible well enough to be a teacher, or do you still need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s Word?*
  - ◊ *Do you need milk, or can you chew and digest the Bible’s solid food?*
- *Ask group members how they answer these questions.*

Broad surveys of church attenders consistently find that many people who have been Christians and have attended church for years are grossly ignorant of God’s Word. This varies from country to country, but to greater or lesser degree it is pretty much universal. These statements to the Hebrews are fitting for the majority of Christians today.

Who wrote Hebrews? (No one knows; the author was anonymous.)

To whom was the book written? (Jewish Christians who were in danger of reverting to Judaism because of Roman persecution of Christians. In addition, fellow Jews were persecuting Hebrew Christians.)

What was the issue? (These Hebrew Christians had converted from their Jewish religion, which had also come from God. They needed a clear distinction between Christianity and Judaism and Hebrews 1:1–3 gives that to them. This theme is elaborated on throughout the book of Hebrews.)

What was the solution offered by the author of Hebrews? (That they aggressively pursue their relationship with Christ; see Hebrews 2:1–2; 3:1.)

This final paragraph of Lesson 1 states that

*The Bible Study Basics course is designed to help you*

- *know God better*
- *and to love him with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.*

*It will teach you*

- *how to interpret and*
- *apply God’s Word to your life*
- *and to digest the Bible’s “solid food.”*

*The course’s goal is*

- *to help train you in righteousness*
- *so you are equipped for God’s good work.*

*It is designed to help you*

- *drink the pure milk of God’s Word*
- *and chew on God’s solid meat*
- *so you are mature*
- *and are trained to distinguish good from evil.*

We add that

*As a result of consistent Bible study, you should*

- *Be prepared to give an answer to those who ask you about your faith.*
- *Be able to teach others the foundational truths of Scripture.*

As your group reads the various purposes this course is designed to serve, do any stand out as more to their liking than others? Any less appealing than the others?  
(*Listening Guide question 22*)

It’s important for all group members to have the same Bible translation for use in future sessions and for future study. In many languages there are few options, but if your group is studying in English there are a number of options available.

In Lesson 2 when you discuss “Tools of the Trade,” you will see why we suggest the NIV Study Bible by Zondervan (you can look at Lesson 2 to explain why). If the group goes to Amazon they can get a copy there. It’s important to get a good binding because Bible study involves a lot of searching through various Bible books. A cheap binding will not long endure. A newer version

with leather binding costs about \$40 on Amazon. An older version (1995) edited by Ken Barker is available in hard cover for a very low price. If money is a constraint, the older version will work fine.

## An Optional Exercise to Help You Practice

[The purpose of this exercise is to show how important it is to read the Bible by paragraphs and not by verses. An essential practice of Bible study is to understand units of thought and not read the Bible verse by verse.]

Since Bible Study Basics deals with a skill, it's important to practice that skill. You can provide opportunity for your group to practice between sessions and discuss their findings in the following session. Using a chalkboard or flip chart to record their findings is an important part of this process.

If your group agrees to practice their Bible-study skills between sessions, here is a simple exercise to get them started. You can make copies of the exercise as stated below, email it to the members, or just read the exercise and they can write it down. There will be optional exercises for each of the first five sessions in the course.

## Practice Exercise to Prepare for Lesson 2 of Bible Study Basics

1. Read Acts 1:1–11 four or five times.
  - *After you read it for the third time, give titles to the three paragraphs in this passage. The paragraphs are verses 1–5; verses 6–8; verses 9–11.*
2. In your journal or notebook, write down the verse numbers in each paragraph. Read each paragraph two or three times; then ask yourself what that paragraph was about and give it a title.
  - 1–5
  - 6–8
  - 9–11.

You may want to illustrate the exercise by stating how you would summarize the next two paragraphs in Acts 1. Read it aloud and then read the title for the paragraph.

- *Acts 1:12–14 — “The apostles and other believers were waiting for the Holy Spirit in obedience to Jesus’ command.”*
- *Acts 1:15–26 — “Peter led the apostles to replace Judas as the twelfth apostle with Matthias.”*

In Lesson 2 you can review this brief study by asking the group for their titles to the Acts 1:1–11 paragraphs and discussing the process they used to get them.

## Reflection

It is important to promote this reflection time in each session of the course. Ask the members to think back over what they have just experienced and form at least one point they can add to their understanding of God's Word. These insights may or may not match what they expected at the beginning of the lesson. Have them reflect on those affirmations or changes.

Also emphasize that this part of the group session could be an important time for participants to minister to other members of the group. Not everyone "sees" the same emphases and something one person highlights may be an added insight to others in the group.

## Close in Prayer

You may want to ask if anyone is dealing with something they would like prayer for. Depending on the size of your group, it would be meaningful to pray for each person by name.

## Introduce the Lesson

**Introduce the lesson** by reading or paraphrasing the following overview of Lesson 2. “Lesson 2 introduces the tools and skills we use to study the Bible.”

*Ask if there are questions about the session or about preparation for the session.*

## Review the Lesson Objectives

**Review the Lesson Objectives** below and briefly comment on any that you feel need elaboration.

*By the end of this study, you should be able to*

1. Name and briefly describe the essential and helpful tools for Bible study.
2. Describe the three foundational steps of inductive Bible study.

While we provide comprehensive lesson goals, it is important that your group members also reflect on their own personal goals. Even if they choose to elaborate on one of the lesson goals that you provide, it helps to have their own reason for studying the lesson. The group will also have time to reflect on these personal goals at the end of the lesson to see how they have or have not been fulfilled or perhaps have changed.

*After you have explained the two levels of lesson goals, ask if anyone would like to share in a sentence their personal goal for the lesson.*

## Introduction

If you asked the group to practice the optional exercise from Lesson 1, you can review it as an opening discussion for this session.

1. Ask the group members how the exercise worked for them. Easy, difficult, other?
2. Ask if they understood what the exercise was designed to illustrate.

The purpose of the exercise is to discover how important it is to read segments of Scripture and not read it as independent verses. The Bible was composed as paragraphs or poems, like any other literature. Although helpful for finding a specific passage, the chapter/verse division has resulted in some Bible readers and teachers reading each verse as a separate idea instead of reading them as related sentences that can be fully understood only in the context of their larger unit of

thought (paragraph or poem). The original Bible texts didn't contain the chapters and verses our Bibles contain. Chapters were added in the thirteenth century and verses in the sixteenth.

## Optional Practice Exercise to Prepare for Lesson 2 of Bible Study Basics

1. Read Acts 1:1–11 four or five times. After you read it for the third time, give titles to the three paragraphs in this passage. They are verses 1–5; verses 6–8; verses 9–11.
2. In your journal or notebook, write down the verses in each paragraph and leave some space between them. Then write a title for each paragraph. Read each paragraph again and then put it aside. Ask yourself what that paragraph was about and give it a title.

Possible paragraph titles may be stated in a number of ways, including with more specific information or less. But the point is to summarize the major idea of each paragraph's content. Group members' titles will differ, but if they capture the paragraph's meaning, accept it as legitimate. Give lots of latitude here, but correct any that miss the paragraph's meaning.

- 1–5: After His resurrection, Jesus ministered to His apostles for forty days before He was taken up into heaven.
- 6–8: When the apostles asked Jesus about the kingdom's timing, He refused to answer. But He promised the Holy Spirit would come to empower them as His witnesses.
- 9–11: After Jesus ascended into heaven, two men in white clothing promised the apostles that Jesus would return in the same way they had seen Him go into heaven.

## Discussion

### Introduction

In Lesson 2 you will discuss the tools needed for effective Bible study and introduce the three essential skills we need to develop so we can study the Bible well.

*(Listening Guide question 1)*

You can open with a discussion about the relationship between tools and skills.

#### Ideas for Discussion

- *Ask group members what they do on their jobs (if your group includes students, tell them being a student is their job at this time).*
- *When teaching someone to do a job, we first have to break the job down into the skills that make up the job. A dentist can say one of the things she does is to repair decayed teeth. But that "job" involves a number of tasks or skills she must master.*

- ◇ *Diagnosing a tooth's health*
- ◇ *Injecting Novocain*
- ◇ *Drilling out the decayed portion of the tooth*
- ◇ *Filling the cavity*
- ◇ *Billing the patient's insurance company*
- *A pastor may say that his job is to preach biblical sermons. But we have to break that job down into specific skills that make up the job.*
  - ◇ *Identifying needs in the congregation and culture*
  - ◇ *Selecting an appropriate Bible passage to address a specific need*
  - ◇ *Exegeting that Bible passage*
  - ◇ *Creating a sermon based on that passage*
  - ◇ *Presenting that sermon in a compelling manner*
- *We are most efficient and effective in our job when we develop our skills for each task that makes up the job. A dentist who is brilliant at drilling and filling but poor at diagnosis may put a beautiful filling in the wrong tooth.*
- *But skillful execution of the tasks isn't enough. We also need the right tools. If your highly skilled dentist stood in front of your open mouth with a carpenter's hammer and drill you would run for cover. So we need proper tools as well as developed skills in all the tasks that make up our jobs.*

## Tools of the Trade

Many pastors and seminary professors have extensive libraries because of their academic study. But for most of us, a good study Bible will get us started.

Ask what the most essential tool is for Bible study. (An accurate translation of the Bible)  
(*Listening Guide question 2*)

### Ideas for Discussion

- *Ask group members which translation of the Bible they prefer. (Some languages have only one or a very few options. English has multiple options.)*
- *If appropriate, ask why they chose that translation.*
- *State why it's important for all group members to use one primary translation for group sessions. Otherwise discussions about word choices in various translations can distract.*

In Lesson 2 we explained why we chose the NIV Study Bible.

Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, in *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, provide a thorough discussion of various English translations. They recommend the New International Version (2011) first of all. They also believe the Good News Bible (1992), the Holman Christian Standard Bible (2003), and the New American Bible (1970) are especially good.

- *Gordon Fee is a New Testament scholar and Douglas Stuart is an Old Testament scholar. Both teach at highly respected seminaries. Their book *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* is one of the most widely used textbooks on how to study the Bible in print. It has sold over 900,000 copies. They*



*recommend the NIV Study Bible and, unless there is a good reason to use another translation, use that one.*

- *We recommend the Study Bible because, as we discover in Lesson 3 on macro-observation, it is important to identify a Bible book's author, recipients, date of writing, etc. We could purchase commentaries and Old and New Testament introduction books to find this essential material, but a Study Bible summarizes that for us as an introduction to each of the Bible's books. Most people don't have the resources to build a large library and the Study Bible is a helpful option.*
- *If a Study Bible is not available, you can discover most of this information in the Bible book itself. It takes a little more digging. In Lesson 3 we will discuss this process under the heading of Macro-Observation.*
- *The NIV Study Bible from Zondervan has a concordance and maps. But as you develop your Bible-study skills, you may want to add a larger concordance that lists where each word in the Bible is used; a Bible atlas to help you locate cities mentioned in a text, a Bible handbook which gives more background on each Bible book than a Study Bible. Talk with your pastor about recommended study tools.*

It's important to understand that not everyone has access to a variety of translation options. While these are suggested for those who read English, there is no hint that you cannot learn more about the Bible by applying the skills presented in this course to whatever Bible you have available.

If, on the other hand, you do have access to a Study Bible, it does help you study.

Applying well-developed study skills to a good translation of the Bible will yield better results than reading the finest Study Bible without using Bible-study skills. A diligent application of the skills presented in our course to any Bible translation is more helpful than not reading, or not reading well, a Bible with all these features.

Get a journal or a notebook to record what you discover in your studies. Writing as we study keeps us focused. Avoid the "mindless reading" syndrome.

Get a red lead pencil or wax highlighter to underline passages and circle key words.

Experienced Bible students have discovered that they shouldn't mark their Bible the first time they read a passage. Some things they mark on their first reading they discovered later were not as important as they initially thought. You can't "unmark" your Bible, so go slowly with underlining and making notes in your Bible.

Many people find it helps them stay with their commitment to study the Bible regularly if they have a written plan. Many find it helpful to lay out their whole year's Bible-study schedule.

Studying with a group or another person is extremely helpful. It provides additional insights and perspectives. Its best to study alone and then discuss your findings with someone who is studying the same passage.

The most essential help for Bible study is much more than a tool. Ask someone to read 1 Corinthians 2:9–10 and John 14:25–26 and discuss the Holy Spirit’s role in understanding the Bible. Prayer for the Holy Spirit’s guidance is the most important of all the tools.

Take a few minutes to discuss this section on tools and ask if there are further questions.

## Three Foundational Steps of Bible Study Basics

Ask if anyone can name the skills that make up the job of studying the Bible well.

- Observation *asks the question, What do I see?*
- Interpretation *asks, What does it mean?*
- Application *asks, What does it mean I should do?*

For each of the three skills, ask group members to describe what they think it involves and what they think it contributes to effective Bible study.

*(Listening Guide question 4)*

## The Observation Step

Ask if anyone can explain the difference between “seeing” and “observing.”

*(Listening Guide question 7)*

Use the illustration from the Lesson 2 text that describes the difference in “looking” at a bicycle and “observing” or “inspecting” one we plan to purchase.

### Ideas for Discussion

- *Ask someone how looking at a bicycle as it passes by on the street and looking at one you are inspecting before you decide to purchase it are different.*
- *To observe something, we have to engage our mind. For instance all of us have “seen” bicycles. But assume you want to buy a used bicycle. As you look at a prospective bike, you inspect the paint. You notice how much the tires are worn and check the spokes. You have “seen” many bikes, but you have “observed” the bike you consider buying. You inspected it with greater interest and intensity.*

We “see” with our eyes, but we “observe” with our brain. We read with full attention, alert for details.

Ask the group why they do or do not believe that observing a Bible text should be the first step in studying that passage.

*(Listening Guide question 8)*

## The Interpretation Step

The second skill is interpretation. Ask the group if they can define the term “*interpretation*.”

- *Webster’s dictionary defines “interpret” as “to explain or tell the meaning of; present in understandable terms.” Very simply, interpretation is deriving the meaning from a text that the writer (or speaker) intended to communicate to us.*
- *William Klein, Craig Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard Jr. said that communication succeeds when the meaning received corresponds to the meaning sent. And, “normally the goal of the recipient in communication is to understand what the author/speaker intended.” Talking specifically about interpreting the Bible, they wrote, “In biblical interpretation, when we have only the written text to study, our goal is to understand the meaning of that text” (Klein, Blomberg, Hubbard, Introduction to Biblical Interpretation, Dallas: Word, 1993, p. 117).*

Ask group members how they would explain the difference between observing a Bible text and interpreting it.

*(Listening Guide question 9)*

- *When observing, we are gathering the specific details in a biblical text so we know “what’s there.” (We will study “Observation” in Lessons 3 and 4.)*
- *When interpreting, we are asking, “What does what we have observed mean”? (We will study “Interpretation” in Lesson 5.)*

## The Application Step

Ask someone to read James 1:22 and explain what James was concerned about.

### Ideas for Discussion

- *James was concerned that we would observe and interpret and not take the “application” step of Bible study.*
- *Ask if anyone can explain what James meant when he said, “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.”*
  - ◊ *The deception is that we have done all we need to do when we have “heard” the message.*
  - ◊ *Ask if anyone has been guilty of “hearing” or reading a Bible passage in church or a Bible study and making no response to it.*

Ask what their experience has been with application.

*(Listening Guide question 10)*

- *When they hear a sermon or read a Bible passage, do they seldom or usually or always ask, “What should I do with this truth from God’s Word?”*

Discuss the relationship between the three inductive Bible-study skills.

*(Listening Guide question 11)*

- *The bottom line of the Bible is life change. Application is the ultimate goal. But to properly apply a*

*Bible passage we must properly interpret it. And to properly interpret it we have to intelligently observe what it contains.*

## Objectives

### Ideas for Discussion

- *Can you name and briefly describe the essential and the helpful tools for Bible study?*
- *Briefly describe the three foundational steps of inductive Bible study.*
- *Check yourself on the personal objective you set for this lesson. How did you do?*

## Optional Assignment to Prepare for the Next Session

In preparation for Lesson 3, Macro-Observation, identify the following facts about the book of Acts. This information is available in a Study Bible, a commentary, a New Testament survey, or Bible handbook. You can also Google “Acts of the Apostles” and find it there.

Who wrote Acts and what do we know about him?

Who was Acts written to and what do we know about the recipient(s)?

What is the main theme of the book?

What are the major points in the book’s outline?

What is the book’s major genre – poetry, narrative, epistle, prophetic?

When was the book written?

Where was the writer when he wrote?

Where were the recipients?

Why was the book written?

A person could write a paper on many of these questions, but the purpose of this exercise is to gain a general overview of the book.

At the beginning of Lesson 3, we will have a completed example of this exercise to assist you in leading a discussion.

## Application

What is your plan for Bible study? A helpful application is to block out a time in your calendar to begin your Bible-study process. Select a book of the Bible and read it through a few times in preparation to apply the skills you discover in this course.

## Reflection

It is important to promote this reflection time in each session of the course. Ask the members to think back over what they have just experienced and form at least one point they can add to their understanding of God's Word. These insights may or may not match what they expected at the beginning of the lesson. Have them reflect on those affirmations or changes.

Also emphasize that this part of the group session could be an important time for participants to minister to other members of the group. Not everyone "sees" the same emphases and something one person highlights may be an added insight to others in the group.

## Close in Prayer

You may want to ask if anyone is dealing with something they would like prayer for. Depending on the size of your group, it would be meaningful to pray for each person by name.

## Introduce the Lesson

**Introduce the lesson** by reading or paraphrasing the following overview of Lesson 3. “In Lesson 3 we learn how to gain the big picture of a Bible book. Before studying any Bible passage we do a Macro-Observation of the book where the passage we study is located to clarify the passage’s context.”

*Ask if there are questions about the session or about preparation for the session.*

## Review the Lesson Objectives

**Review the Lesson Objectives** below and briefly comment on any that you feel need elaboration.

*By the end of this study, you should be able to*

1. Describe macro-observation and micro-observation and explain the difference between them.
2. Name and explain each of the six observation questions.
3. Explain why it is essential to do macro-observation before we do micro-observation.
4. Do a macro-observation of any Bible book.

While we provide comprehensive **lesson** goals, it is important that your group members also reflect on their own **personal** goals. Even if they choose to elaborate on one of the lesson goals that you provide, it helps to have their own reason for studying the lesson. The group will also have time to reflect on these personal goals at the end of the lesson to see how they have or have not been fulfilled or perhaps have changed.

*After you have explained the two levels of lesson goals, ask if anyone would like to share in a sentence their personal goal for the lesson.*

## Introduction

### Optional Assignment from Lesson 2 to Prepare for This Session on Macro-Observation

*In preparation for Lesson 3, “Macro-Observation,” identify the following facts about the book of Acts.*

*This information is available in a Study Bible, a commentary, a New Testament survey, or a Bible handbook. You can also Google “Acts of the Apostles” and find it there.*

*Review the questions and ask group members what they discovered about each.*

*Who wrote Acts, and what do we know about him?*

- Luke was one of Paul’s companions (Acts 16:11). Luke used the pronoun “we.” In 2 Timothy 4:11, Paul told Timothy that only Luke was with him in prison.
- He was a physician.
- He was a careful researcher (Luke 1:1–4).
- He wrote one of the four Gospels.
- He was a Gentile.

*Who was Acts written to and what do we know about the recipient(s)?*

- It was written to man named Theophilus (as was Luke’s gospel)
- We don’t know much about him, but the title “most excellent” (Luke 1:3) indicates he was a Roman official or someone with a position of some kind.

*What is the main theme of the book?*

- People were amazed that Jesus’ message had spread across the Roman Empire. He was an obscure, uneducated Jewish prophet whom the Romans had crucified. His teachings should have died with Him. Luke explained that Jesus’ teachings were changing people’s lives because although Jesus had ascended into heaven, He had sent His Holy Spirit to continue His work through His followers. Jesus was still at work on earth.

*What are the major points in the book’s outline?*

- Luke organized his material in Acts under three major movements presented in Acts 1:8:
  - ◊ You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem (1–7).
  - ◊ You will be my witnesses in Judea and Samaria (8–12).
  - ◊ You will be my witnesses in all the world (13–28).

*What is the book’s major genre — poetry, narrative, epistle, prophetic?*

- The book of Acts is written in narrative form (telling a story). In the New Testament, only the four Gospels and Acts are narrative. Then there are twenty-one epistles written in the epistolary genre and the book of Revelation written in the apocalyptic genre.

*When was the book written?*

- Around AD 63, although it is difficult to date with certainty.
- Acts opens with Jesus’ ascension around AD 33 and closes with Paul under house arrest in Rome around 63.

*Where was the writer when he wrote?*

- We don’t know.



*Where was Theophilus, the recipient?*

- We don't know.

*Why was the book written?*

- To help his reader(s) understand how “an obscure Jewish prophet’s” teachings could have such an impact on the Roman Empire.
- Note the statement in Acts 1:1, “In my former book, *Theopolus*, I wrote about all that Jesus *began* to do.” This second book, with its claims and its miracles, is clearly intended to communicate that while Luke wrote about what Jesus began to do in his Gospel, this book is about what Jesus is *continuing* to do through His followers.

*Ask the group how this information will help them understand Acts' contents when they read individual passages.*

- We will interpret individual passages more clearly because we understand how they contribute to Luke's purpose of explaining that Jesus was still at work.
- Because we know how Luke structured his material, we can understand each of Acts' three movements more clearly.
- We can place each paragraph of Acts in its context because we have a broad understanding of the whole book.

*A person could write a paper on many of the questions in this exercise, but the purpose of the exercise is to gain a general overview of the book.*

## Discussion

### Introduction

Review from Lesson 2.

#### Ideas for Discussion

- *Ask if anyone can name the three steps in Bible study (observation, interpretation, application).*
- *Ask if anyone can explain what observation is. (Looking at something with the mind fully engaged to identify details.)*
- *Ask what the difference is between “seeing” and “observing.” (We see with our eyes, we observe with our mind. Seeing is physiological; observing is psychological.)*
- *Remind the group about the difference between “seeing” a bicycle and “observing” one before we decide to purchase it.*

Discuss macro-observation and micro-observation.

#### Ideas for Discussion

- *What's the difference? (macro — a more general observation of a larger unit; micro — a more specific observation of a smaller unit).*
- *When do we use each? (macro — getting the background of a whole Bible book; micro — studying a particular passage in the book).*

Ask what the six observation questions are.

#### **Ideas for Discussion**

- *Who, What, Where, When, How, and Why?*
- *Ask in which type of observation we use the six questions (both macro and micro).*

Ask how much of a Bible book we might be studying when we apply the micro-observation step.

- *Any unit of thought. It could be a paragraph or a group of paragraphs that address the same topic, a psalm, a sermon, a proverb, etc.*

We don't refer to micro-observation on a whole Bible book because it would be a confusing process. We have to divide the books into their smaller units of thought so we can complete this kind of thorough investigation of each part.

## **Why Do We Use Macro-Observation?**

Ask why it is a good idea to do a macro-study of a book before we dive into a micro-study of any of its passages.

First, because we must "locate" the book. What are some ways we locate a book?

#### **Ideas for Discussion**

- *Old or New Testament?*
- *In the Old Testament, we ask which historical era was the book written in and when did the events occur? (Abraham lived in 2100 BC and Moses recorded his story when he wrote Genesis in 1400 BC. David lived around 1000 BC. Life was dramatically different for people living in Abraham's time, Moses' time, and David's time. We can't understand their situations clearly unless we first locate them with macro-observation.)*
- *Where did events occur? We must understand where the writer and the readers were. (We best understand Daniel's story when we know that he was an exile in Babylon.)*
- *What genre is the book written in? When we read an epistle we have to first identify that it was composed as a letter and not as a narrative like the Gospels and Acts.*

Second, we have to identify the book's purpose, theme, and outline before we can accurately understand specific passages in the book.

- *Each passage contributes to the writer's overall purpose of writing the book. Only when we understand that Paul was giving the Romans a clear and thorough presentation of the gospel can we make full sense of any specific passage in the book of Romans. Each passage contributes to the overall argument of the book.*
  - ◇ *Romans 12:1–2 is an important passage for a Christian to understand and live by, but we can't*

*fully understand Paul's emphasis there if we don't see how he used it in the total argument he is making in the book of Romans. It is the crucial bridge statement that ties the theological presentation of the gospel in Romans 1–11 with the explanation of how the gospel changes our life, which he explained in Romans 12–16.*

- *Each passage contributes more specifically to the particular section of the book where it is located and is best understood when we read it as part of the specific emphasis the writer is making in that particular section.*
  - ◊ *Romans 6:12, "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, so that you obey its evil desires" is certainly an important statement. But it takes on additional significance when placed in its role as part of Paul's larger explanation of how Jesus changes our view of sin and holiness, which he explains in Romans 6–8.*
- *The point is, we can make more sense of each statement in a Bible book when we understand how the writer is using it in the context of the whole book and more specifically in the argument he is making in a particular portion of the book.*

Ask why it's important to begin our observation process with macro-observation.

*(Listening Guide question 7)*

- *Because we can't fully understand how a writer uses a single statement or idea in a Bible book unless we place it intelligently into the flow of the book's overall idea.*

## How Do We Do the Macro-Observation Step of Bible Study?

Note: This is a good place to walk the group through the optional exercise. If the group completed it, walk them through a discussion of the exercise. If not, you can use it as a teaching guide.

Review the answer we look for as we ask each of the six observation questions in our Macro-Observation.

Emphasize that we use the word book in each macro-observation question.

*(Listening Guide question 8)*

As you announce each question, ask someone in the group to describe what we look for under each.

- *WHO wrote this book? (The author's name and some information about him)*
- *WHO was the book written to? (The book's recipients and some information about them)*
  - ◊ *And what do we know about their relationship? (How would the reader "read" what the author wrote – as a stranger, authority, mentor?)*
- *WHAT is the book's major theme or themes? (What is the book about? Why was it written?)*
- *HOW is the book's content organized? (The book's outline reveals how the writer organized his material to develop the book's major theme(s).)*
- *WHERE was the book's writer and the recipient(s)? (What was the reader's cultural background?)*
- *WHEN was the book written? (Old or New Testament? What era of Old Testament history?)*

- *WHY was the book written? What was its intended purpose? (What was the writer trying to “do” with the book — record history, teach doctrine, correct behavior, etc.?)*

Ask why it is important to answer as many of the macro-observation questions from our own study of the book before we begin using various Bible study tools.

*(Listening Guide question 9)*

- *Because it forces us to pay attention to details as we read. We are searching for clues to answer our macro-observation questions about the book.*

Ask when it is appropriate to use whatever tools we have available.

*(Listening Guide question 10)*

- *After we have read the book at least a few times and discovered we cannot find answers to some the macro-observation questions, we use reference tools to answer the remaining questions and check our answers to what we have found in our reading.*

## Applying Macro-Observation to a Bible Book

Discuss the three things we must identify with the “who” question.

*(Listening Guide question 11)*

- *Who wrote? Identify what we can about each writer’s personality and background.*
  - ◊ *One of the explanations for why the four Gospels are different is that each writer viewed Jesus’ life and ministry from his own personal perspective.*
- *Who was it written to?*
  - ◊ *Another explanation is that each Gospel writer addressed a different audience and included material that would be of greatest interest to his readers.*
- *What was their relationship to the people they were writing to?*
  - ◊ *Read Philippians 1:1–5 and Galatians 3:1–3. Paul wrote Philippians as a thank-you letter and wrote Galatians to confront the believers’ distortion of the gospel message. Paul’s relationship with the Philippians was much warmer than with the Galatians.*

Ask how a letter a group member might write to a beloved family member would be different from a letter to a political candidate.

We identify the book’s major theme to help us make more sense of the individual paragraphs the writer included to develop the theme.

Ask the group to think of some differences they would expect to find between an article on repairing a motorbike and an article about a child who wants a motorbike for her birthday.

*(Listening Guide question 13)*

Paul wrote Romans to explain what he meant by the term gospel. It is a heavy theological book. He wrote Philemon to ask a favor of an old friend. When we know “what” each book is about we can gain more from reading it.

Ask if someone can define “genre” in their own words. (Simply, it is a style of writing.)  
(*Listening Guide question 14*)

- *Most books are written in one genre (Genesis–2 Kings, the Gospels, and Acts are narrative; Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon, are poetry; the Prophets contain sermons; New Testament epistles are letters, etc.).*

Ask the group if they read a poem differently than they read instructions for operating a computer. If so, how are they different?  
(*Listening Guide question 15*)

Ask what the “how” question deals with.

- *The book’s outline. Each writer organized his material in a coherent way as he developed the major idea or theme in his book, just as we organize a letter or an email message. How do we begin? How do we approach our idea to best explain it or convince our reader to accept it? How do we end it?*

An optional exercise. A helpful way to outline a book or even a chapter is to

- *Title the paragraphs (like you did in the exercise from Lesson 1).*
- *Group paragraph titles that relate to one another to form an outline.*
- *Use the outline to identify the book’s major theme or themes.*

You can use the illustration from Philemon below to demonstrate to the group how to outline a book.

Paragraphs	Related Paragraphs	Book’s Theme
1–3 Opening greetings	I. Paul greeted and complimented Philemon (1–7).	Philemon’s Theme:  Paul asked Philemon to embrace Onesimus as a Christian brother.
4–7 Personal compliments		
8–11 Introducing Onesimus	II. Paul asked Philemon to embrace Onesimus as a Christian brother (8–21).	
12–16 Explanation about Onesimus		
17–21 Request for Onesimus		
22 Personal favor for Paul	III. Paul closed with a personal request and benediction (22–25).	
23–25 Closing remarks		

Ask how a writer’s environment would influence how and what he writes.  
(*Listening Guide question 17*)

#### **Ideas for Discussion**

- *Read Philippians 4:10–11 and ask if anyone knows where Paul was when he wrote that (in prison). Does that make any difference in how we understand Paul’s point in that passage?*

Ask what some differences would be between a book that was written in Old Testament times and

one that was written in New Testament times.

- *Before Jesus' death and resurrection, Israel lived under Moses' Law (including the time in the Gospels). After Jesus, beginning in Acts 2, Jews and Gentiles lived under God's grace.*

Or ask what the difference is between one written during Moses' time (no Bible book was written until Moses wrote Genesis about seven hundred years after Abraham lived) and one written at the end of the Old Testament about eleven hundred years later.

- *The first five Old Testament books (written by Moses around 1400 BC) were books that looked forward to Israel living in a great kingdom with God as their king. The last books (Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi) were written to a people attempting to recover from Israel's failures and God's judgment on them. Chronologically placing an Old Testament book in Israel's history from Abraham to Malachi is absolutely essential to understanding its content.*

Ask how knowing why a book was written helps us understand its content.

*(Listening Guide question 20)*

- *The paragraphs and sentences that make up a Bible book were not written as disconnected ideas. God inspired each writer to produce a document that was supposed to accomplish a specific purpose. If readers don't know what that purpose is, we can't make the most sense out of what role a specific passage is intended to play in the book. Each sentence and paragraph was carefully written to contribute to the author's purpose.*

Ask someone to state, once again, the reason we do macro-observation before we do micro-observation.

*(Listening Guide question 21)*

- *Because we cannot do accurate micro-observation on any passage in the book until we have done macro-observation to discover the who, what, where, when, how, and why of the whole book.*

Suggestion! Tell your group members that an excellent way to gain familiarity with the books of the Bible and add to understanding of each Bible book is to study one of ODBC's many Bible courses.

For overview surveys that discuss the macro-observation material in survey form study:

- *SF105 Bible Basics*
- *OT128 Old Testament Basics*
- *NT109 New Testament Basics*

For more advanced Bible studies

- *ML507 Biblical Hermeneutics is a more in-depth course on how to study the Bible.*
- *Old Testament Courses OT216–OT227 are in-depth studies of the Old Testament books.*
- *New Testament Courses NT217–NT228 are in-depth studies of New Testament books.*

These courses not only discuss the background material that is so essential to Bible study, they also discuss its content and help with micro-observation.



## Objectives

(Listening Guide question 22)

- Can you describe “macro-observation” and “micro-observation” and explain the difference between them?
- Name and explain each of the six observation questions.
- Explain why it’s essential to do macro-observation before we attempt to do micro-Observation.
- Do a macro-observation of any Bible book.

## Application

Complete the “Practice Builds Skill” exercise.

## Reflection

It is important to promote this reflection time in each session of the course. Ask the members to think back over what they have just experienced and form at least one point they can add to their understanding of God’s Word. These insights may or may not match what they expected at the beginning of the lesson. Have them reflect on those affirmations or changes.

Also emphasize that this part of the group session could be an important time for participants to minister to other members of the group. Not everyone “sees” the same emphases and something one person highlights may be an added insight to others in the group.

## Close in Prayer

You may want to ask if anyone is dealing with something they would like prayer for. Depending on the size of your group, it would be meaningful to pray for each person by name.



## Introduce the Lesson

**Introduce the lesson** by reading or paraphrasing the following overview of Lesson 4. “When studying any Bible passage we must observe its details. In Lesson 4 we learn to apply Micro-Observation to a biblical text so we can clearly interpret and apply its meaning.”

*Ask if there are questions about the session or about preparation for the session.*

## Review the Lesson Objectives

**Review the Lesson Objectives** below and briefly comment on any that you feel need elaboration.

*By the end of this study, you should be able to*

1. Explain each component of a historical, grammatical, literary, and cultural study of a Bible passage.
2. Describe how we apply the six observation questions to a micro-observation of a Bible passage.
3. Conduct a micro-observation of any Bible passage.

While we provide comprehensive **lesson** goals, it is important that your group members also reflect on their own **personal** goals. Even if they choose to elaborate on one of the lesson goals that you provide, it helps to have their own reason for studying the lesson. The group will also have time to reflect on these personal goals at the end of the lesson to see how they have or have not been fulfilled or perhaps have changed.

*After you have explained the two levels of lesson goals, ask if anyone would like to share in a sentence their personal goal for the lesson.*

## Introduction

Group Leader’s Note: You can use the optional assignment from Lesson 3 to guide a discussion on the point, “How Do We Do Micro-Observation?” when you get to that section in this lesson (Lesson 4). The exercise is completed and inserted into this discussion guide at that point.

Review.

Ask if anyone can name the three steps of Bible study and describe what each step involves.

- *Observation: What do I see?*
- *Interpretation: What does it mean?*
- *Application: What does it mean I should do?*

Ask what two types of observation we must do.

- *Macro: Observe the whole Bible book.*
- *Micro: Observe a specific passage in the Bible book.*

Ask what the six observation questions are.

- *Who, What, Where, When, How, Why?*

## Discussion

### Introduction

What is the major difference between macro- and micro-observation?

*(Listening Guide question 1)*

- *With micro-observation we focus on a specific portion of a Bible book and we observe it more closely than with macro-observation. Macro gives us a telescopic view of the whole book and micro gives us a microscopic view of an individual Bible passage.*

### Macro- and Micro-Observation

Use the following table from Lesson 4 to compare and contrast the two observation steps. You can read the bold print and ask group members to explain the difference between how each is answered in micro- and in macro-observation.

*(Listening Guide question 2)*

	<b>Macro-Observation</b>	<b>Micro-Observation</b>
<b>Scope</b>	Whole book	Individual passage
<b>Who</b>	Author and recipient(s)	All characters named in a passage
<b>What</b>	Major idea(s) of the book	Big idea of an individual passage
<b>How</b>	Outline of the book	Structure and/or outline of a specific passage
<b>When</b>	Time the book was written	Timing of events that occur or are mentioned in a passage
<b>Where</b>	Location of author and readers	Describes places mentioned in a passage

## A Historical, Grammatical, Literary, and Cultural Study of a Bible Passage

Talk through the definitions of the four elements of Bible study we complete with our observation, interpretation, and application steps.

Ask the group if anyone can describe what each of the Bible-study elements deals with.

Historical: When did the events in the passage occur?

Grammatical: How are words arranged and what parts of speech are they (nouns, verbs, etc.)?

Literary: What genre is this passage?

Cultural: What were the cultural norms and values of the culture(s) addressed in a passage?

After getting a clear sense of what each element deals with, use the material below to lead a brief discussion of each to expand on why it's important.

## Historical

Each Bible book has a historical setting.

- *First is the obvious historical difference between Old and New Testament.*

But some Old Testament books have individual passages that cover a wide historical period.

- *The Old Testament, from Abraham in circa 2000 BC to Malachi in 400 BC.*
- *Genesis 12–50 covers a span of about 350 years and four major characters.*
- *1 & 2 Kings covers a period of almost 400 years and the reigns of twenty-two kings in Judah.*

- *1 Kings 12 shifts from Israel's united kingdom to its divided kingdom after Solomon died.*

Micro-observation must identify what specific time period an individual passage refers to.

## Cultural

Observe cultural norms.

- *In the Old Testament: Cultural norms and laws that shaped family structure, community relationships, agrarian practices, pace of life, Jewish laws and customs are all crucial components to accurate interpretation of a Bible passage. We cannot understand them if we try to read them as if written in our current cultural setting.*
- *In the New Testament: The Gospels' culture is similar to Old Testament culture but with the added reality that Israel was living under Roman oppression and with a mix of cultures in Palestine. The Pharisees, Sadducees, Sanhedrin, and other groups Jesus dealt with didn't exist in Old Testament days. The disdain Jews felt for Samaritans doesn't appear until the very end of Old Testament days.*
- *Acts moves the church's culture from being primarily Jewish in Acts 1–11 to Gentile in Acts 13–28.*
- *The epistles were written to churches in Jewish, Asian, Greek, and Roman cultures.*

Micro-observation must identify how cultural realities influence the meaning of any Bible passage.

Observe literary forms.

- *The Bible contains historical narrative, poetry, proverbs, parables, letters, sermons, predictive prophecy, and apocalyptic imagery. Many Bible books contain various genres in their contents.*
- *Micro-Observation must identify the genre(s) of whatever passage we study.*
  - ◊ *Consider the gospel accounts where we are reading about a true event in Jesus' life and then Jesus tells a parable, which is an illustration to emphasize a point. The fact that Jesus told the parable means we must read it as truth. But when we begin reading the parable we must recognize that it is merely an illustrative story—a quick but important shift in our thinking.*

We must always observe grammar.

- *When we observe grammatical facts in a passage, we are looking for the tenses of verbs (past, present, future); their mode (indicative, imperative, interrogative). We observe adverbs and adjectives. We ask about antecedents of pronouns (who is "she" or "he" or "you" or "I"?). We must review our language grammar classes from our school days.*
- *Our micro-observation sorts out a biblical text's parts of speech and their uses.*

What makes a term a "key" term?

*(Listening Guide question 7)*

- *A term is "key" because it plays an unusually important role in a passage. Terms like "therefore," "but," "because," "so." Terms that are repeated are key. Numbers are key. The words "so that" introduce reasons for saying or doing things. These terms are often overlooked when we list answers to our six observation questions, but they make an enormous difference in the passage's meaning.*

## How Do We Do Micro-Observation?

Multiple readings of a passage give us a sense of the passage's theme and structure. A good practice is to read it four or five times and then try to state it in our own words.

It is absolutely essential that we ask God's Holy Spirit to guide our thinking as we do Bible study. Both Jesus (John 14:26) and Paul (1 Cor. 2:12) told us that God's Spirit would teach us.

Lesson 4 gave broad descriptions of six biblical genres. Discuss each one with the group and emphasize how important it is that we understand how the writer chose to craft his composition and cooperate with him by reading the passage as he intended us to read it.

Although you have these general descriptions in Lesson 4, we repeat them here for your convenience. There is a passage that illustrates each narrative type. It would be helpful to have a group member read the passage and comment on its genre.

- *Narrative: We apply the five observation questions to each story so we can interpret the point of the story in each narrative portion of a book. Each one is there for a reason.*
  - ◊ *John 13:1–2 is a brief narrative that includes a lot of detail to observe.*
- *Epistle: We read the epistles like we would read a letter. We usually find the author, the recipient, and the purpose stated early in the letter. Focus especially on the opening and closing verses. We often discover a great deal about the recipients by carefully observing the issues and questions the letter discusses.*
  - ◊ *Philippians 1:1–3 and 4:21–23 illustrate this point well.*
- *Prophetic: These books are a combination of narrative stories and proclamations. Most prophetic books include poetic sections as well. The key to reading these prophetic books is to observe when the writer is describing historical facts and when he switches to recording one of the prophet's sermons.*
  - ◊ *Jonah 2:1–2 is a narrative (v. 1). Then verses 2–9 shift to a proclamation — in this case a prayer. Unless we carefully observe this move, we miss an important shift in what the writer is doing with the text. Then in verse 10 the poetic genre shifts back to narrative and the story continues.*
- *Parable: These stories are found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. And it's crucial that we shift gears when we begin reading one. Matthew, for instance, is telling us something true when he says that Jesus told a parable. But what Jesus said inside the parable is a made-up story. We must observe that fact as we read. The narrative portion most often tells us why Jesus told the parable.*
  - ◊ *In Luke 15:1–3, Luke recorded a true story of Jesus' life. In verses 4–32, Luke recorded a parable with three separate stories (the lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost son) that Jesus told in response to the events recorded in verses 1–3. To understand the parable, we must observe the details of why Jesus told the parable. When we observe two points in verse 3, we discover two essential facts.*
    - » *“So' he told them this parable,” tells us that the parable was Jesus' response to his critics' grumbling.*
    - » *“So he told them 'this' parable” tells us that the three stories that follow are one parable. So we look for the common elements in the three stories and discover the point of Jesus' parable: – He came to search for lost sinners and bring them “home” to His Father, just as the shepherd searched for his lost sheep, the widow for her lost coin, the father for his lost son.*
- *Poetry: The key to reading Hebrew poetry is to understand its parallelism. Poetic verses include lines that work together to create the meaning. The lines in some poetic verses repeat the same idea in*

*different words. In other verses, the second line begins with the word “but” and the verse’s message is contained in the contrast between the lines. In a third type of parallelism, the second line completes the thought that is started in the first line. As we read Hebrew poetry, we always ask how the lines in a verse relate to each other.*

- ◇ *Psalm 15:1 contains two lines that ask the same question in two ways. If we fail to read it as poetry, we misunderstand that the poet is using a distilled style of writing to emphasize his concern about who is acceptable to God.*
  - » *Lord, who may abide in your tent?*
  - » *Who may dwell on your holy hill?*
- ◇ *Psalm 15:2 includes three lines as an answer to the question. If it is not read as poetry, we don’t realize that the poet is saying essentially that “only a good person can abide in God’s presence,” but he is saying the same thing in three ways:*
  - » *He who walks in integrity*
  - » *And works righteousness*
  - » *And speaks truth in his heart.*
- *Apocalyptic: Found in Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, and Revelation, this genre presents its message in imagery. God reveals His future plans through dreams of unreal creatures and strange symbolism, events, and numbers. Because of its indirect manner of revelation these passages are often difficult to navigate.*
  - ◇ *Daniel’s description of four beasts in chapter 7 describes four Gentile empires that would rule over the earth. The beasts’ appearances contain characteristics of the empires they represent. Daniel 7:1–4, a lion with eagle’s wings represents the majestic nature of the Babylonian empire. The reader isn’t supposed to believe any such beast exists, but is meant to read the passage as apocalyptic literature and identify what the beast represents.*

Bring the text of Lesson 4 with you to the group session. Points 2 through 11 in Lesson 4 are brief explanations of specific details we look for under each of the “Who, What, Where, When, How and Why” questions.

- *Tell the group that these explanations can provide a helpful checklist of things to look for when they do the micro-observation of a Bible text. They should refer to them for reference and reminders of what to look for until they become familiar with them.*

They are not reproduced here, so bring the lesson material to the session for your reference.

## Optional Assignment to Prepare for the Next Session

You can use a chalkboard or flip chart to record the group’s findings as you discuss the following exercise.

Since you did the macro-observation on Acts in your last session, your group should have some background on the book of Acts. Briefly review the material from your macro study of Acts.

And since you did a paragraph study of Acts 1 in Lesson 2 you have a feel for the chapter. Review those paragraph titles with the group.

If students completed this exercise in preparation for this session, you can lead them in a



discussion of what they found.

If not, you can still lead a discussion but will have to give group members more time to discover the answers.

Ask the group members to read Acts 1:1–9 two times and then ask someone to read it out loud.

If you have a PowerPoint® projector and can project the passage on a screen, you can see the passage and point to what you are talking about. If not, you can also write the words of Acts 1:8 on a chalkboard or a large piece of paper, such as a flip chart.

Then, using the content of verses 1–9 for context, conduct a micro-observation of Acts 1:8.

Who? List all persons named or implied in the verse.

Ask whom the pronoun “you” refers to and note that we have to use the context to identify the antecedent.

- *You* \_ used three times in the verse — Jesus’ apostles. But only eleven of them. Judas is gone.
- *Holy Spirit*
- *My* — from the context we discover that the pronoun refers to Jesus.

What? List any actions named or implied in the verse.

- *Will receive* — future tense, active voice; the apostles will receive
- *Comes* — what the Holy Spirit will do
- *On you*
- *Will be* — Describes a different state of being for the apostle. Doesn’t introduce an action but a condition.

What? List any objects or animals named or implied in the verse.

- *Power* — ability, strength. Apparently more than and/or different than their normal strength or ability. It is something that will be added when the Holy Spirit comes.
- *Witnesses* — designates what the apostles will be when the Holy Spirit comes.
- *This statement as a whole is a command or a commission from Jesus to the apostles.*

Where? List any places named or implied in the verse.

- *From the context we know Jesus and the eleven apostles were on the Mount of Olives outside Jerusalem (read v. 12).*
- *The apostles would be witnesses in four places*
  - ◊ *Jerusalem*
  - ◊ *Judea*
  - ◊ *Samaria*
  - ◊ *The ends of the earth*
  - ◊ *Mention to the group that questions will arise as we do our observations, and we should write them*



down for further thought, prayer, and study.

- » You may be curious about how these place names are used. Did he mean literally only Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, or do they represent other places — why not Galilee?
- » Paul was more of a witness to “the world” in Acts than the eleven apostles. Does that mean this command isn’t limited to the apostles?

When? List any time references named or implied in the verse.

- Although not stated in verse 8, an obvious time reference is, *When did this happen?*
  - ◊ Read Acts 1:3.
  - ◊ “When” means that the apostles would be witnesses when the Holy Spirit came on them.
  - ◊ We know from the context that the Holy Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost. If we look that up in our Study Bible or in the Old Testament, we know that it is the fiftieth day after the Sabbath of Passover week. Jesus was crucified the day before Passover Sabbath (Matt. 26:2) and He was with the apostles for forty days. So we calculate that the Holy Spirit came on the apostles about ten days after the events recorded in Acts 1:8.

How? List any explanations of actions named or implied in the verse.

- There are no explanations of actions in the passage

How? We also ask how the passage is organized.

- Acts 1:8 presents two events:
  - ◊ The Holy Spirit would come on the apostles
  - ◊ The apostles would be Jesus’ witnesses.
- Acts 1:8 presents these two events in sequence. The apostles would not be Jesus’ witnesses until after the Holy Spirit came on them.

Why? State why the author included this passage in the book.

- Luke was telling Theophilus that the events recorded in the book of Acts were not the results of human wisdom or power but that God’s Holy Spirit was empowering His witnesses.
- In Acts 1:8 Luke provided an outline for the book of Acts. Jesus’ followers were His witnesses in Jerusalem in chapters 1–7; in Judea and Samaria in chapters 8–12 and in the world in chapters 13–28.

Key Words: Ask how many observed the first word in Acts 1:8.

- The word “but” sets this statement in contrast with what Jesus said before this verse.
- The immediate context of verse 8 begins in verse 6.
  - ◊ The disciples asked “when” Jesus would restore the kingdom (v. 6).
  - ◊ Jesus said they didn’t need to know the time, implying “when” wasn’t the most important question.
  - ◊ But what was important was what they would give their life to until He did come back to restore His kingdom.
  - ◊ The word “but” sets this verse off as a crucial statement.

After we have made these observations, we can do additional study to identify people, places, or

actions we don't understand clearly. Before we go to interpretation, we must have thoroughly acquainted ourselves with the passage's content. Some of the tools we can consult are

- *Other books in the Bible*
- *A Study Bible*
- *Online or library resources*
- *A concordance*
- *A Bible dictionary*
- *A Bible encyclopedia*
- *Bible handbooks*
- *Old or New Testament introductions*
- *Commentaries*

This process takes time and concentrated study, but it identifies the facts we need to make an accurate interpretation of the text. Note that in the micro-observation step we are not making interpretations of these facts; we are focusing on identifying them through rigorous observation.

## Conclusion

This list of “things to observe” may seem overwhelming at first. But when we apply it to a Bible passage, it goes much faster than these lists may indicate. Many students have reported that they find themselves applying this micro-observation process to most everything they read when they develop this habit of observing what's in a text.

Optional exercise for the next session.

- *When you finish the macro- and micro-observations steps, you will have thoroughly observed your text and constructed a working knowledge of its details. You are now ready to prayerfully move to the interpretation step of Bible study. Completing the observation steps takes by far the most time in our Bible study. But the more time we invest here, the better equipped we are to interpret and apply what God said when He inspired His human authors to record His divine messages to us.*
- *Review what you have observed from your macro- and micro-observations of Acts 1:8 and in a single sentence state what Luke wanted his readers to understand from the content of that verse.*
- *Then state in a brief paragraph what the verse contributes to the purpose and content of the whole book of Acts.*

## Objectives

*(Listening Guide question 11)*

### Ideas for Discussion

- *Explain each component of a historical, grammatical, literary, and cultural study of a Bible passage.*
- *Give a general description of how we apply each of the six observation questions to a Micro-Observation of a Bible passage.*

## Application

You may suggest the group members practice on another passage. It is not a suggested assignment with a completed example, so you can either prepare to lead a discussion on that passage or just suggest it as a passage for additional practice.

An excellent passage for practice is Joshua 1:1–2 and its paragraph (Joshua 1:1–9). Do a macro-observation of Joshua, then focus on chapter 1 as a macro-study of the verse's immediate context and then do a micro-study of verses 1–2.

## Reflection

It is important to promote this reflection time in each session of the course. Ask the members to think back over what they have just experienced and form at least one point they can add to their understanding of God's Word. These insights may or may not match what they expected at the beginning of the lesson. Have them reflect on those affirmations or changes.

Also emphasize that this part of the group session could be an important time for participants to minister to other members of the group. Not everyone "sees" the same emphases and something one person highlights may be an added insight to others in the group.

## Close in Prayer

You may want to ask if anyone is dealing with something they would like prayer for. Depending on the size of your group, it would be meaningful to pray for each person by name.

### Introduce the Lesson

**Introduce the lesson** by reading or paraphrasing the following overview of Lesson 5. “Lesson 5 teaches us how to interpret a biblical author’s intended meaning. To understand literature written in ancient languages, cultures, and historical contexts, we must apply skills of interpretation.”

*Ask if there are questions about the session or about preparation for the session.*

### Review the Lesson Objectives

**Review the Lesson Objectives** below and briefly comment on any that you feel need elaboration.

*By the end of this study, you should be able to*

1. Explain what we must understand about ourselves as Bible interpreters.
2. Explain some things we must understand about the Bible to interpret it accurately.
3. Explain how Bible interpretation works.

While we provide comprehensive **lesson** goals, it is important that your group members also reflect on their own **personal** goals. Even if they choose to elaborate on one of the lesson goals that you provide, it helps to have their own reason for studying the lesson. The group will also have time to reflect on these personal goals at the end of the lesson to see how they have or have not been fulfilled or perhaps have changed.

*After you have explained the two levels of lesson goals, ask if anyone would like to share in a sentence their personal goal for the lesson.*

## Discussion

### Introduction

Read Psalm 119:34 and ask what the psalmist asked God for.

*(Listening Guide question 1)*

- *Understanding: The psalmist realized he needed God’s help to understand God’s law.*

- *Help in keeping God’s law: “Keep” means to guard it, not violate it, not do what it prohibits.*
- *Help to obey God’s law: We “obey” it by doing all it commands for our health and growth. We can sin by commission and by omission.*
  - ◊ *The only way to understand and obey God’s Word is to read and study it.*

## Interpretation’s Three Understandings

Introduce and briefly discuss the three things we must be aware of as Bible interpreters.

Ask if the group can name some things we must carefully “observe” and keep in mind as we study. (You will elaborate on these three, so only introduce and briefly discuss them as a preview to the lesson.)

- *The interpreter: We must be aware of what’s going on with us — fatigue, preoccupied, emotional responses to what we’re reading, etc.*
- *The nature of the Bible: This is God’s Word, and we must be aware of how we are reading and processing its content.*
- *The process we use to understand what it means: Because it is ancient literature, we must apply certain skills to understand many of its passages. We must be aware of “how” we are reading it.*

Lead the group for a moment in a conversation about these three things we must understand as interpreters.

*(Listening Guide question 2)*

### Ideas for Discussion

- *How important do they think each of them is?*
- *Do they think they would struggle more with any of these than with the other two?*
- *Is one of them most or least important?*
- *How could each one help or hinder us as we study the Bible?*

## We Must Understand the Interpreter

We all realize that we are finite beings attempting to understand messages from an infinite God.

We all realize that as we hear and read messages from others, our physical, emotional, and intellectual condition influences how we understand and respond to those messages.

We therefore realize that we can distort messages as easily as we can properly understand them (or perhaps more easily?).

Discuss the following five human realities we must be aware of as we study our Bible.

*(Listening Guide question 4)*

## Faith

Ask someone to read Hebrews 11:6.

### Ideas for Discussion

- *Ask how the verse is relevant to effective Bible study.*
  - ◊ *Much of what we read is really fantastic and unbelievable unless we have a strong conviction that God is real and does miraculous things.*
- *Talk about how deeply your group members trust God and the authority of His Word.*

## Illumination

Read John 14:25–26 and  
(Listening Guide question 6)

- *Ask how convinced group members are that the Holy Spirit can teach us things in the Bible that we can't see without His divine guidance.*
- *Ask how often they ask the Holy Spirit to show them deeper things than they would otherwise see in Scripture.*

## Qualifications

Read 2 Timothy 3:14–17.

### Ideas for Discussion

- *Explain what Paul is urging Timothy to “be.” (A man who is approved by God)*
- *How can Timothy be approved by God? (He is someone who does not need to be ashamed of his work as a minister who uses God's Word.)*
- *How can he be sure that he doesn't need to be ashamed? (He correctly handles God's truth.)*
- *How would group members explain to someone why they are taking a course on how to study the Bible? (So God will approve of how we handle His holy Word.)*

## Humility

Ask what role humility plays in being an effective Bible student.  
(Listening Guide question 8)

- *We must be able and willing, even excited, to put ourselves under God's authority and respond to His teachings.*

## Awareness

The saying “familiarity breeds contempt” is often at work with those of us who have a previous knowledge of the Bible. We hold some ideas very strongly and sometimes it’s tough to let them go when confronted with a new understanding.

Talk about the fact that we all come to the Bible — or anything else we read — with “pre-understandings” or knowledge and attitudes that influence us to see what we think the text is going to say. Four elements contribute to our pre-understanding, and we must be aware of them.

- *Information we have about a text before we study it. Ask where we might gain information about a text (sermons, previous reading, conversations, etc.).*
- *Attitudes about a teaching we find in a text. Ask if there are any attitudes people have about certain biblical teachings (women leaders in the church, speaking in tongues, etc.).*
- *Theological convictions (passages about when Jesus returns; modes of baptism; once saved; always saved, etc.).*
- *Reading habits (some see the Bible as so spiritual they tend to turn off their brain, some look for application before interpretation, some are lazy readers whose minds don’t engage what they read, etc.).*

Ask how willing group members are to work at gaining a text’s true meaning and then letting God’s Word be their teacher even when it disagrees with their own ideas.

*(Listening Guide question 9)*

## We Must Understand the Bible.

Ask if anyone can name the two worlds or settings we must hold in our mind as we study the Bible.

*(Listening Guide question 10)*

- *The specific historical and cultural world the writer was living in and describing in the text*
- *Our own contemporary world or setting*
  - ◊ *A helpful phrase is, “The Bible was not written to us, but it was written for us.”*
    - » *Moses wrote to Israel, Paul to Corinth and Ephesus, but God intended that we would also learn from what was written to them long ago.*
- *Illustrations you can use:*
  - ◊ *We can only understand why Jonah resisted going to Nineveh when we know that Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, a nation Israel feared and that eventually destroyed them.*
  - ◊ *The Jews’ loathing of the Samaritans resulted partially from a history of Samaritans’ abuse of Jews recorded in Ezra and in Nehemiah.*
  - ◊ *Jews despised tax collectors because they were seen as turncoat Jews who worked for the oppressing Romans and abused their power.*
- *Discuss the fact that the interpreter’s first goal is to understand what the original writer wanted his original readers to understand.*



- *Achieving the first goal is sometimes difficult because we have to cross some obstacles between our world and the ancient writer's world.*
- *Discuss the three obstacles described in Lesson 5.*

## Historical/Cultural Obstacles

Ask the group, "From your experience with the Bible, can you name a few ways the biblical culture is different from ours?"

*(Listening Guide question 12)*

- *Family structure. (Depending on your group's culture, discuss similarities and differences.)*
- *Role of women. (Most women had little or no education and the ancient Near Eastern world was extremely male-oriented.)*
- *Religious differences. (Most people believed in and worshiped a god or gods.)*

Illustrate how historical/cultural differences matter. Unless we have a feel for the animosity between Jews and Samaritans, Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman (John 4) and his parable on the good Samaritan (Luke 10) lose their power.

## Literary Obstacles

We studied genres in Lesson 4. Ask if anyone can name and describe any of the genres.

Narrative, Epistle, Prophetic, Poetic, Parable, Apocalyptic

Illustrate a few ways genre influences interpretation.

- *Go back to the introduction and Psalm 119:34. If we don't understand how the three lines of that poetic verse work together, we can misinterpret its meaning. Line 2, "so that I may keep your law," and line 3, "and obey it with all my heart," are almost synonymous. There are subtle differences, but we must read it as poetry to understand that the writer is expressing the same thought twice with subtle differences to emphasize the same point, "Help me understand your Word so I can live by it."*
- *Proverbs are not promises. If we interpret Proverbs 22:6 as a promise, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it," we will think the Bible makes false promises. Proverbs are generalized truisms, not promises.*
- *Parables are not actual stories with real characters, but narrative; and epistles are true.*

Ask if there are any genres the group members find difficult or less appealing to read.

*(Listening Guide question 13)*

## Communication Obstacles

Talk a bit about communication difficulties.

### Ideas for Discussion

- *How skilled are you in normal communication?*
- *Do you ever misunderstand or are you ever misunderstood?*
  - ◊ *Do you ever get the wrong thing at the store, do the wrong assignment, miss appointments?*
  - ◊ *This happens even when we are writing and speaking in the same language in the same culture!*
- *Remind the group: The biblical writers wrote in different languages and are from cultures different than ours. Therefore we must observe and interpret carefully.*

## In Written Communication

Briefly discuss each of the three aspects of communication.

- *The author's intended meaning*
- *The words and grammatical constructions the author uses to express that meaning*
- *The interpretation the reader gives to the words the author used*

(You will talk about how each of these can add to miscommunication in a moment. Just introduce them at this point.)

Stress the fact that our goal when we interpret the Bible is to understand what the author intended us as readers or hearers to understand.

There are three places where communication can be confused.

1. The writer is not certain what he wants to communicate, and so the message is confused in the writer's mind.
2. The writer was certain about his message but wrote in a confusing manner.
  - *A sign in an office break room read: "After Tea Break Staff Should Empty the Teapot and Stand Upside Down on the Draining Board."*
  - *A sign in a safari park warned: "Elephants Please Stay in Your Car."*
  - *A sign in a Laundromat: "Automatic Washing Machines: Please Remove All Your Clothes When the Light Goes Out."*
3. The reader didn't understand the writer's message and misinterpreted it.
  - *A group of immigrants were taking an English course. Among a list of vocabulary words on the board was the word straight. "Do you know that word?" the teacher asked one student. "Sure," he replied. "That word is 'straight.'" "Wonderful" replied the teacher. "What does it mean?" The student confidently replied, "Without ginger ale."*

Ask the group if they think the confusion most often happens in the first, second, or third place. (Although all three occur, the most likely is the third place. We misunderstand or misinterpret what the messenger intended us to understand.)

Ask which is the only place misunderstanding can occur when we read Scripture and why that is the case.

(When we interpret the Bible our belief in divine inspiration rules out option (1). Our omniscient God knew what He wanted to communicate. And (2) is ruled out because God inspired His writers to state it clearly. Because we are human readers, option (3) is always at work and we have to use our best Bible-study skills so we accurately and clearly understand the truth God communicates in Scripture.)

If taken seriously, how would this point influence the way we approach our Bible-study process? (*Listening Guide question 16*)

- *(If something doesn't make sense to us, we must own the problem. God's Word, because He inspired it, is never confused about what it wants to say or how it says it.*

Pause here and review the lesson so everyone is clear about what you have discussed before moving on.

What three things must we understand as interpreters?

- *The nature of the interpreter: What's going on with me as I read?*
- *The nature of Scripture: What am I reading?*
- *The nature of interpretation: How can I accurately understand what I'm reading?*

What must I understand about myself as an interpreter of God's Word?

- *I must have a genuine faith in God and in His Word.*
- *I must depend on God's Holy Spirit to teach me His Word.*
- *I must develop certain skills to understand a book written in a different culture and language.*
- *I must be humble enough to accept God's opinion over my own.*
- *I must be aware of my own pre-understandings.*
  - ◊ *What I am already convinced is true about the text I'm studying.*
  - ◊ *Attitudes I have or feel developing in myself as I read.*
  - ◊ *Some passages may contradict a strong theological conviction I'm convinced is true.*
  - ◊ *I may have developed reading habits I need to change in order to be an effective reader.*

What must I understand about the nature of Scripture?

- *It was written over many centuries, and different books reflect different time periods and cultural issues.*
- *There are obstacles to understanding Scripture we don't face when reading our daily newspapers. We have to deal with*
  - ◊ *Historical/cultural differences*
  - ◊ *Literary differences*
  - ◊ *Communication obstacles*

And that's why the following it is so important:

## We Must Understand How Interpretation Works.

Because the historical/cultural differences between the biblical writers' times and ours can make interpretation difficult, Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart in *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* suggest we break the interpretation process into two related but separate tasks called exegesis and hermeneutics.

Ask if anyone can describe exegesis and hermeneutics.

*(Listening Guide question 17)*

- *When we do exegesis we identify what the original writer wanted to communicate to his original reader.*
- *When we do hermeneutics we ask how that ancient message relates to us in our time and culture.*
  - ◊ *We apply the hermeneutical process only after we apply the exegetical process and interpret the writer's message to his original reader.*
- *We will study hermeneutics and its role in Lesson 6. But in this session we discover how we do exegesis.*

Now ask if someone can explain the difference between exegesis and hermeneutics.

*(Listening Guide question 18)*

- *Exegesis focuses on what the original writer said to his original reader.*
  - ◊ *Paul told Timothy that church elders must be above reproach.*
- *Hermeneutics asks how that original message would be stated today.*
  - ◊ *God requires elders in our churches to be above reproach.*
- *Exegesis is time-bound to the author and reader's immediate situation.*
  - ◊ *It is God's message to the original readers in their specific situation.*
- *Hermeneutics is the timeless message the passage has for God's people.*
  - ◊ *It is God's message for readers of all time.*
- *Remember the mantra: "The Bible books were not written to us, but they were written for us."*

Stress the foundational principle that ties the two steps of exegesis and hermeneutics together:

"A Bible text can never mean what it never meant," or in a positive statement,

"A Bible text will always mean what it always meant."

The difference between the exegetical statement of a text's meaning and the hermeneutical statement of a text's meaning never changes what the text means. The hermeneutical statement restates the exegetical statement in contemporary language.

We can call the exegetical statement "the original statement of the text's interpretation," and

we can call the hermeneutical statement “the current statement of the text’s interpretation.”

- *Exegetical statement: In the sixth commandment, Moses told Israel they should not commit murder.*
- *Hermeneutical statement: The sixth commandment tells us that we should not commit murder.*

This point may take some time to jell in people’s minds. Illustrate it a few times and let the group process it.

Read the following exegetical statements and ask the group to restate them as hermeneutical statements.

Isaiah told Israel that their sins separated them from God.

- *The Bible teaches us that our sins separate us from God.*

Ezekiel promised Israel that God would build a heavenly temple where they could worship him.

- *God has promised to build a heavenly temple where we can worship him.*

Jesus told Nicodemus that he must be born again.

- *Jesus made it clear that the only way to be saved from sin is to be born again.*

Paul told the Corinthians that Jesus’ resurrection is an essential Christian truth.

- *First Corinthians 15 teaches that it is essential that we believe in Jesus’ resurrection.*

In Lesson 6 we will see why it is so important to state a passage’s meaning exegetically before we state it hermeneutically.

## What Do We Do When We Do Interpretation?

Lesson 5 (page 3) stated that “After we have observed the details of the text using the steps of Macro- and Micro-Observation described in Lessons 3 and 4 of our course, we summarize those observations into a statement of interpretation that represents what the text we have observed means.”

Review the three steps of Bible study: observation (What is in the text?), interpretation (What does the text mean?), and application (What does the text mean I should do in response?).

Ask which of the three steps is related to the exegetical statement.

- *The exegetical statement is our statement of the text’s interpretation.*

Ask which of the three steps is related to the hermeneutical statement.

- *The hermeneutical statement restates the exegetical statement in such a way that we can create legitimate applications from the text.*

So after we complete the observation step, the first step in interpretation is to state the passage’s

meaning in its exegetical form.

When we interpret, we ask, “What is the plain, normal meaning of the passage?”

There is a danger that we make this process more difficult than it is. If we have done our observation steps well, this process most often is quite simple.

Read 2 Timothy 4:9–13 and ask the group what its interpretation is.

- *“Paul asked Timothy to visit him in Rome and to bring Mark, his cloak, and his parchments.”*

Read Isaiah 1:2–3 and ask the group its interpretation.

- *“God told Israel that animals show more appreciation for their owner than Israel did for the God who adopted them as His children.”*

Many Bible readers want to immediately go to the application step of Bible study. But trying to apply before we interpret can lead to faulty application.

- *Remember the principle: There may be many applications of a passage but only one interpretation.*

To test your group’s understanding of exegesis and hermeneutics, break them into pairs and ask

- *One to summarize the meaning of exegesis;*
- *The other to summarize the meaning of hermeneutics;*
- *The first one to explain the difference between them;*
- *The second, how they relate to each other.*

If they are unable to do that, review the material until they are confident that they can.  
(*Listening Guide question 20*)

The second step is to test. A helpful way to test the accuracy of our interpretive (exegetical) statement is to place it into five contexts.

- *Immediate context: Does our interpretation make good sense and contribute to the flow of the verses and paragraphs around it?*
  - ◊ *Jesus’ parable of the prodigal son must be understood as Jesus’ answer to those who criticized Him for eating with sinners (Luke 15:1–2).*
- *Literary context: Does our interpretation make sense in light of the message of the book it’s written in?*
  - ◊ *Paul’s statement on the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12 must be read in the context of Paul’s concern about selfishness and disunity in the Corinthian church, which is the major theme of 1 Corinthians.*
- *Historical context: Does our interpretation fit the writer and reader’s historical situation?*
  - ◊ *Jonah’s rebellion against God’s call only makes sense in light of his patriotism and Israel’s fear of the Assyrian invasion.*
- *Cultural context: Does our interpretation fit the culture to which it was addressed?*
  - ◊ *If we read Paul’s cautions about women teachers with no understanding of how rare it was for a woman to be educated in the ancient culture, we can misinterpret how we apply those passages*

today.

- ◇ *Paul's strong rebuke of the Galatians can only be understood in light of their fickle nature.*
- *Scriptural context: Does our interpretation agree with what the rest of Scripture teaches?*
  - ◇ *If your interpretation violates other biblical teachings, it cannot be right.*
  - ◇ *The greatest guide to interpreting Scripture is Scripture itself.*

These contextual tests are essential to keep in mind as we check the accuracy of our interpretation. These contextual points become a normal part of our reading after we have used them for some time, but as we begin the process we may want to keep them close by so we can refer to them as a checklist.

The third step is to consult. If the group members are confused about their interpretation, tell them to:

- *Check to see if their Study Bible makes any comments on the passage;*
- *Check with a commentary;*
- *Check with their pastor;*
- *Pray that God will guide them to a person or group they would enjoy studying with and then write down a few names of people who might be good study partners.*

If your group did the micro-observation study of Acts 1:8 in Lesson 4, they should be prepared to make a statement of its interpretation. Read the passage and ask someone to share their interpretation of Acts 1:8 in exegetical form. It should sound something like:

“Jesus told His apostles that the Holy Spirit would come upon them and they would be His witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria, and in all the world.”

In Lesson 6 you will discuss how we turn our exegetical statement of interpretation into a hermeneutical statement of interpretation so we can generate legitimate applications of the passage to our own time and culture.

Objectives.

*(Listening Guide question 22)*

- *Using the criteria in this lesson, describe yourself as a Bible interpreter.*
- *Describe how the way you understand the Bible may help and/or hinder your ability to interpret it accurately.*
- *Explain how Bible interpretation works.*

## Application



We are our own greatest asset or liability when we study the Bible. What attributes will be your greatest assets as a Bible student, and what are some areas for prayer and adjustment?

## Reflection

It is important to promote this reflection time in each session of the course. Ask the members to think back over what they have just experienced and form at least one point they can add to their understanding of God's Word. These insights may or may not match what they expected at the beginning of the lesson. Have them reflect on those affirmations or changes.

Also emphasize that this part of the group session could be an important time for participants to minister to other members of the group. Not everyone "sees" the same emphases and something one person highlights may be an added insight to others in the group.

## Close in Prayer

You may want to ask if anyone is dealing with something they would like prayer for. Depending on the size of your group, it would be meaningful to pray for each person by name.

### Introduce the Lesson

**Introduce the lesson** by reading or paraphrasing the following overview of Lesson 6. “In Lesson 6 we study how to apply messages written to people in a different cultural and historical setting to people living in our contemporary world without distorting their intended meaning and purpose.”

*Ask if there are questions about the session or about preparation for the session.*

### Review the Lesson Objectives

**Review the Lesson Objectives** below and briefly comment on any that you feel need elaboration.

*By the end of this study, you should be able to*

1. Name three kinds of passages we interpret and apply.
2. State the differences between the three kinds of passages.
3. Describe how we cross the bridge from exegesis to hermeneutics.
4. Explain how we do application.

While we provide comprehensive **lesson** goals, it is important that your group members also reflect on their own **personal** goals. Even if they choose to elaborate on one of the lesson goals that you provide, it helps to have their own reason for studying the lesson. The group will also have time to reflect on these personal goals at the end of the lesson to see how they have or have not been fulfilled or perhaps have changed.

*After you have explained the two levels of lesson goals, ask if anyone would like to share in a sentence their personal goal for the lesson.*

### Introduction

*To introduce the theme of interpretation, read James 1:22 and 2:14–20 and discuss James’ point that the Bible was written to teach us how we should act. Everything else we do in Bible study leads to our response to what we learn.*

*Review the Bible-study process. You may ask the group what the steps are and guide them in a brief discussion of this review.*

- *We select a passage that is a complete unit of thought. We don't limit ourselves to verses.*
- *We locate the passage in the Bible by applying the six observation questions to the book of the Bible where the passage is located using macro-observation.*
- *We identify the text's details by applying the six observation questions to the text using micro-observation.*
- *We make our exegetical statement of interpretation to clearly understand what the writer said to the original reader(s).*

*Now we are ready to make legitimate applications of the text to our own lives so we can “be doers of the Word and not merely hearers who delude themselves” (James 1:22).*

## Discussion

### Three Kinds of Passages We Interpret and Apply

Moving from exegesis to hermeneutics is a crucial but potentially tricky step.

Note: This portion of the lesson is crucial to understand and is a place where many people misrepresent the Bible and distort God's truth. There is some repetition here, but stay with this point until you feel confident your group members understand the difference between exegesis and hermeneutics.

When we move from exegesis to hermeneutics, we discover there are three kinds of passages:

- *Some automatically transfer from the ancient text to our life today.*
  - ◇ *Do not murder; You must be born again; Preach the Word, etc.*
- *Some need additional work because they are culturally specific.*
  - ◇ *God commanded Joshua to invade Canaan; God commanded Israel to leave portions of their harvest for poor people to gather; Naomi told Ruth to lay down by Boaz's feet and sleep there.*
- *Some are not as clear as we would like and lead to different understanding and application.*
  - ◇ *Role of women; modes of baptism; church government, etc.*
  - ◇ *In many of these passages, scholars agree on their exegesis but differ on their hermeneutical application.*

Remind the group that “Even though no Bible passage was written to us, all Bible passages were written for us,” and all Bible passages were written to a specific audience in a specific time and culture to address a specific issue in their life. Some of those issues no longer exist, and we have to ask if that passage is relevant to today and, if so, how.

The important two-step process of exegesis and hermeneutics helps us clearly separate two vital functions. When we do exegesis we state what the author meant when he wrote it to his original audience. Hermeneutics, while preserving that interpretation of the text, asks how we apply that teaching to our own setting. We ask that question because God's timeless truth, though not written directly to us, was written for us as well as to the original audience.

Our task as modern readers is to clearly understand what the original writer intended his original reader to understand and only then to ask how God intended that message to influence readers in all places at all times.

## Universal Truths

Ask if anyone can explain what makes a text "universal."

- *Some texts have the same application today that they had when they were written. What the author of a Bible book wrote to his original audience applies in any time and place.*

Ask if anyone can illustrate any of these kinds of truths.

- *"Be holy as I am holy, says the Lord."*
- *"You will have no other gods before Me," and the other nine of the Ten Commandments.*
- *"Go into all the world and make disciples."*
- *When a lawyer asked Jesus what the greatest commandment was, we state Jesus' answer exegetically as,*
  - ◇ *Jesus told the lawyer that the greatest commandment was that he should love the Lord his God with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength.*
  - ◇ *Ask if someone can state the hermeneutical idea. (Jesus tells us that the greatest commandment is that we should love the Lord our God with all our heart.)*

These are the most common kinds of passages and are the easiest to restate as hermeneutical statements for application.

## Culturally Specific Passages

Ask if someone can explain what makes a passage culturally specific.

Because of the cultural differences, either (1) the passage doesn't work in another historical/cultural context.

- *Israel was told to build parapets or railings around the flat roof of their house because the roof was part of their living quarters and people would fall off the roof.*
  - ◇ *Our exegetical interpretation would be, Moses commanded Israel to build parapets around the roofs of their houses to avoid accidents.*
  - ◇ *Any hermeneutical interpretation would make no sense to a modern reader. God tells us to build our homes so people won't be injured when they are in them?*

- *Instructions about caring for widows in 1 Timothy 5:9 would not work today.*
  - ◊ *Paul told Timothy to not include a widow on the church rolls unless she was older than sixty years of age and had been faithful to her husband.*
  - ◊ *How would we state that hermeneutically so it makes any sense today?*
- *Stoning people for adultery or murder is illegal in most modern cultures.*
  - ◊ *God commanded Israel to stone any Israelite who committed adultery or murder.*
  - ◊ *We are not able to write a current statement that works.*
- *Certain dietary laws are no longer needed because of refrigeration and sanitation differences.*
  - ◊ *God commanded Israel not to eat certain foods because they were unclean.*
  - ◊ *Mark 7:19 teaches us that Jesus “declared all foods clean.”*
  - ◊ *This illustration shows that even within the Bible there are historical and cultural differences that we must be aware of.*

Or (2) the passage cannot be directly transferred to another time and culture like a universal truth can, but we are able to generate principles of application based on the passage.

- *God will never tell us to invade Canaan as He commanded Joshua, but we can derive an important principle from Joshua 1:1–9:*
  - ◊ *Our exegetical interpretation of Joshua 1:1–9 is, “God commanded Joshua to lead Israel into Canaan and promised him success if he followed His teaching.”*
  - ◊ *Our hermeneutical principle of interpretation could be, “God will bless our efforts to serve Him if we faithfully follow His Word.”*
- *God told Israel not to boil a kid in its mother’s milk.*
  - ◊ *The principle we derive is that we should not adopt pagan worship practices into our worship of God.*
- *God had an elaborate system of sacrifices so Israel could atone for their sins.*
  - ◊ *We don’t offer sacrifices, but we still repent, confess, and ask forgiveness.*
- *Paul told the Corinthians to avoid eating meat sacrificed to idols if it would offend another Christian.*
  - ◊ *We don’t buy meat offered to idols, but there are other questionable practices that we must avoid if they offend another believer.*

## How Do We cross the Bridge from Exegesis (the Original Statement of Interpretation) to Hermeneutics (the Current Statement of Interpretation)?

Five steps take us across that bridge with any passage we are studying.

1. State the application(s) the original writer intended his original reader(s) to follow. (This is the important first interpretive step called exegesis.)
2. Determine if the applications are transferable from the original reader to today’s reader.
  - ◊ *The universal truths are transferable to any culture.*
  - ◊ *We can form others into applicational principles.*
  - ◊ *Some are not transferable. (2 Timothy 4, Paul asked Timothy to visit him in Rome.)*

3. If they are not universal truths that are immediately transferable, attempt to identify broader principles from the passage that make sense in our time and culture. (With some thought, we can form principles from most Bible passages as we did with Joshua 1, the laws of gleaning, and confession of our sins).
4. Relate those principles to specific situations in your life and live by them.
5. We examine our own life to identify how we can most profitably apply the passage's principle to our situation.

Use these five steps to define as precisely as you can what kind of application the passage presents. This is not as difficult to do as it may sound when reading about it, but it does take some practice.

## “Difficult” Passages

In Lesson 5 we discussed “humility” as one attribute of an effective interpreter. There are some passages that are difficult to apply clearly today. Accomplished Bible scholars have wrestled with them for years, and we must be humble enough to confess that there are great mysteries in the Bible we will probably never all agree on and let them be mysterious. Church denominations have been formed to accommodate for these differences. Most are not matters of orthodoxy that separate between Christian and non-Christian, but are different ways Christians have understood what these passages mean. We must allow room for these differences and not allow them to separate us as fellow members of Christ's body.

## How Do We Do Application?

Ask someone to read 2 Timothy 3:16–17 and, as a group, identify the four ways we can apply Scripture.

- *Teaching: Is this passage teaching me how to understand God and His will and His creation?*
- *Reproof: Does this passage rebuke me because I am disobeying God's way of life?*
- *Correction: Does this passage teach me how to turn bad attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors into godly attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors?*
- *Training: Does this passage provide instruction for a specific role or command?*

## Conclusion

It is a privilege to read and study words from God Himself. The Bible is one of the earth's greatest treasures and should be treated with the respect it deserves. By honoring God's Word, we honor him. If we carelessly interpret and apply it, we are in great danger of misrepresenting and offending Him. Observe the text, interpret the text, and apply the text carefully and with integrity.

## Objectives

(Listening Guide question 11)

### Ideas for Discussion

- *What are the three kinds of passages we interpret and apply?*
- *State the differences between the three kinds of passages.*
- *Describe how we cross the bridge from exegesis to hermeneutics.*
- *Explain how we do application.*

## Application

In Lesson 4 you did a micro-observation of Acts 1:8. Use those observations to interpret and apply that passage to your life.

Acts 1:8 — Exegetical statement of interpretation: “Jesus promised His apostles that the Holy Spirit would come upon them, and then He commanded them to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, and to the whole world.”

- *Jesus’ final commission to His apostles is not totally universally transferable.*
  - ◇ *We don’t “wait” for the Holy Spirit; we believe He “came upon us” when we received Jesus as our Savior and Lord.*
  - ◇ *We are indwelt by the Holy Spirit but must pray regularly for His filling and His fruit.*
  - ◇ *We aren’t commanded to go to Jerusalem or Judea and Samaria.*
- *Ask what parts of Jesus’ final commission are transferable to any Christian. What principles can we derive from it as legitimate applications?*
  - ◇ *We depend on the Holy Spirit to do God’s work through us.*
  - ◇ *To be effective witnesses, we must pray for the Holy Spirit to work through us.*
  - ◇ *We don’t literally go to Jerusalem, but we do go to a regular place where we live and work.*
  - ◇ *We need to move outside our normal sphere of influence and exert initiative to be Christ’s witnesses in our own “Judea” and “Samaria.”*
  - ◇ *The apostles’ “Samaria” represented a culture they would not normally go to. It was outside their comfort zone. Many of us have our own “Samaria” and need to go outside our comfort zone as Christ’s witnesses.*
  - ◇ *Jesus’ specific command was that we would “be” His witnesses. When we take the name “Christian,” we become His representatives. The question isn’t whether or not as Christians we are witnesses to Him, the only option is what kind of witnesses we are.*
  - ◇ *The command involves what we “do,” but is far more concerned with what we “are.”*

Acts 1:8 hermeneutical statement of interpretation: “Jesus promised us that His Holy Spirit has come upon us and empowers us to be effective witnesses to Jesus’ life and mission wherever we are in the world.”



## Reflection

It is important to promote this reflection time in each session of the course. Ask the members to think back over what they have just experienced and form at least one point they can add to their understanding of God's Word. These insights may or may not match what they expected at the beginning of the lesson. Have them reflect on those affirmations or changes.

Also emphasize that this part of the group session could be an important time for participants to minister to other members of the group. Not everyone "sees" the same emphases and something one person highlights may be an added insight to others in the group.

## Close in Prayer

You may want to ask if anyone is dealing with something they would like prayer for. Depending on the size of your group, it would be meaningful to pray for each person by name.