

## General comments on observations

1. Not every observation will be significant, or lead to some great insight. But you never know until you start looking (and *marking* and *writing*!). Don't be afraid to make trivial observations. They may uncover some key aspect of the passage. Remember Traina's encouragement: "The familiar is made to disclose undreamed treasure." (p. 32)
2. Not every observation from your personal study will be useful in a group discussion. Often thorough observation will suggest multiple directions the passage could take in a group discussion. Most likely, the passage will not be exhausted in a single quiet time or a single group meeting. For example, the Philippians 1:1-11 passage could provide great insight about Paul's prayer life, Paul's ministry, an emphasis on the unity in the church at Philippi, an overview of the process of Christian growth, etc. Rather than trying to cover every aspect, the use the observation of the passage to determine which aspect will best address your current personal need or the needs of the particular group.
3. The observation questions often follow the sequence of the passage, but asking questions in a different order may be more helpful in you own study or in a group discussion. As you "pound" on the passage like Luther to dig out more and more facts, some of the observations will often group together. The observation of the individual parts may help you fit together broader observations about the passage as a whole (an inductive method, remember?).
4. Observation questions start with what you see in the passage. As you continue in observation of the passage, the facts you discover should help you to understand the passage, especially as you move to interpretation. As God uses the passage in your life, think about "How can I help other people discover this for themselves?" rather than just telling them. "How can I help them 'receive the word with great eagerness' and 'examine the Scriptures' like the Bereans in Acts 17?"
5. Thorough observation is critical for your own personal study, but is especially important if you are in a group discussion or even sharing the passage with another individual. If you only skim the passage to get ammunition for the point you want to make, you will not be prepared for the really good questions that the other(s) may ask about the passage. Exhaustive observation will give you a better grasp of what is in the passage and better equip you to respond to other questions. Some of those other questions may be tangential "rabbit trails", but some may lead to great, life-changing insights that God wants to use in a discussion that are not what you expected to discuss. Observation of the passage, including the parts that don't at first seem critical to you, is important preparation.

These are observation questions. Interpretation questions should be coming to mind as you are doing the observation on the passage. You might want to jot down notes to remind yourself of the question later. But don't abandon observation too soon by getting onto even a really good interpretation tangent. Discipline yourself to exhaustive observation as a prerequisite to effective interpretation. Remember Traina's admonition: "If there is ever a blurring of the process to the extent that the various phases of study become indistinguishable, then eisegesis will inevitably result." (p. 49)