

Feeding Yourself From the Word of God

Workshop#6: Application (D. Parlett)

Welcome to Workshop #6:

I love going on “Adventure Walks.” For me, this is simply exploring an area I am not familiar with. I love discovering new things, enjoying fresh views, or finding a new route to someplace. Of course, many people have walked these places before me, but there is something special about discovering them for myself. It’s the same with Bible Study. God will often use a gifted teacher to bless your life, but the truths you discover on your own “Adventure Walks” in God’s Word are so much more precious. That’s why I am passionate about helping people feed themselves from the Word of God. As we conclude this study, I trust that you are discovering the joy of hearing personally and powerfully from God as you seek Him in the Scriptures.

Review:

Which observation techniques have worked the best for you? (See Workshop #3: Sections B & C)

There are three critical rules of Interpretation. I’ll give you the titles: 1) Scripture Interprets Scripture; 2) Literary Genre, 3) Context. Can you explain what is meant by these cryptic titles? (See Workshop #4: Section B)

Can you name the six main types of literature found in the Bible? (See Workshop #5: Section B)

In this workshop, we will cover:

Principles for applying the Bible to our lives

Introduction

Every workshop, so far, has been leading up to this workshop on Application. The whole point of this process is to apply scriptural truths to our lives; to grow more in love with Christ and to experience the joys and blessing of knowing Him. If we don’t take this application step, the whole process has been a waste! “Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.” (James 1:22) This is really serious.

When I was in college, I met a fellow student who studied his Bible every morning and would not leave the house until he had applied something from the passage he was reading to his life. “Sometimes, I was late to class!” he explained. What a commitment to Application! In whatever way we do it, we should all imitate that zealous desire to apply the Word of God to our lives.

This was the hardest workshop to write. Observation and Interpretation principles are pretty cut-and-dried and most people agree on them, but Application is so personal and individual. Remember, each verse has only one interpretation (based on the intent of the author) but it has billions of different applications, depending on who is applying it to their life. How can I give general principles to such an individual process?

But then, I took a look at Jesus. He didn’t just leave us with a set of principles to live by. He also gave us the Holy Spirit: our own individual personal guide and power source for living the Christian life. Listen! God is more interested in you applying the truth of the Bible to your life than you are. He will give you the insight you need in every situation and the power to live a victorious and joyful life to His glory. So, then, the key to Application is to understand God’s vital role in this life-changing process. We have a part as well but the key is depending on God to change us from the inside out.

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A. 3 Steps to Application: See It, Want It, (Let God) Do It

When I've really Observed a verse carefully and then Interpreted it correctly, I am ready for personal Application. Remember that the Interpretation is the general principle such as "Love your neighbor." But the Application is what it means for us personally. So, then, what does it mean for me to love my neighbor? As you pray and think over that, trust that God will give you insight as to which 'neighbor' He is leading you to love and how. And trust that He will also give you the power and resources to do it.

As you can see, Application is as individual as the person doing it. However, I do think there is an underlying series of steps that can help guide our individual application of Scriptural truths. And, again, in each step the key is depending on God. Paul reminds us in Romans 7:18, "I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out." Jesus put it this way, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5) So then, in each step we must acknowledge that it is really God that is doing the application as we let Him work in our lives.

I don't know about you but I like things to be simple so I can remember them. So, when I am trying to apply a principle of Scripture to my life I want to take these steps: **See It**, **Want It**, and then, (Let God) **Do It**. Let's take a closer look at those helpful application steps.

See It

The first step is to **See It**. With God's insight, we should seek to "see" or recognize the best application for our situation. Now, there are many types of application and it might be helpful to review some of these to see if it helps us "see" what to apply from a particular verse or passage.

Truth to Believe: One of the most common is finding a truth to believe. My pastor is fond of reminding us that "The truest thing about us is what God says is true." You see, we already believe many lies about ourselves and our world. Satan has been called the Father of Lies and he knows that the key to tripping us up is to get us to believe those lies. It hinders us greatly. However, if instead, we fill our minds with God's truth, we will increasingly be thinking and living out that truth in our lives. The result will be joy and peace and victory. Many of the verses in God's Word contain life giving truths. Is your verse giving you one of those life-giving truths? Jesus reminded us that "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:31-32)

Exercise: 2 Corinthians 5:17 tells us, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come." Do you believe this truth? If so, what difference does that make? How would our lives be different if it's really true that we are new creations?

Promise to Claim: God gives us many promises in His Word. Peter expresses it this way: "... he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires." (2 Peter 1:4) Promises give us joy, assurance, and a confidence that our needs will be met. If you come across a promise that applies to you, claim it for yourself. For example, the very last words of Jesus, as recorded in Matthew, were a promise. He had just given The Great Commission, a very challenging assignment for the first disciples and for all believers. But it ended with this promise, "And surely I am with you always, to the every end of the age." (Matthew 28:20b) As you seek to be a disciple and to make disciples, isn't it wonderful that we can claim this promise that He is with us always? Isn't that encouraging? See if your passage contains equally encouraging promises for you to claim. Sometimes circumstances will cause you to doubt God's promises. The Holy Spirit will be there to assure you.

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Exercise: The following verse has a truth and a promise: “No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.” (1 Corinthians 10:13) What promises do you find in this verse? What temptations in your life could these promises be applied to?

Command to Obey: Some are strong. Some are recommendations, really. But obeying a command of Scripture is a great way to apply the truth of God’s Word to your life. We can have confidence that any command that God asks us to obey is there for our own good. For example, the book of Hebrews ends with a number of commands. Just casually scanning the last chapter, I notice these commands: Keep loving each other as brothers; Do not forget to entertain strangers; Remember those in prison; The marriage bed should be kept pure; Keep your lives free from the love of money. Wow! Those are some great commands to obey! How are you going to personally obey these and other command you find in your study? It’s not always easy but God will give us the strength to do it.

Example to Follow: I like the fact that the Bible is full of stories of real people. I can learn a lot from their example – both things to imitate and things to avoid. Perhaps your passage is this kind of narrative. Is there a way you can grow from their experience? One famous example is that of the Bereans found in Acts chapter 17. These Jews examined the Scriptures (for us this is the Old Testament) to see if everything Paul was teaching them about Christ was true. We should imitate this wonderful example of people who are eager to study the Word and test what is being taught by it. Can you find other examples in your passage that are good lessons for you? Be discerning. Remember, not every example is a positive one. The Holy Spirit will give you insight (“... he will guide you into all truth” John 16:13b).

Exercise: Read Nehemiah, chapter 2. This is the account of how Nehemiah went about getting the ruined walls of Jerusalem rebuilt following the Babylonian captivity. How do you think you could learn from the example of Nehemiah? Is there a great task that God has asked you to be a part of?

Prayer to Pray: The recorded prayers in the Bible are precious. When you come across them, it’s a great to make those prayers your own. That prayer might give you things to pray for yourself or things to pray for others. Or, it might be a wonderful way to express praise, worship, repentance, or thanks to God. It might also give you good things to ask God for. Are there recorded prayers in your passage that could be a rich source of blessing to you?

Exercise: In the appendix to this workshop there is a list of prayers. Pick out a few to pray back to the Lord.

Sin to Confess: Whether directly or indirectly, the Scripture points out many of the ways we blow it. If the Holy Spirit is working in your life, He will often bring up verses that convict you of sin your life. It won’t be easy. But God disciplines us for our own good that we may share in His holiness. Be quick to confess your sin to God. That means agreeing that it is a sin and that we truly want to turn our back on that sin. You might also need to ask forgiveness or make restitution to someone. Again, we must depend on God to overcome sin in our lives not our own will power.

I am sure that there are other kinds of Application to look for but the above list is a great starting point as you seek to apply the principles you have discovered to your life. Remember, the goal in this step is to **See It**. Paul, who wrote much of the New Testament, gave this advice to his protégé, Timothy, about how to respond to the many truths he was sharing with him. “Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.” (2 Timothy 2:7). That’s my advice in this step: Trust God to give you insight as to how He wants you to apply His Word to your life. Often, the first step is just recognizing how a particular verse applies to your situation.

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Want It

In the first workshop we talked about the importance of an Obedient Heart. In other words, we must enter this process of feeding ourselves from the Word of God with the express desire to enthusiastically obey what we learn – letting it change and mold us. But change is difficult. There is a spiritual battle for our hearts. Our enemy wants to keep us from being blessed. So, at times, we will find a resistance to the commands and principles we discover. I hate to admit it but often I discover something in Scripture but out of fear or disbelief I don't want it or I don't believe it. That's why an important step in this process is wanting it. First, we need to *See It*. Then, we should **Want It**. Do you want it?

When I use the term "want it" I am suggesting that we must have a reservoir of determination to fight the spiritual battle, to overcome the forces against us, to accept the discipline of the Lord. Thankfully, God is with us in this also. How did Paul overcome all the obstacles in his life and ministry? "To this end I labor, struggling with all *his* energy, which so powerfully works in me" (Colossians 1:29, italics mine) Note that Paul labored and struggled but it was with God's energy and power. That should be our approach as we seek to do the difficult work of applying Scripture to our lives.

One of the greatest challenges of scripture is to not gossip. Paul says, "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen." (Ephesians 4:29) Here, and in other places, we are challenged to not be critical of others behind their backs. I don't know about you, but that's a tough one! I sense in myself a compulsion to be critical of others and to share my criticisms with others. Often we justify it and explain to others "I think this is information that's important for you to know." If we are to seriously wrestle with these and other difficult commands of scripture, it will take all the fortitude we have and the power of God to work in our lives. We need to **Want It**. Do you want to live out God's truth in your life no matter what?

One of the greatest hindrances to applying God's Word to our lives is unbelief. I think we can all admit that there are areas of our life where we trust God completely but there are also areas where we do not trust Him. For various reasons, there are areas of our lives where we do not believe that God will give us victory. The author of Hebrews gives this challenge to believers, "See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God." (Hebrews 3:12)

One of the reasons we have unbelief is that we have a false picture of God. That's why the application above, a 'Truth to Believe', is so vital. The more we learn about God's true nature, the more we put away our old and misguided views of God. If we are to put away our fear and unbelief, we need to really want to apply God's truth to our lives. We join the honest father in Mark, chapter 9, when he said, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" Again, the key is to depend on God.

Step one: **See It**. Trust God for insight as to how you should apply what you are studying. Step two: **Want It**. Trust God for both the will and the commitment to make those difficult life changes. Let's now camp on this vital theme of trusting God to change us.

(Let God) **Do It**

It's time for action. As we saw earlier, James exhorts us "Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." (James 1:22) The whole point of Bible Study is to know God better and grow as a result. We need to apply what we learn. We can know what we ought to do. We can even be willing. But at a certain point we will have to step out in faith and see God work.

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I'm reminded of when the nation of Israel crossed the Jordan River. The river was at flood stage. The priests were carrying the Ark of the Covenant on great poles. Leading the way, the priests headed for the river. Nothing happened. They got to the very edge. Nothing happened. It was when they actually took a step into the water, then something happened. God piled up the water so millions of His people could cross over on dry land. We need to take steps of faith and trust God to work powerfully. The key is to let God do it through you.

Proud people think they can do it in their own strength and will power. But God is clear on this: He opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. That humility unleashes the power of God in our lives. In 2 Corinthians, chapter 4, Paul explains what it means for the power of God to work in the humble vessels of our lives. "But we have this treasure (Christ) in jars of clay (our weak selves) to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us." (2 Corinthians 4:7) I know that I cannot produce the Christian life in my own strength. When I am applying the Word of God to my life, I must let God do it. Paul says, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength." (Philippians 4:13)

In summary, as God is speaking to us, through the verses we are studying, we first need to **See It**. That is, we need to trust God for insight as to how we need to personally apply this verse to our lives. Second, we need to **Want It**. That is, we need to have a wholehearted commitment to doing what it says (whether we like it or not). The reality of the spiritual battle means that there will be opposition. We need to trust God to give us hearts that are fully His. Finally, we need to *(Let God)* **Do It**. The secret of the Christian life as well as the secret of applying Scripture to our lives is to depend on the Holy Spirit to produce it in us. This doesn't mean we are passive. No. We need to take steps of faith trusting that God will work powerfully in and through us. These key steps can be very helpful as we do the difficult but vital work of applying God's Word to our lives.

B. Final thoughts on Application:

Accountability:

The author of Hebrews encourages us "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching." (Hebrews 10:25) We need each other. The Christian life was not meant to be lived alone. Fellowship and accountability are vital, especially for Biblical application. Besides, it's more fun that way, isn't it? Seriously seek to gather together with other like-minded believers for fellowship, Bible Study, and mutual accountability in applying the principles of Scripture.

Application beyond yourself:

I want to emphasize that, at times, the practicality of what we are learning may not be immediately apparent. In other words, God may teach you something that has no immediate value, but is there waiting for the right moment to be revealed. In other words, you may learn something "now" that is meant for "later."

John Sherrill, in his interesting book "My Friend, The Bible," (which I recommend) shares how certain verses would stand out to him but he didn't know why. However, the truths of those exact verses were perfect for someone else he met with later.

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So, sometimes the application of a particular verse may not be immediately applicable to our life today but it may be there to be a blessing to someone else, or, be a blessing to us at a later date. Sometimes I study a section and I think, “Hmmmmm. I’m not sure what I got out of that?” Even so, be confident that God says, “. . . my word that goes out from my mouth; it will not return to me empty.” (Isaiah 55:11). In other words, it can have an impact but we will not always know when and how. Even if we do not see an application right away, we can be assured that, “. . . the word of God is living and active.” (Hebrews 4:12a) Sometimes the things you learn from a verse, a passage, or an entire book will serve to bless others beyond yourself.

C. Conclusion:

There is nothing like the Bible. It is the most influential and unique book in history. This is because individuals over the ages have believed and lived out the truths of the Bible. They have come to personally know and experience the God of the Universe. It has transformed them individually. It has transformed whole societies. It can transform you.

Bible study is not some esoteric activity that a few really dedicated eggheads enjoy. I am convinced that it is something almost anybody can learn if they are willing to work hard. As I look back over these workshops, I don’t see a bunch of complex and difficult principles. I see some simple but powerful techniques that can have a profound impact on our lives. When the message of God is combined with the power of God, awesome things happen.

As I have mentioned several time in this course, Bible study is not just about gaining knowledge or a bunch of facts. It’s about knowing God. In fact, the ultimate result of each additional verse, passage, or book of the Bible we study is this: Loving God. There are many things on earth that we love and then loose, but we will enjoy God forever. The Westminster Catechism states that the chief end of man is to “glorify God and enjoy him for ever.”

Bible Study is not just a step towards Christian maturity. So, then, the next time you curl up early some morning with the Bible and your favorite hot beverage, pause and understand that you are, in fact, stepping into eternity. Pretty cool, isn’t it?

D. Goals for this workshop:

1. Put it all together: By now you should have a good idea of the whole process of feeding yourself from the Word of God. If you have not already, take yourself through the whole process – Observation, Interpretation, and personal Application for a particular section or verse. Share that with someone.
2. Start keeping a log of things you are learning from your time in the Word. Share that with someone.
3. In the coming weeks, see if you can study your entire section (whatever goal you set yourself). First we should seek to “teach” ourselves. But is God also leading you to also teach others, perhaps?
4. Are there others who could benefit from learning these principles of Bible Study? Perhaps you are now able to pass these simple of powerful techniques on to others.
5. Lifetime learning: Although I have been studying the Bible for many years, I’m still learning. It will be the same for you. Continue to be faithful in your study of God’s Word. You’ll find that you know God better and better. What great preparation for that time when know Him fully. As Paul reminds us, “Now we see but a poor reflection a in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.” (1 Corinthians 13:12)