

OBSERVATION



WHAT DOES IT SAY?

Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.

- **PSALM 119:18** -

I INTRODUCTION: PROFESSOR AGASSIZ & THE FISH

This story is taken word for word from Samuel H. Scudder¹

It was more than fifteen years ago that I entered the laboratory of Professor Agassiz, and told him I had enrolled my name in the Scientific School as a student of natural history. He asked me a few questions about my object in coming, my antecedents generally, the mode in which I afterwards proposed to use the knowledge I might acquire, and, finally, whether I wished to study any special branch. To the latter I replied that, while I wished to be well grounded in all departments of zoology, I purposed to devote myself specially to insects.

"When do you wish to begin?" he asked.

"Now," I replied.

This seemed to please him, and with an energetic "Very well!" he reached from a shelf a huge jar of specimens in yellow alcohol. "Take this fish," he said, "and look at it; we call it a haemulon; by and by I will ask what you have seen."

With that he left me, but in a moment returned with explicit instructions as to the care of the object entrusted to me. "No man is fit to be a naturalist," said he, "who does not know how to take care of specimens."

I was to keep the fish before me in a tin tray, and occasionally moisten the surface with alcohol from the jar, always taking care to replace the stopper tightly. Those were not the days of ground-glass stoppers and elegantly shaped exhibition jars; all the old students will recall the huge neckless glass bottles with their leaky, wax-besmeared corks, half eaten by insects, and begrimed with cellar dust. Entomology was a cleaner science than ichthyology, but the example of the Professor, who had unhesitatingly plunged to the bottom of the jar to produce the fish, was infectious; and though this alcohol had a "very ancient and fishlike smell," I really dared not show any aversion within these sacred precincts, and treated the alcohol as though it were pure water. Still I was conscious of a passing feeling of disappointment, for gazing at a fish did not commend itself to an ardent entomologist. My friends at home, too, were annoyed when they discovered that no amount of eau-de-Cologne would drown the perfume which haunted me like a shadow.

In ten minutes I had seen all that could be seen in that fish, and started in search of the Professor--who had, however, left the Museum; and when I returned, after lingering over some of the odd animals stored in the upper apartment, my specimen was dry all over. I dashed the fluid over the fish as if to resuscitate the beast from a fainting fit, and looked with anxiety for a return of the normal sloppy appearance. This little excitement over, nothing was to be done but to return to a steadfast gaze at my mute companion. Half an hour passes--an hour--another hour; the fish began to look loathsome. I turned it over and around; looked it in the face--ghastly; from behind, beneath, above, sideways, at a three-quarters' view--just as ghastly. I was in despair; at an early hour I concluded that lunch was necessary; so, with infinite relief, the fish was carefully replaced in the jar, and for an hour I was free.

On my return, I learned that Professor Agassiz had been at the Museum, but had gone, and would not return for several hours. My fellow-students were too busy to be disturbed by continued conversation. Slowly I drew forth that hideous fish, and with a feeling of desperation again looked at it. I might not use a magnifying-glass; instruments of all kinds were interdicted. My two hands, my two eyes, and the fish: it seemed a most limited field. I pushed my finger down its throat to feel how sharp the teeth were. I began to count the scales in the different rows, until I was

¹ Lane Cooper, "Louis Agassiz As A Teacher: Illustrative Extracts on His Method of Instruction. United States: Comstock Publishing Company, 1917.

convinced that that was nonsense. At last a happy thought struck me--I would draw the fish; and now with surprise I began to discover new features in the creature. Just then the Professor returned.

"That is right," said he; "a pencil is one of the best of eyes. I am glad to notice, too, that you keep your specimen wet, and your bottle corked."

With these encouraging words, he added, "Well, what is it like?"

He listened attentively to my brief rehearsal of the structure of parts whose names were still unknowns to me: the fringed gill-arches and movable operculum; the pores of the head, fleshy lips and lidless eyes; the lateral line, the spinous fins and forked tail; the compressed and arched body. When I finished, he waited as if expecting more, and then, with an air of disappointment, "You have not looked very carefully; why," he continued more earnestly, "you haven't even seen one of the most conspicuous features of the animal, which is a plainly before your eyes as the fish itself; look again, look again!" and he left me to my misery.

I was piqued; I was mortified. Still more of that wretched fish! But now I set myself to my tasks with a will, and discovered on new thing after another, until I saw how just the Professor's criticism had been. The afternoon passed quickly; and when, towards its close, the Professor inquired, "Do you see it yet?"

"No," I replied, "I am certain I do not, but I see how little I was before."

"That is next best," said he, earnestly, "but I won't hear you now; put away your fish and go home; perhaps you will be ready with a better answer in the morning. I will examine you before you look at the fish."

This was disconcerting. Not only must I think of my fish all night, studying, without the object before me, what this unknown but most visible feature might be; but also, without reviewing my discoveries, I must give an exact account of them the next day. I had a bad memory; so I walked home by Charles River in a distracted state, with my two perplexities.

The cordial greeting from the Professor the next morning was reassuring; here was a man who seemed to be quite as anxious as I that I should see for myself what he saw.

"Do you perhaps mean," I asked, "that the fish has symmetrical sides with paired organs?"

His thoroughly pleased "Of course! of course!" repaid the wakeful hours of the previous night. After he had discoursed most happily and enthusiastically--as he always did---upon the importance of this point, I ventured to ask what I should do next.

"Oh, look at your fish!" he said, and left me again to my own devices. In a little more than an hour he returned, and heard my new catalogue.

"That is good, that is good!" he repeated; "but that is not all; go on"; and so for three long days he placed that fish before my eyes, forbidding me to look at anything else, or to use any artificial aid. "Look, look, look," was his repeated injunction.

This was the best entomological lesson I ever had--a lesson whose influence has extended to the details of every subsequent study; a legacy the Professor had left to me, as he has left it to many others, of inestimable value, which we could not buy, with which we cannot part.

II READING WELL BEFORE STUDYING WELL

As we begin to build our reading and studying skills of the Bible, we have to begin with a basic task that grounds all other tasks: *reading*. This sounds like a “duh”, but it is actually not as easy as some claim. For many of us we read without comprehending what we are reading. We skim, we scurry, we want to get to the end, we want to check off our reading lists, all the while we have earbuds in and televisions blaring. This doesn't work.

I tell my students in my history classes all the time, “You cannot read this profound historical document (i.e. *The Federalist Papers* or Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*) like you do a text message or Twitter post.” You *must* go beyond the level of a Neanderthal or goldfish if you ever want to even hope to understand difficult texts. This applies to the Bible.

The precursor to understanding the Bible well is studying the Bible well and the precursor to studying the Bible well is reading the Bible well. So, the first place to start after our hearts and minds are in the right state is to READ THE TEXT. None of this may seem profound but it is.² **And here is the thing:** none of this requires you to have a PhD, it doesn't require you to have extensive knowledge of biblical languages, it doesn't even require that you have a knowledge of Biblical history or literary genres. *This just requires you to open your eyes, slow down, think, and observe without distractions.* It requires you to start being aware of your reading. It requires you to digest and think. It requires you to think about your thinking. To begin observing well you need to read well. To do this consider:

A READ PRAYERFULLY

Every single time we open our Bibles we need to be of the right mindset. Consider once again the important tools we need for the journey: the Right Spirit. Part of having the right spirit requires being prayerful throughout the process. Prayer should not be something added at a later time or detached from our study. It needs to be going on as we are studying. Pray that you may till your heart and mind to receive the implanting Truth and Wisdom of the Word you are going to study. Being prayerful is showing humility.

B READ REPEATEDLY

Read the text, then read it again, and after you have done that, read it again. This cannot be emphasized enough. You need to take the time and the effort to read through the passage in more than one sitting before you go towards interpretation or application. This is a way of framing your mind to understand the larger picture of what you are reading and begin to pick up nuances.

C READ DYNAMICALLY

By this it is meant to say that we should flood ourselves with the Word of God. We need to think dynamically, in a diverse set of ways, to get the Word of God into us. Three subpoints come to mind:

- a. **READ ALOUD:** This I know this sounds insane, but most of the books of the Bible were written in the context of oral cultures and are styled in such a way that they were meant to be read publicly (*Exodus 24:7*,

² I would suggest one consider the significant little book of Mortimer Adler's *How to Read a Book: The Classic Guide to Intelligent Reading* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2014). Here is a free version in pdf form if you are interested: <https://www.mathscinotes.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Adler-Mortimer-How-To-Read-A-Book.pdf>

Joshua 8:34-35, 2 Kings 23:1-2, Luke 4:16-21, Colossians 4:16, 1 Thessalonians 5:27, 1 Timothy 4:13, Revelation 1:3).³ There is something to this method that is powerful!

- b. **READ ANOTHER TRANSLATION:** Reading the same text in a different translation can help you to see things afresh that you otherwise would miss. You can begin to make sense of the nuance of language used in the passage of scripture. It also is useful for insuring that the text does not become mundane.
- c. **LISTEN TO THE READING:** If you are able to, it is very beneficial to have a recording of the scripture you are reading through. Listen to it in your car, when you work out, as you're working on the house, as you are making dinner and so forth. By doing this you are saturating the mind with the passage you are studying and only deepening retention.

D READ CONTEXTUALLY

This is to say, you need to stay away from hen-pecking your way around the Bible. *Stop choosing a verse here or a passage there or a chapter anywhere.* The Bible, as we have said, is NOT a collocation of esoteric golden nuggets of wisdom and self-help tips, it is a collection of 66 individual books, each with its own author, theme, message, and context. If you are wanting to move from *gaining information* to *understanding*, then it requires you grasping the individual books of the Bible – which requires you reading each of those books on their own terms. What this means is doing away with the “lucky-dip” and “golden nugget mining” approaches we take with scripture all too often. Whatever you are reading and studying be sure to ask where this is in relation to other things (ex: within the section, chapter, book, or Bible).

A good way to do this is **APPLY THE 10/10 RULE** in which you read 10 verses before that section and 10 verses after. This will help keep you from isolating that section from the larger structure.

Reading contextually also takes seriously the wholeness of the book you are reading. This may sound like a daunting task, and I realize that sometimes this isn't possible (Psalms is massive), but most of the books of the Bible do not take a tremendous amount of time to read in one sitting.⁴ This is an important step in the process of observation because it helps you begin to see the skeletal structure or the big picture level of the passage/book you are reading.

E READ INQUISITELY

The fundamental question you need to keep in the back of your mind as you do this step is, *“What is the text saying?”* Here you need to read the text with a questioning mind. You need to keep before you the fundamental questions of WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, WHY, & HOW on both the macro and micro levels.

- **WHO** – Who is the text talking about? What is said about the person or people in the text? What does the person say? What group of people are being written to?
- **WHAT** – What is happening in the text? What is the major point being made?
- **WHEN** – What time is this event taking place? What time in the history of the Bible? What time in the life of the prophet or apostle or life of Jesus?
- **WHERE** – What is the setting? Where is this taking place? Where is this written from and to?
- **WHY** – Why is this even included? Why is it here and not somewhere else?
- **HOW** – How does this apply to my life? How does this apply to the larger story of the book? To the larger story of the Bible? To the larger story of redemption?

³ Consider: <https://bibleproject.com/learn/public-reading-scripture/>; Brian Wright, *Communal Reading in the Time of Jesus: A Window into Early Christian Reading Practices* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017). Also read this article: <https://tabletalkmagazine.com/posts/dont-forsake-the-public-reading-of-scripture/>

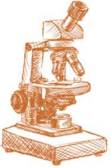
⁴ <https://www.crossway.org/articles/infographic-you-can-read-more-of-the-bible-than-you-think/>

III TWO LEVELS OF OBSERVATION

There are two major levels of observation that needs to be considered.



Macro-Observations: These are observations from a telescopic view. This is considering the larger framework, a survey, the overall meaning and message of a portion of text. The point of these observations is to not lose the forest for the trees. Broad details.



Micro-Observations: These are observations at the microscopic level. This is considering the ground level details of the text. It is concerned with how sentences, paragraphs, and chapters relate to each other. It is concerns with grammar, syntax, word ordering, and so forth. The points of these observations is to not lose the trees for the forest. Specific details.

To understand the Word of God requires that we SEE with eyes wide open both telescopically and microscopically.

A MACRO-OBSERVATION: LOOKING AT THE LARGER STRUCTURE & IDEAS OF A TEXT

When you are beginning the process of observation you want to first look at the broad structure of the text you are reading. Specifically, what is in mind here is looking at the larger structure of the whole text of a book you are reading and studying.

It must be remembered that when we read paragraphs, chapters, or verses in the Bible those paragraphs, chapters, and verses do not exist in a vacuum. They are not detached golden nuggets of ancient wisdom laid out for us like sayings in fortune cookies. They are not random profound self-help sayings collected into an encyclopedia format. The paragraphs, chapters, and verses of the Bible were/are written within specific individual books. In fact, the Bible isn't a single book (in one sense it may be seen as such) but rather a collection of books, 66 to be exact and each one has its own authors, historical settings, themes, and purposes.

It cannot be stressed how important this is to understand!

Respecting the Word of God means respecting how God gave His Word to us. It just so happens that He chose to use various authors to write various books in various styles and flows of thought with various purposes and themes in various languages to communicate His Universal Truth to all Mankind. That is how He chose to give us His will in written form and that is His prerogative. Because of this we have to take seriously not only what we are reading in the Bible (i.e. any particular verse, paragraph, or chapter) but where in the Bible what we are reading is located. This means necessarily reading and studying within the context of each book and respecting it as a complete work while at the same time considering where the book we are reading lies in the grand story of the Bible as a whole.

All of this said, when we come to observation, we must first get a birds-eye view, a cosmic view, of the book we are reading and studying. What this means practically is when we read and study, ***we need to chain ourselves to the text.*** We need to stay within ONE BOOK rather than jump around. Within that one book we need to repeatedly read through it. We need to read, keep reading, and then read more. If possible, as has already been said, we need to read the book as a whole book in one setting. We need to step back and look at the larger overall message and themes that we see surfacing throughout the text.

By doing these steps we are going to begin to pick up some of the broad details, ideas, concepts about the book we are studying. Slowly we will be able to see the story of the book as a whole, if we are reading narrative, or track the overall flow of thought, if we are reading discourses.

As we are doing macro-observation we need to ask some fundamental questions of the text/book as a whole:

- **WHO?** – Who wrote this? Who is the audience? Who are the people mentioned?
- **WHAT?** – What are the main ideas coming out to you in the text? What literary genre is the text?
- **WHEN?** – When was the text written? When does this take place within the story of salvation/Bible?
- **WHERE?** – Where was this written? Where are the events mentioned taking place?
- **WHY?** – Why was this written? Why do you think this is mentioned and/or written this way?
- **HOW?** – How is it written (tone and style)?

B

MICRO-OBSERVATION: LOOKING AT DETAILS IN SENTENCES, PARAGRAPHS, & UNITS

Once you have taken the time to read through the text a couple of times (not necessarily or even often understanding everything) you now want to start combing back over the text in a slower fashion. *You want to read with an intent to observe specific details.* You want to start observing certain things within the sentences, paragraphs, and units of the text. To do this, go slowly, and even **get physical with the text** – this is the part where you need to be highlighting, underlining, starring, circling, and even writing in the margins. Consider the following things:

I. OBSERVING SENTENCES: Things to look for in sentences of text:⁵

- 1) **REPETITION OF WORDS:** Look for words that repeat in a text. Repetition of words helps to indicate to you what major idea, concept, or theme is in focus within the authors writing. (1 Peter 1:15-16) (1 Corinthians 1:3-4)
- 2) **CONTRASTS & COMPARISONS:** Look for ideas, concepts, and/or people that are contrasted with each other. Look at all the “buts.” (Proverbs 15:1) (Ephesians 5:8). Similarly look for ideas, concepts, and/or people that are compared with each other. (Proverbs 25:26) (Ephesians 5:8)
- 3) **LISTS:** Look for lists. Ask how many elements are in the list? Why are they ordered the way they are? Why are they linked together the way they are linked together? (Galatians 5:22-23) (1 John 2:16)
- 4) **CAUSE & EFFECT:** Always consider what is making something else happen or take place. What is the particular reason for certain consequences? Consider the IF/THEN, BUT, BECAUSE OF THIS, THEREFORE, are some examples. (Proverbs 15:1) (John 3:16) (Romans 6:23)
- 5) **FIGURES OF SPEECH & IDIOMS:** Figures of speech “are powerful literary forms because they paint images to which we can relate emotionally.”⁶ An “idiom” is a phrase or expression that presents figurative and non-literal meanings attached to phrases (ex: it’s raining cats and dogs, don’t cry

⁵ An excellent source used in this section is J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God’s Word* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012) pg. 54-61; also consider some basic grammar helps: https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/grammar/verb_tenses/active_verb_tenses.html

⁶ J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God’s Word* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012) pg. 58

over spilled milk, your beating around the bush). (Psalm 119:105) They are colorful pictures of what the author is saying (Isaiah 40:31)

Figures of speech remind us that the Bible affects us at the emotional level not just the intellectual level. What is the image? What are they trying to portray?

- 6) **GRAMMAR:** You have to take seriously in your observation the structure of the words being used.⁷ This means considering the following parts of grammar:
- d. **NOUNS:** Know the people, places, thing, or idea in the passage. Concrete nouns are things you can touch, taste, see, smell, or taste (ex: man, river, home, cat), and abstract nouns are ideas, concepts, emotions (ex: love, happiness, time, surprise).
 - e. **PRONOUNS:** Note what pronouns are being used, “they,” “them,” “we,” “you,” and so forth and also note the antecedent (to whom or to what the pronoun refers). what are the pronouns (Ephesians 1:3). Who is the pronoun referring to?
 - f. **VERBS:** Nouns are the drivers of a sentence but verbs are the engine. Verbs bring action and pep to a sentence (Colossians 3:1) Be aware of:
 - i. **The Type:** Are they linking verbs or action verbs? (ex of linking: am, is, are, was, were) (ex of action: walking, drinking, standing, thinking)
 - ii. **The Tense:** Are they past, present, or future oriented? (ex: I was going, I am going, I will be going)
 - iii. **The Mood:** Are they active, passive, imperative? (ex: John hit the ball; the ball was hit by John; Hit the ball John!)
 - g. **MODIFIERS:** Consider adjectives and adverbs. Take seriously those words that describe or add to nouns and verbs within the text.
 - i. **Adjectives:** Modify nouns (objects) by making you consider which one, what kind, how much, and how many of a noun or pronoun. (ex: The man sat in the chair vs the old man sat in the chair)
 - ii. **Adverbs:** Modify verbs by making you consider where, when, how, and to what extent about verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. (ex: She ran across the street vs she quickly ran across the street).
 - h. **CONJUNCTIONS:** It is vital to be aware when conjunctions are being used. Why? Because they help to give a cohesiveness to the thoughts and flow of meaning within the text. For example, consider these: “so,” “but,” “therefore,” “and,” “since,” “because,” “nevertheless,” “likewise.” These tell you what the implication is of previous text. (Romans 6:23) (Colossians 3:12)
 - i. **PREPOSITIONS:** Prepositions indicate relationships between other words in a sentence. Many prepositions tell you where something is or when something happened. Prepositions often tell us where one noun is in relation to another (ex: The pizza is *on* the counter *beside* you).

⁷An excellent resource to learn about and/or brush up on your grammar can be found here: <https://www.englishgrammar101.com/>



But you will receive power

when the Holy Spirit has come upon you,

and you will be my witnesses

in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria,

and to the end of the earth.”

ACTS 1:8 (ESV)

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God,
to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God,
which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world,
but be transformed by the renewal of your mind,
that by testing you may discern what is the will of God,
what is good and acceptable and perfect.

ROMANS 12:1-2 (ESV)

II. OBSERVING PARAGRAPHS: A paragraph is a complete thought. Paragraphs contain usually a theme or idea or topic. Things to look for in paragraphs of text:⁸

- 1) **EMPHASIS:** Look for the idea, concept, or theme that emerges within the paragraph or paragraphs you are reading. How do you know what is emphasized? A couple of ways to consider:
 - a. A book can emphasize something by devoting a lot of space to the topic.
 - i. The Gospels for example spend close to a third or half of their space devoted to the final week of Jesus' life (John 12-20 = nearly half of the book dealing with a week of Jesus' life. John 13-19 is 1/3 of the entire Gospel and it covers a single day)
 - b. A book can emphasize something by directly stating the purpose for the writing (John 20:30-31)
 - c. A book can emphasize something by repetition of words or phrases (Psalm 136)
 - d. A book can emphasize something by the way things are ordered (Genesis 1-2)
- 2) **GENERAL & SPECIFIC DANCE:** Look for when and how the author flows from a general statement, idea, or thought and then goes into specific detailed demonstrations or concepts of that general point. For example, "Walking by the Spirit" in Galatians is a general broad concept. We need details to make sense of it. Those details are made in chapter 5 "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (v. 22-23).

Also be aware when the author goes from specific to the general. For example, 1 Corinthians 13 on love. Verses 1-12 have specifics "If I speak with the tongues of men or of angels, but have not love... Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud..." Then in verse 13 it says, "And now these three remain: faith, hope, love. But the greatest of these is love."

GENERAL: (Romans 12:1-2) SPECIFIC: (Romans 12:9-12)

- 3) **QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:** Always be aware when there is a dialogue of questions and answers between persons or within the argument of the text (ex: Jesus and the Pharisees and Disciples, or Paul in Romans). This helps to tell you something of the major concerns or issues that are in focus within the book you are looking into. (Mark 2:7-10)
- 4) **DIALOGUE:** Be aware of dialogue sections of text. Ask basic questions within the text of: Who is talking? Who is listening? What is being said? Where is it being said? Who is listening or not listening? Who is present and who isn't present? These are questions to ask with dialogue. (Habakkuk 1:2-4) → (Habakkuk 1:5-11)
- 5) **PURPOSE/RESULT STATEMENTS:** These are words or phrases or sentences that describe reasons, the results, or the consequences of actions or ideas. They are almost always conjunction oriented. They are like hinges in the text that link large bodies of narrative and discourse and ideas with each other. Take note. For example: "that," "now it happened" "in order that," "so that," "because of," "therefore." (John 15:16) (Ephesians 2:10) (Deuteronomy 6:3)
- 6) **CONDITIONAL CLAUSES:** Always look to the "if/then" relations that take place. (1 John 1:6) (2 Corinthians 5:17)
- 7) **THE ACTIONS AND ROLES OF PEOPLE & GOD:** You need to be consciously aware of who is doing what in the portion of text you are reading. What are the actions and roles of people in this passage? What are the actions and roles of God in this passage? Is there a connection between what God does and people do? (Ephesians 5:1-2) (Matthew 5:43-6:34) [14 references to God as Father]
- 8) **TONE:** Try to be aware of the tone of the writing. This can be gotten across through the use of emotional terms, phrases, or idioms. Is it short and to the point or drawn out? Is it poetic or logical? Is it sorrowful or scolding, or accusatory, or weary? (Lamentations 3) Galatians 4:12-14)

⁸ An excellent source used in this section is J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God's Word* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012) pg. 69-79; Howard G. Hendricks and William D. Hendricks, *Living By The Book* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1991), pg. 147-173



¹² Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed,

so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence,

work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,

¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

¹⁴ Do all things without grumbling or disputing,

¹⁵ that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish

in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation,

among whom you shine as lights in the world,

¹⁶ holding fast to the word of life,

so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.

¹⁷ Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith,

I am glad and rejoice with you all.

¹⁸ Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.

PHILIPPIANS 2:12-18 (ESV)

Blessed is the man

who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,

nor stands in the way of sinners,

nor sits in the seat of scoffers;

² but his delight is in the law of the LORD,

and on his law he meditates day and night.

³ He is like a tree

planted by streams of water

that yields its fruit in its season,

and its leaf does not wither.

In all that he does, he prospers.

PSALMS 1:1-3 (ESV)

III. OBSERVING TEXTUAL UNITS WITH EYES WIDE OPEN: Things to look for in large passages or chapters or units of text:⁹

- 1) **CONNECTIONS BETWEEN READING UNITS:** Always be consciously aware of switches in the text between paragraphs/units of reading in thought, vocabulary (like a change in verbs or pronouns), subject matter, character shifts, and so forth. Look at repeated words or themes within paragraphs and see when a switch takes place of repeated words or themes.
(Mark 8:22-26)
- 2) **SHIFTS IN FLOW & THOUGHT:** As you read larger sections of text it is important to be aware of when the story or the discussion takes a new turn. In stories/narratives this may be a change of scenery or change of character or a change in tone or with a *pivotal episode* (ex: promises to curses, things going good to things going bad). In letters and discourses (like the Epistles) this can be noted when the subject or topic has shifted.
 - a. **Discourse Example:** Ephesians 1-3 → explanatory and descriptive verbs. Ephesians 4 → verbs become imperative. Paul switches his verb usage after Chapters 1-3 from *passive verbs* (has blessed, made known, God has made us) to in Chapters 4-6 *imperative verbs* (make every effort, be kind and compassionate, follow God's example). A similar break occurs in the *Book of Romans* where Chapters 1-11 are doctrinal and Chapters 12-16 are application.
 - b. **Story/Narrative Example:** 11 Samuel 1-10 → David's life is good. 11 Samuel 13-21 → David's life is falling part. The question would be what happened? What is the pivot situation?
- 3) **INTERCHANGE:** Be aware when particular events, people, or thoughts within the unit of texts are compared and contrasted with one another. Consider for example the comparisons of between Hannah/Samuel vs the Priest Eli and his sons Hophni & Phineas in 1 Samuel. For the first few chapters these two narratives oscillate back and forth contrasting their lives and spiritual status. In Acts there is an oscillating between Paul and Peter and their miracles and teachings. This also involves noticing when a narrative seems to repeat within the same book. For example in the Book of Genesis there are two creation narratives in Genesis 1 and 2.
(1 Samuel → Eli and his sons, Hannah and her sons) (Acts → starts with Peter → then switches to Paul)
- 4) **TEXTUAL STRUCTURE:**
 - a. **CHIASM:** This word sounds strange to those outside of the scholarly world but it has relevance for basic skills of reading. It is from the Greek word *khiasmos* means "placing crosswise." It is a literary device used a lot in ancient writings in which there is a reverse parallelism of thoughts, items, ideas, or events from an outward to an inward flow from the first and last lines being paralleled to the next lines following. Example:

SIMPLE WORLD EXAMPLE	BIBLICAL EXAMPLE (GENESIS 11:1-9)
(a) I got up this morning	(a) the whole world (11:1)
(b) got dressed	(b) had one language (11:1)
(c) and drove into town	(c) Shinar and settled there (11:2)
(d) I worked hard all day	(d) "Come, let's make bricks" (11:3)
(c) returned home	(e) "Come, let us build" (11:4)
(b) put on my PJ's	(f) "a city, with a tower" (11:4)
(a) and went to bed	(g) But the Lord came down (11:5)

⁹ An excellent source used in this section is J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God's Word* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012) pg. 91-103; Richard Alan Fuhr Jr. and Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Inductive Bible Study* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016), pg. 152-175

- (f) to see the city and the tower (11:5)
- (e) the people were building (11:5)
- (d) "Come, let us go down and confuse their language" (11:7)
- (c) Babel—because there (11:9)
- (b) the Lord confused the language (11:9)
- (a) the whole world (11:9)

Why did ancients and even biblical authors do this? Chiasm is poetic, it gives a rhythm to the reading, it is more digestible, and it helps with memorization for oral cultures. It also helps to structure the reading in such a way that the central thought, idea, value is preserved and made central to the mind.

- b. **INCLUSIO:** Another strange word but something you can notice if you look for it. Inclusio is a literary technique in which a passage (like a story, poem, or discourse) has the same similar word, statement, event, or theme at the beginning and the end. This is a style used in ancient writings to "bracket" or "chunk" text for the listeners and the readers. For example Psalm 8 begins with "Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth" and it ends the same way. Also the Book of Joshua – Chapter 2 (Rahab) then a chunk about Joshua Chapters 3-6, then Chapter 7 is about Achan.
- 5) **BOUNDARY MARKERS:** When you are trying to understand a larger section of text look for the boundary markers. What is being meant by this is look for the beginning and ending of a singular section of thought. See where a unit of thought begins and ends and how it begins and ends. How do you do this?
- a. Look for words or phrases that have a beginning connotation to them. For example:
 - i. Common beginning markers for teaching/epistle units include:
 1. "Dear children" (1 John 2:1 and then 2:12)
 2. "Brethren" (James 1:2; 2:1; 3:1) (Corinthians 14:6, 20, 26, and 39)
 3. "Therefore" (Romans 12:1) (Ephesians 4:1, 17) (Hebrews 12:1 and 12)
 4. "Now concerning" (1 Corinthians 7:1; 8:1; 12:1)
 - ii. Common beginnings markers for narrative/prophetic/story units include changes in time, setting, character, or situation:
 1. "In the spring when kings march out to war..." (2 Samuel 11:1)
 2. "There was a man in Caesarea named Cornelius" (Acts 10:1)
 3. "This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord" (Jeremiah 11:1)
 - b. Look for words or phrases that have an ending connotation to them so you can see where the unit of thought is coming to an end/conclusion. For example:
 - i. Common ending markers for teaching/epistle units include:
 1. Doxologies (Ephesians 3:20-21)
 2. Benedictions (Ephesians 6:23-24)
 - ii. Common ending markers for narrative/prophetic/story units include some of the following:
 1. Summary Statements (Matthew 4:23-25)
 2. Formulaic Conclusions (2 Kings 20:20-21; 21:7-18)
 3. Concluding Commentary (John 3:16-21)
 4. Extended Theological Summation (2 Kings 17:7-23)
 5. Confirmation of Divine Authority "The Lord has spoken" (Amos 5:17) or intent "Then they shall know that I am Yahweh" (Ezekiel 36:38)



¹⁴ Now they had forgotten to bring bread, and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. ¹⁵ And he cautioned them, saying, "Watch out; beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." ¹⁶ And they began discussing with one another the fact that they had no bread. ¹⁷ And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened?"

¹⁸ Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember? ¹⁹ When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?" They said to him, "Twelve." ²⁰ "And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?" And they said to him, "Seven." ²¹ And he said to them, "Do you not yet understand?"

²² And they came to Bethsaida. And some people brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him. ²³ And he took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village, and when he had spit on his eyes and laid

his hands on him, he asked him, "Do you see anything?" ²⁴ And he looked up and said, "I see people, but they look like trees, walking." ²⁵ Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he opened his eyes, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. ²⁶ And he sent him to his home, saying, "Do not even enter the village."

²⁷ And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi.

And on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" ²⁸ And they told him, "John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets."

²⁹ And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him,

"You are the Christ." ³⁰ And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him.

MARK 8:14-30 (ESV)