

Lesson 4: Hearing and Obeying God's Word, Part 1

One of the most important passages for our mission as disciple-makers is the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16–20), which we covered in a previous lesson. Take a moment to read this passage as a group, having two different group members read the passage aloud in different translations.

The Centrality of the Scripture

Consider what the Bible says about its own importance for carrying out the mission you just read about. Have a group member read 2 Timothy 3:16,17.

- Where did Scripture come from, according to this passage?

- What is Scripture useful for?

Simply put, it is impossible to make disciples without knowing the Bible.

Obedience Is Our Goal

Looking back to Matthew 28:19–20, note that part of the command to make disciples is “teaching them to observe all that I [Christ] have commanded you [Jesus’ original disciples]” (Matthew 28:20).

- What does it mean to “observe” or “obey” a command?

- What is the difference between knowing the commands of Jesus and obeying them?

If we are to make disciples, it is critically important that we know the commands of Jesus, and the Word of God (the Bible) in general. But it isn't enough to know what God has said; we must put it into practice:

James 1:22–25

But be doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the Word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

For us to grow as disciples and help others become growing disciples, we must study the Bible in such a way that we can both learn what God is saying to us and be prepared to obey what He has said to us.

Inductive Bible Study

The most powerful tool we are aware of for this process is called inductive Bible study. There are many methods of inductive Bible study, but all of them involve the same basic idea: mining facts and principles from a passage of Scripture, then seeking to apply them to life. In this lesson, we'll generally follow the Discovery Bible Study format (for more information, see bit.ly/220wo4I).

Individual Study vs. Group Study

One of the versatile aspects of inductive study is that it can be done individually or in a group. Both individual and group study are helpful for disciple-making. Below we introduce some general principles for individual study, and in our next lesson we'll take a closer look at group study.

THREE SECTIONS

Scripture

To study a passage of Scripture individually, take a piece of paper and divide it into three columns (this works best if you first turn the paper sideways to “landscape” orientation). Label the columns “Scripture,” “My Words,” and “I Will,” from left to right.

Begin your study in the “Scripture” column by writing the passage of Scripture you’re studying, word-for-word. Let’s practice with a short passage: Ephesians 6:5–9.

Did you notice that as you wrote these verses word-for-word, you actually read the verses more than once? That’s part of the value of writing the Scripture down in our own study; it slows us down and hopefully encourages us to read deliberately and thoughtfully.

My Words

Next, in the “My Words” column, rephrase the passage in your own words. What’s important here is that you write as if you were explaining the passage to someone else who wasn’t familiar with it. Common speech is better than eloquent prose in this case. Go ahead and try it with Ephesians 6:5–9.

Now, have each person in the group read his summary. Give one another some feedback. Did you include the important details? Would someone on the street be able to understand your paraphrase?

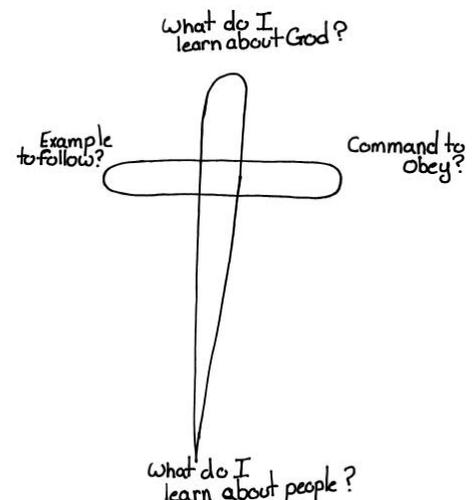
Back of the Page

Flip your piece of paper over and draw a sword on it like this:

For now, don’t worry about writing the words displayed in this (amateurish) drawing. Instead, consider the four points of the sword to be four different areas of focus for your Scripture investigation.

Above the sword you drew, write some thing(s) the passage says about God. Below the sword, write some thing(s) the passage says about people. On the left of the sword, write any examples to follow. On the right, write any commands you find in the passage.

Let’s try this out with Ephesians 6:5–9. You may find data for each of the four points of the sword, though it’s pretty common that in studying a passage you’ll not be able to write something for all four of the focus areas. That’s OK—just do your best to account for the information in whatever passage you are studying.



I Will

Now that you have written these facts down, it's time to consider what God might want you to obey from the passage. A good way to think about this is to ask yourself a few questions:

- “What point in the passage struck me the most?”
- “How would my life look different if I lived more in line with this passage?”
- “Why might God be showing me this point right now given what’s going on in my life?”*

Take a moment to pray and ask God how He might want you to put the passage into practice. After you have done this, try to come up with one actionable item that you can obey, and write it down in the “I Will” column.

Here are a couple of pointers as you develop “I Will” statements:

- “I Will” statements must be specific in order to be effective. It is good to recognize, for example, that God’s Word is powerful, but what will you do about that? Commit to reading the Scripture regularly? Write someone a note of encouragement based on a particular Bible verse? Something else?
- “I Will” statements are ideally actionable within a short time frame—something like 24 to 48 hours. If you wait a long time to obey something, it becomes more difficult to obey (and to remember).
- It’s OK for an “I Will” item to address your emotions, attitudes, and thought life. Just recognize that your assessment of how you did in following through on such “I Will” items will be more subjective and possibly require particular attentiveness.
- In addition to your “I Will” takeaway from the Scripture passage, consider a second action item: telling someone what you learned. This is where your paraphrase in the “My Words” section comes in handy. Look back at it and make sure you’re ready to share God’s Word with someone else.

Looking Forward

Congratulations! You’ve learned a simple and transferable method of Bible study for individuals. This method is designed to help you not only hear what God is saying to you in the Scripture, but also to obey what He’s told you. Typically we think about practicing what we’ve studied at this point in the lesson, but you’ve already practiced the method. Now it’s time to look forward a bit.

SET GOALS AND PRAY

Your study has given you a couple of action steps, namely your “I Will” item and the opportunity to tell someone else what you learned from Scripture. Share your “I Will” item with the others in the group so that you can check in with one another at your next meeting about how it went. Then close the meeting by asking God to empower you through the Holy Spirit to accomplish the goal(s) you shared with one another. Enjoy this opportunity to align yourselves with God as you seek His glory.

* Adapted from Timothy Keller, *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God* (New York: Dutton, 2014), 253.