

Handling the Word

How to Study the Bible Faithfully

Lesson Three Leader Guide

Observation - What Does the Text Say?

Private leader document

Use this guide alongside the participant notes. Keep the session conversational, practical, and confidence-building.

Lesson Overview

Main question	What does the passage actually say?
Main idea	Before we ask what a passage means or how it applies, we first slow down to notice what God has actually said.
Key text	Proverbs 18:13
Supporting passages	Nehemiah 8:1-8; Acts 17:10-12; Mark 4:35-41; Luke 10:25-37
Suggested length	60 to 75 minutes. Let the Mark 4 practice breathe rather than rushing through every passage.

Intended outcomes

- He understands observation as noticing what is actually in the passage.
- He slows down before moving to meaning or application.
- He practises simple questions: who, where, what, words, actions, questions, responses.
- He sees that simple observations are real Bible study.
- He leaves with one practice using **Mark 4:35-41**.

Leader emphasis

- This is the first clear study skill. Keep it simple.
- Ask what he notices before telling him what you notice.
- Affirm simple observations from the text.
- Avoid making him feel there is a hidden answer key.
- Do not turn this into interpretation. That comes later.

Helpful phrase to repeat

A simple observation from the passage is not a small thing. It means you are learning to listen to what God has actually said.

Recommended Session Flow

Time	Section	Purpose
5 min	Welcome and check-in	Begin relationally and remove pressure.
2 min	Opening prayer	Ask God to help you slow down and listen.
8 min	Review pre-reading	Draw out one or two simple observations.
5 min	Today's question	What does the passage actually say?
7 min	Proverbs 18:13	Answering before listening.
10 min	Nehemiah 8:1-8	The Word read clearly and understood.
6 min	Acts 17:10-12	Bereans: ready and Scripture-testing.
8 min	Observation tool	People, place, problem, words, actions, questions, responses, surprise.
20 min	Mark 4:35-41	Main practice: read slowly and notice details.
8 min	Pull together and practise	Summarise and set one achievable weekly step.

Leader posture

Keep the tone warm, patient, and conversational. If he moves too quickly to application, say: "That may be true, but let us first ask what the passage actually says." Give him time to read, think, and answer.

1. Welcome, Prayer, and Pre-Reading - 15 minutes

Aim: Begin relationally, remove pressure, and let him share what he noticed from the pre-reading.

Prompts: How has your week been? Did beginning with prayer before reading help? What stood out from the Session Three pre-reading? When you read Mark 4:35-41, what were three simple things you noticed?

Listen for / draw out

Shame if the practice was not completed; any sign he is beginning to come to Scripture prayerfully; simple observations such as people, place, storm, Jesus sleeping, disciples afraid, Jesus speaking, calm, and questions.

Suggested prayer: Lord, thank You for giving us Your Word. Help us slow down, listen carefully, and notice what You have actually said. Open our eyes and give us understanding. Amen.

2. Today's Question and Observation Principle - 8 minutes

Aim: Introduce the simple question: What does the passage actually say?

Ask: Why does it matter to slow down before we answer a Bible passage? What can go wrong if we ask "What does this mean to me?" before asking what the passage says? What kinds of things can we notice in a passage?

Brief teaching summary

Before interpretation and application, we observe. Observation helps us listen before answering. It protects us from rushing, guessing, or forcing our own ideas into the text.

3. Read **Proverbs 18:13** - Listen Before Answering

Aim: Show the danger of answering before listening.

Ask: What warning does this verse give? How might this apply to reading Scripture too quickly? What might it look like to answer a passage before really listening to it?

Pastoral note

This is not meant to make him anxious about getting everything right. It gives a safe first step: before you explain the passage, simply listen to it.

4. Read **Nehemiah 8:1-8** and **Acts 17:10-12** - Reading Clearly and Testing by Scripture

Aim: Show that God's Word should be read clearly, understood, and tested by Scripture.

Ask: What were the people doing with the Word? What did Ezra and the others help them do? What attitude did the Bereans have? What did they do with the Scriptures?

Summary and caution

Nehemiah 8 shows the Word read clearly and understood. Acts 17 shows ready, Scripture-testing listening. Do not use the Bereans to make him suspicious of every teacher. Use them to show healthy, humble discernment.

5. The Simple Observation Tool - 8 minutes

Aim: Give him a repeatable tool for noticing what is in the passage.

Look for

- People - who is mentioned?
- Place - where is it happening?
- Problem - what is going on?
- Words - what stands out?

Also notice

- Actions - what do people or God do?
- Questions - what is being asked?
- Responses - how do people respond?
- Surprise - what is unexpected?

Pastoral note

If he says this feels too simple, affirm that simple is good. If it feels hard, reassure him that observation is a skill that grows with practice.

6. **Main Practice** - **Mark 4:35-41**

Aim: Practise reading slowly and making observations from the text. This is the heart of the session. Do not rush it.

Reading pattern: first, read the whole story. Second, notice people, place, actions, words, and responses. Third, look for questions, contrasts, and changes from beginning to end.

Ask: Who is in the passage? Where are they? What problem happens? What are the disciples doing and saying? What is Jesus doing and saying? What changes after Jesus speaks? What questions are asked? What do you notice about fear, faith, and authority?

Listen for / draw out

Jesus and His disciples are in a boat. A great windstorm arises. Jesus is asleep. The disciples wake Him and question His care. Jesus rebukes the wind and sea. There is a great calm. Jesus asks about fear and faith. The disciples end by asking who He is.

Brief teaching summary

Even before interpretation, careful observation shows important things: the disciples are afraid, Jesus has authority over the wind and sea, and the passage presses the question of who Jesus is.

7. Observation Tip - Look for Questions

Aim: Show how the questions in a passage often reveal what matters.

In **Mark 4:35-41**, ask him to notice: “Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?” “Why are you so fearful?” “How is it that you have no faith?” “Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?”

Pastoral note

If he jumps to application such as “Jesus is with me in my storms,” do not crush it. Affirm the instinct, then gently return to what Mark actually shows in the story.

8. Pulling It Together and This Week’s Practice - 8 minutes

Ask him to finish: “Observation means...” Then ask why we should ask what the passage says before asking what it means.

Practice: Read **Mark 4:35-41** three times this week. First reading: What happens? Second reading: What do I notice about the disciples? Third reading: What do I notice about Jesus? Write one sentence: “One thing I noticed this week was...”

Closing encouragement

One honest sentence from the passage is enough. If needed, reduce the practice to one reading and one observation.

If He Gets Stuck

Situation	Gentle response	Next step
I do not see anything.	That is okay. Let us read it again and look for one person, one action, or one question.	Return to a simple category.
This seems too obvious.	Obvious observations are still important. They keep us grounded in the text.	Affirm it and ask what else the passage says.
I do not know what it means.	That is okay. Today we are first asking what it says.	Redirect to observation.
I think it means...	That may be worth exploring. What words in the passage make you think that?	Connect meaning back to the text.

Key truths to reinforce

- Observation means noticing what is actually in the passage.
- We listen before we answer.
- Simple observations are valuable.
- The Bible should be read carefully and with understanding.
- Good Bible study is active, like the Bereans searching the Scriptures.
- Observation protects us from rushing into assumptions.

What to avoid

- Turning observation into a technical lecture.
- Rushing to interpretation too early.
- Correcting every imperfect answer immediately.
- Making him feel he must find something deep or impressive.
- Overloading the session with too many passages.
- Using the Bereans to create suspicion rather than discernment.

Optional Extra Scriptures

Use only if the conversation naturally opens up. Do not overload Lesson Three.

- **Psalm 119:18** - A prayer for open eyes.
- **Psalm 119:105** - God's Word as a lamp and light.
- **Matthew 13:10-17** - The importance of hearing and understanding.
- **Luke 24:27** - Jesus explaining the Scriptures concerning Himself.
- **2 Timothy 2:15** - Handling the Word rightly.
- **James 1:22** - Be doers of the Word, not hearers only.

Suggested closing prayer

Father, thank You for giving us Your Word. Help us not to rush past what You have said. Teach us to slow down, listen carefully, and notice what is written. Give us humble hearts like the Bereans. Help us see Christ more clearly, trust Your Word more deeply, and walk faithfully before You. Amen.

Leader Reflection After the Session

What encouraged him? _____

Where did he seem unsure, anxious, or confused? _____

What should I follow up next time? _____

Preparation for Lesson Four

Lesson Four will focus on context: Never read a verse alone. Encourage him to keep practising observation with Mark 4:35-41. If he struggles, begin next time with grace, then help him take the next step of reading a verse in its sentence, paragraph, chapter, book, and whole-Bible setting.