

The Great Commandment and Bible Interpretation

Lesson 2

TEACHER TO TEACHER

In the preceding lesson we learned that the Great Commandment is foundational both to the Old Testament Law and Prophets and to the New Testament teachings of Jesus. In fact, the Great Commandment serves as the centerpiece, or overarching thesis, of Christ's system of moral/ethical behavior. These truths lead us to conclude that we must allow the Great Commandment to influence our interpretation of Scripture. This is essential to developing a biblical theology of loving relationships.

This lesson overviews a systematic Bible study/interpretation process that is firmly rooted in conservative evangelical hermeneutics, including a process for bringing the Great Commandment to bear upon Bible interpretation. The process is simple in nature and requires only those resources that are readily available to most of our congregation.

Not surprisingly, the process is similar to that used by Roger, Glenn, and Jack as they prepare to preach. Similarly, we encourage our Bible Fellowship teachers to utilize the process in their personal study and when preparing lessons for their departments. However, this may be the first time at Casas that we will teach Bible Fellowship *participants* to apply the steps in the process to their own personal Bible study.

The suggested process contains three steps:

1. Observation—answering the questions, “What do I see?” and/or “What does it say?”
2. Interpretation—answering the question, “What does it mean?”
3. Application—answering the questions, “How does it work in my life?” and “How does it work in the life of others?”

Identified with each step are actions to take and questions to ask of the text. By “working the process,” individuals can arrive at a correct understanding of Scripture and can apply its truths and principles in life-changing ways.

Be aware that many people use Scripture only for meditative or devotional purposes. While these are valid ways to engage Scripture, apart from a disciplined study and interpretation process, such a study can lead to a misunderstanding of truth as well as a wrong application of biblical principles and truths in daily living.

You may find this lesson somewhat challenging to teach. Taking time for adequate preparation will be important. Make the material your own, *before* you present it.

May the Holy Spirit open your eyes to things you have read, but not understood. May He anoint you as you guide your department into richer and more profitable study and interpretation of His life-transforming Word.

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Notes 

Studying the Word Together

Please note: effective Bible study requires a method. You don't teach a kid to swim by tossing him into the deep end of the pool and saying, "OK, swim." No, you start out slowly, showing him how to float, how to hold his head under water, how to kick his feet, and how to dog paddle. You give him direction and a process so that he gradually develops the skills required. The same is true for learning to study the Bible. — Dr. Howard G. Hendricks¹

Heart appropriation, not merely head apprehension, is the true goal of Bible study. Only in this way can believers grow spiritually. — Dr. Roy B. Zuck²

When believers give the Bible its rightful place of authority in their lives, they intimately experience its Author in life-changing ways. — Dr. Roger Barrier³

INTRODUCTION

The "Emmaus" dialogue between Jesus and two disciples is, for me, a very poignant New Testament passage. Several aspects of the narrative minister to both my heart and my mind. The event occurs on Resurrection Day after the woman and Peter have found Jesus' tomb empty.

¹³Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. ¹⁴They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. ¹⁵As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; ¹⁶but they were kept from recognizing him.

¹⁷He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"

They stood still, their faces downcast.

¹⁸One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

¹⁹"What things?" he asked.

"About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. ²⁰The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; ²¹but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what

is more, it is the third day since all this took place. ²²In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning ²³but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. ²⁴Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see."

²⁵He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!

²⁶Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?"

²⁷And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

²⁸As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. ²⁹But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them.

³⁰When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. ³¹Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. ³²They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:13-32)

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The two men with whom Jesus walked and talked were distraught (v. 17). Their hope for Israel's redemption was crucified (v. 21). They were having a hard time determining just what the empty tomb implied. Jesus challenged their faith (vs. 25-26). Then, Jesus did an amazing thing; He began to interpret Scripture for them (v. 27). The men apparently knew what Scripture said, but they did not understand its meaning. After Jesus interpreted it for them, they were transformed from skeptics into believers (v. 32).

The Bible *is* sometimes difficult to understand; and that which we do not understand or understand correctly, we cannot apply in life-transforming ways. With the help of the Holy Spirit, a sound study method, and readily available resources, we are able to interpret the Bible accurately, to understand it more fully, and to apply its life-changing message.

Writing in *New Testament Theology*, Frank Stagg says, "The Bible is so written that its essential message is open to any humble person of faith. However, some passages are difficult to understand, even to the most competent interpreter. An effective interpretive process is essential in understanding and applying the Scriptures correctly."⁴ Generally, this lesson is about such a process; more specifically, it is about allowing the Great Commandment to influence that interpretation process.

EFFECTIVE BIBLE INTERPRETATION

Effective Bible interpretation is very important if we are to do everything with the Scriptures that God intended. The Bible is God's progressive revelation of Himself to us. From the beginning of Genesis to the end of Revelation, it points us to Jesus, our Messiah, and the salvation and reconciliation to God that we have in Him. In addition, the message of the Bible is crucial in helping us to live a Christlike

life. The Apostle Paul describes the relevance of Scripture to the believer:

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

In this passage we find three ways in which Scripture is useful or profitable for Christ-followers. First, Scripture is useful for teaching. The Greek word for *teaching* is a derivative of *didaskalia* (did-as-kal-ee'-ah). It connotes *doctrinal teaching*. In other words, Scripture is profitable in helping us know what we should believe about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, mankind, the church, salvation, Satan, etc.

Next, Scripture is useful for "rebuking and correcting." Scripture rebukes us when it helps us to identify the sin in our lives. It corrects us by telling us how to live rightly. We can say that Scripture is useful or profitable for the maturing Christian in that it tells us what sinful actions and thoughts to avoid, as well as what moral code or system of ethics to practice.

Finally, we see that the written Word of God provides useful "training in righteousness." The word rendered *training* in this verse renders as *parenting* in others. Scripture parents us, raises us up, or nurtures us in righteousness.

Howard G. Hendricks asserts the importance of a systematic method for studying and interpreting the Bible, saying that it is essential to spiritual growth, to spiritual maturity, and to spiritual potency.⁵ Wilbur M. Smith emphasizes the significance of good interpretation to understanding the eternal revelation of God to humankind, saying:

When [understanding] is absent, men have not only misinterpreted the Word, but they have taken falsehood out of truth, and thus have deceived many when they should have led them out of darkness into light.⁶

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► **A Systematic Three-Step Process**

Good Bible interpretation requires a logical, systematic process guided by basic rules and principles. The process of Bible interpretation is called *hermeneutics*. Bernard Ramm, author of *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, defines hermeneutics as both a science and an art. He says, “It is science because it is guided by rules within a system; it is art because the application of the rules is by skill, and not by mechanical imitation.”⁷

Dr. Howard G. Hendricks lists three steps in the process for studying Scripture that result not only in correct understanding, but also in life-changing application. Those steps include observation, interpretation, and application.⁸ The observation step asks the question, “What do I see?” The second step—interpretation—asks, “What does it mean?” Finally, the application step asks, “How does it work?”

In the *observation* step we are concerned with terms and key words and phrases, as

well as with structure, literary form or genre, and atmosphere—the setting and feelings picked up from the text. Observation provides the basic building blocks from which meaning is constructed.

In the *interpretation* step we ask questions of the text. Then we search for answers to the questions, using resources such as a Bible dictionary, manners and customs materials, commentaries, a concordance, and maps and atlases, as well as other related Scriptures.⁹ The final phase of the interpretation step is integration. In this phase, we reconstruct what we have taken apart in our inspection of the details.

Application is the crucial third step in the systematic hermeneutical process. We focus on two areas in this step. One answers the question, “How does it work for me?” The other addresses the question, “How does it work for others?”

The chart below summarizes both actions to take and questions to ask in each step of the process described above.

Step 1: Observation - Answers the question, “What do I see?” or “What does it say?”	Step 2: Interpretation (or Contextualization) - Answers the question, “What does it mean?”	Step 3: Application - Answers the questions, “How does it work for me?” and “How does it work for others?”
<p>Actions to Take</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Always begin with prayer, inviting the Holy Spirit to teach you. ◆ Read the passages in several versions of the Bible. ◆ Make note of terms, key words and phrases, grammatical structure, story line, and location, as well as geographic and cultural issues. 	<p>Actions to Take</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Meditate upon key passages (Col. 3:16). ◆ Use a good Bible dictionary to define key words and phrases. ◆ Use Bible atlases and manners and customs materials to research geographical and cultural settings. ◆ Use commentaries to learn what past and present scholars think about the passage. ◆ Study focal passages in literary, historical, cultural, geographical, and theological contexts. 	<p>Actions to Take</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Begin the application phase by reflecting upon what you know about the passage. ◆ Relate the passage to your personal, family, church, and work life. ◆ Meditate upon or ponder the passage with a view toward letting it help or readjust your life. ◆ Practice the principle or truth in your own life.
<p>Questions to Ask the Text</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ To whom is the author addressing his message? ◆ What is the historical, cultural, and geographic context? ◆ Why is the writer addressing the people to whom he is writing? ◆ What actions are the characters in the narrative engaged in? Are they unique to the culture of that day? 	<p>Questions to Ask the Text</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ What do the meanings and connotations of the key words and phrases suggest to you about the author’s intended meaning? ◆ What does the total context suggest about the author’s intended meaning? ◆ Are any doctrinal issues being addressed? ◆ What insights do other Bible passages lend to the passage you are interpreting? 	<p>Questions to Ask the Text</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ What transcendent truth must I believe and apply? ◆ What principle was the inspired writer asking his audience to apply within the context of their unique culture? ◆ How can I apply the principle in my life now? ◆ What instruction must I follow or command must I obey? ◆ What behaviors must I avoid?

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► Guiding Principles

There are seven guiding principles to keep in mind when interpreting the Bible for understanding and application. The following is a brief summary:¹⁰

Clarity of Scripture — The Bible is the rightful possession of all people. It is written so that its essential message is open to any humble person of faith. Every Bible student should sharpen his/her understanding (or remedy his lack thereof) by utilizing the work of past and present scholars.

Accommodated Revelation — The Bible contains the truth of God accommodated to the human mind so that the human mind can assimilate it. The Scriptures were written in three known languages of man: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. They were written in a social environment and its analogies are drawn from that environment. When we learn the content of that environment, we can understand the analogies.

Progressive Revelation — By progressive revelation we mean that the Bible presents a movement of God, with the initiative coming from God rather than from man, in which God brings man up through the theological infancy of the Old Testament to the maturity of the New Testament. Progressive revelation is the pattern of revelation.

Scripture Interprets Scripture — Obscure passages in Scripture must give way to the clear passages. In other words, the entire body of Scripture is the context and guide for understanding the particular passages of Scripture. We must rest our doctrine upon those passages that are clear rather than those that are obscure.

The Analogy of Faith — This refers to the constant and perpetual harmony of the Scripture in the fundamental points of faith and practice, deduced from those passages in which they were discussed by the inspired authors either directly or expressly and in clear, plain, and intelligible language. The basic assumption is that

there is one system of truth or theology contained in Scripture, and therefore all doctrine must cohere to or agree with each other.

The Unity and Diversity of Scripture — Few books in the Bible addressed similar situations; there is great variety in wording and emphasis; each writer expressed himself through his own personality with different emphasis and different figures of speech. Nevertheless, behind the diverse expressions is a critical unity.

Meaning Is Genre-Dependent — The Bible contains many forms of literary expression: narrative, poetry, wisdom, prophecy, apologetic, parable, and epistle. The genre or type of literature in which a passage is found suggests its own particular set of hermeneutical principles for interpretation. For example, we would not seek to interpret a narrative with its rather explicit language in the same manner we would seek to interpret poetry with its figurative language.

Most Bible study curriculum designers and writers apply a systematic process of observation, interpretation, and application like the one described in this section. Some “teacher kits” or leader’s guides contain resources that make the process easier for the Bible teacher to properly interpret specific Bible passages for his/her “students.”

THE GREAT COMMANDMENT AND BIBLE INTERPRETATION

If our Bible study and teaching is to reflect that of the Christ, the Great Commandment must influence our interpretation of Scripture. Remember, it serves as the foundation of the Law and the Prophets and it forms the centerpiece of Jesus’ moral code by which Christians live.

We must understand that bringing the Great Commandment imperatives into our Bible study/interpretation process opens

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our eyes to “heart issues” — to feelings and motivations more associated with our emotions than with our mind. After all, relationships are the contexts in which we practice Great Commandment love (e.g., we love [*agapé, agapao*]; therefore, we give, serve, etc.).

This begs the question, *How do we allow the Great Commandment to influence our interpretation of Scripture?*

We can accomplish this objective by applying an additional set of questions to both Step 1 and Step 2 of the study process described in the previous section. This set of questions helps us understand God’s heart for His people, which motivates the actions that He takes toward them. Similarly, they help us understand what our heart and actions toward God need to be. Likewise, they help us understand what our heart and actions toward others need to be. In addition, they often help answer the “Why?” question, giving us insight into the motivation that propels us into action. Answers to the Great Commandment questions also may give us insight into who we might become if we really believe the truth concerning the priority of loving God and loving others as we love ourselves.

Great Commandment Questions to Ask the Text in Step 1 and Step 2

- ◆ What does this passage reveal about God’s heart? (Not every passage is about us. Sometimes it is about God. The more mysterious it is, the more intriguing it is.)
- ◆ Why did God give us this truth? What does the gift of this truth reveal to us about God’s heart?
- ◆ What does our knowledge of Who He is suggest to us about why He behaves as He does?
- ◆ What is my heart response to His heart for me?
- ◆ What does my heart response to Him motivate me to become? How would I like to be different because of my heart response to God’s heart for me?
- ◆ How am I responding to the relational interactions in this passage? What are my responses (reactions) telling me about myself?
- ◆ What does this passage suggest to me about either how I can love God more or how I can love others differently?
- ◆ How am I to respond both to God and to His response to the people in the text? (We presume that God wants us to know what is occurring in His heart. That is part of progressive revelation.)

APPLICATION
IDEAS &
QUESTIONS

Few things are more exciting than the experience of Scripture “coming alive” in our heart and mind. When it happens, we feel connected to God in a remarkable way, agreeing with the men who walked and talked with Jesus on the road to Emmaus: “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with ... and opened the Scriptures to us?”

This lesson presents a process to help you and the participants in your Bible Fellowship more effectively study and interpret the Bible and to apply its life-transforming truths in your relationships

with God and with others. The process is simple, in that it is composed of three easily remembered steps: observation, interpretation, and application. Admittedly, the work involved in each step seems a little complex. However, with practice most committed Bible students develop a “workflow” that soon becomes second nature to them.

The application of this lesson is simple: “Just do it!” In another way, it is challenging without being out of reach of most. Here are some questions to consider as you think through how you might apply the lesson in your life and how you might help those in your Bible Fellowship study and interpret for accurate and in-depth understanding and application:

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- ◆ Do I regularly study the Bible using a process similar to the one described in this lesson, so that I can better understand it and apply it in my life?
- ◆ Do I question the text and interact with Scripture in a manner that helps me know the Author more intimately?
- ◆ Do I experience the truths of Scripture in a manner that grows my faith and facilitates my growth toward spiritual maturity?
- ◆ Can I affirm that my understanding and application of Scripture is reflected in an increasing love for God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit, as well as for others?

Notes 

¹ Howard G. Hendricks and William D. Hendricks, *Living by the Book*, copyright © 1991 by Howard G. Hendricks and William D. Hendricks, Moody Press, Chicago, IL p. 26. (Dr. Howard Hendricks is a long-time distinguished professor at Dallas Theological Seminary. Some of his former students include Dr. Tony Evans, Dr. Charles Swindoll, Dr. Bruce Wilkinson, Dr. David Jeremiah, D. Joseph Stowell, and Dr. Erwin Lutzer.)

² Roy B. Zuck (General Editor), *Rightly Divided: Readings in Biblical Hermeneutics*, copyright © 1996 by Roy B. Zuck, Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, MI, p. 17.

³ Roger Barrier and Jerry Wilkinson, *The Prayer God Always Answers*, copyright © 2005 by Casas Adobes Baptist Church, Tucson, AZ p. 2-1.

⁴ Frank Stagg, *New Testament Theology*, Broadman Press, Nashville, TN, 1962, p. 10.

⁵ *Ibid.*, Howard G. Hendricks, pp. 18-21.

⁶ Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: a Textbook of Hermeneutics*, copyright © by Baker Book House Company, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI (from the Preface by Wilbur M. Smith). Dr. Ramm was a faculty member at Biola University, a Professor of Philosophy at Bethel College and Seminary, Professor of Religion at Baylor University, and Professor of Systematic Theology at the American Baptist Seminary of the West where he taught between 1958-74 and again from 1978-86.

⁷ *Ibid.*, Bernard Ramm, p. 1.

⁸ *Ibid.*, Howard G. Hendricks, pp. 34-44.

⁹ The Casas Church library has many Bible study resources available for loan. Many “public domain” resources are available on free Bible study websites. Several Bible study computer programs containing multiple Bible versions, commentaries, and word study tools are available for purchase from Christian book distributors and directly from software publishers. Most “bundle” resources for everyone from beginning students to research scholars.

¹⁰ These principles are normative in interpretation processes used by the evangelical segment of the Christian church.

Notes 

Commentary

HERMENEUTICS

We derive our English word *hermeneutics* from the Greek verb *hermènia* and the noun *hermèneia*. These words point back to the wing-footed messenger god Hermes in Grecian mythology. He was responsible for transmitting what is beyond human understanding into a form that human intelligence could grasp. The verb *hermèneuo* came to refer to bringing someone to an understanding of something in his language (explanation) or in another language (translation).¹ Therefore, Dr. Roy B. Zuck, defines *hermeneutics* as “the science (principles) and art (tasks) by which the meaning of the biblical text is determined.”²

Dr. Grant Osborne expands Zuck’s definition with this explanation. He says there are three perspectives critical to a proper understanding of the interpretative task. First, he says, hermeneutics is a science since it provides a logical, orderly classification of the laws (rules) of interpretation. Second, hermeneutics is an art, for it is an acquired skill demanding both imagination and an ability to apply the “laws” to selected passages or books. Finally and most important, hermeneutics is a spiritual act, depending upon the leading of the Holy Spirit.³

Osborne goes on to say that correct interpretation is essential for *understanding and teaching the Bible* properly.⁴ The first step in Bible study is observation. This step leads us to ask, “What does it say?” The next step is interpretation and that leads us to ask, “What does it mean?” The third step, application, suggests the question, “How does it apply to me?” When we fail to use good hermeneutics in our study process, we skip a very vital step that leads to enlightened understanding and effective teaching.

Bible interpretation is also essential for *applying the Bible* properly.⁵ The goal of Bible study is not just to determine what it says and means, but also to apply its truths and principles to our lives. If we fail to apply it, we cut short the process; we have not finished what God intended for us when He provided His Word to us.

ASSUMPTIONS

The process of Bible study/interpretation described in *Studying the Word Together* assumes three things about the interpreter:

1. The interpreter of Scripture comes to his text believing in its Divine inspiration and in the inerrancy of the original autographs.
2. The conservative evangelical interpreter works within the framework of the biblical canon long recognized by Protestants.
3. The interpreter works with versions (translations, rather than paraphrases) of the Bible produced by scholars who faithfully employed the parameters of sound textual criticism.

QUALIFICATIONS

The interpreter must be qualified for his tasks. Roy Zuck identifies eight essential qualifying characteristics of a Bible interpreter. These include:

1. Regeneration (being born again, saved)
2. A reverence for and an interest in God and His Word
3. A prayerful attitude and humility
4. An approach to Bible Study anchored in a willingness to obey its instructions and to apply its principles to daily living

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5. A dependence upon the Holy Spirit
6. A commitment to Bible study
7. Approaches Scripture with sound judgment and wisdom
8. A willingness to receive from the teaching of others (written or verbal)

**RATIONAL AND
RELATIONAL
UNDERSTANDING**

Many Bible interpreters stop short in the interpretive process because they fail to bring the Great Commandment into their study methodology. This results

in a rational understanding that often misses the significance of the vertical relationship between humankind and God, as well as the horizontal relationship between humankind and his fellow human being.

As Zuck says, “Heart appropriation, not merely head apprehension, is the true goal of Bible study. Only in this way can believers grow spiritually.”⁶ Dr. David Ferguson contends that the ultimate purpose of God’s revelation of Himself to man is to provide the means by which man can intimately know and eternally fellowship with God. Ferguson further emphasizes that a significant purpose of Scripture is to help us know the One who wrote it.⁷

Notes 

¹ Roy B. Zuck, General Editor, *Rightly Divided: Readings in Biblical Hermeneutics*, Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, MI, 1996, p. 22 .

² *Ibid.*, p. 23.

³ Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Ill, 1991, p. 5.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, Zuck, p. 23.

⁷ Dr. Ferguson taught these principles in the fall of 2001 at Casas Adobes Baptist Church.

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Notes **RESOURCES
NEEDED:**

- ◆ 2-sided copies of Lesson Notes / Take-Home pages
- ◆ Pencils or pens for each person
- ◆ Dry erase markers and marker board or felt tip markers and a flip chart

TIMEFRAME:

- ◆ 35 minutes

Suggested Lesson Plan

NOTE TO TEACHER: This *suggested* lesson plan contains many elements that, if employed, will help maximize learning for life-change in your Bible Fellowship. If you are an experienced teacher, you have freedom to create your own plan based upon the “Studying the Word Together” section. If you are less experienced, we suggest that you “stick to the plan.” However, even less-experienced teachers should feel free to modify the plan based upon the needs of your Bible Fellowship. This plan is designed to be presented in 35 minutes. It is important, therefore, that you carefully plan your presentation so that you communicate the main points with brevity and clarity.

**► Important Scripture
References:**

- ◆ Luke 24:13-32
- ◆ 2 Timothy 3:16-17

► Teaching Goals:

- ◆ **Learn:** Bible Fellowship participants learn:
 1. Accurate Bible interpretation is essential to correct understanding and proper application
 2. A 3-step process for Bible study/interpretation that utilizes a series of action steps and questions to ask of Scripture as they study
 3. How to use a set of questions to bring the Great Commandment into their Bible study/interpretation process
- ◆ **Experience:** Each Bible Fellowship participant asks Great Commandment questions of Luke 24:13-32 and 2 Timothy 3:16-17, getting in touch with God’s heart for him/her and deciding how he/she might respond to God’s loving initiative

► Before Class Begins:

- ◆ Distribute handouts.

**STEP ONE: GETTING
READY TO LEARN
(7 MINUTES)**

Use Studying the Word Together material from pages 2-2 to 2-3 to prepare for this section.

- ◆ Briefly set the scene for the Road to Emmaus dialogue between Jesus, Cleopas, and his traveling companion. (Who? When? Where? What?)
- ◆ Divide your fellowship into groups of 3 to 5 people. Ask each group to read Luke 24:13-32 (on handout) and to answer the following questions:
 1. What evidence do you find that Cleopas and his companion knew the Scriptures but did not understand them?
 2. What evidence do you find that understanding led Cleopas and his companion to be transformed from skeptics to believers?

**STEP TWO: EFFECTIVE
BIBLE INTERPRETATION
(15 MINUTES)**

Use Studying the Word Together material from pages 2-2 to 2-5 as well as Commentary material from pages 2-8 to 2-9 to prepare for this section.

- ◆ Briefly review why accurate interpretation is important to understanding and how correct understanding can lead to life-changing application.

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1. The Scriptures point us to Christ and the salvation and reconciliation we have in Him (Luke 24:27).
 2. The Scriptures are helpful in teaching, in rebuking and correcting, and in training in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16-17).
- ◆ Introduce the Systematic 3-Step Process for Bible study/interpretation (outline on handout).
 1. Observation — What do I see? What does it say?
 2. Interpretation — What does it mean?
 3. Application — How does it work for me? How does it work for others?
 - ◆ Very briefly review the summary chart and point out that it contains actions to take and questions to ask that will help in observation, interpretation, and application steps (on expanded handout).
 - ◆ Briefly review the seven guiding principles that we must remember when interpreting Scripture (on expanded handout).

**STEP THREE:
THE GREAT
COMMANDMENT AND
BIBLE INTERPRETATION
(10 MINUTES)**

Use material from pages 2-5 to 2-6 to prepare for this section.

- ◆ Remind your department that the two Great Commandment imperatives — love God and love others as you love yourself — form the centerpiece of Jesus’ moral code or system of ethical behavior by which Christ-followers live. This leads to the conclusion that we must allow the Great Commandment to influence our

interpretation of Scripture if we are to be true image bearers of Christ.

- ◆ Refer your group to the Great Commandment Questions Chart (on expanded handout).
 1. Explain that we ask these additional questions during the observation, interpretation, and application stages of the Bible study/interpretation process.
 2. Tell your Fellowship: *It is important to understand that bringing the Great Commandment imperatives into our Bible study/interpretation process opens our eyes to “heart issues” — to feelings and motivations more associated with our emotions than our mind. After all, relationships are the contexts in which we practice Great Commandment love (e.g., we love [agapé, agapao]; therefore, we give, serve, etc.).*

**STEP FOUR: APPLICATION
AND CLOSING (3 MINUTES)**

- ◆ Ask everyone to reflect for a moment upon the key Scripture references for this lesson (on handout).
- ◆ Then ask them to meditatively think about the following Great Commandment questions in regard to the key Scripture passages:
 1. What does the gift from God of these passages suggest to me about His heart for me?
 2. When I consider His heart for me as it is reflected in these passages, I am motivated to become ___ (fill in the blank)___.
- ◆ Close with a prayer asking God to transform each person by the power of His Holy Spirit acting through the truth of His Word.



**LESSON NOTES
BLANKS:**

- ◆ Accurate interpretation is important...because the Scriptures point us to Christ and to the salvation and reconciliation ...
- ◆ The Scriptures are helpful in teaching, in rebuking and correcting, and in training ...
- ◆ The following three steps for studying Scripture ... :
 1. Observation - “What do I see?”
 2. Interpretation - “What does it mean?”
 3. Application - “How does it work?”

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Step 1: Observation - Answers the question, “What do I see?” or “What does it say?”	Step 2: Interpretation (or Contextualization) - Answers the question, “What does it mean?”	Step 3: Application - Answers the questions, “How does it work for me?” and “How does it work for others?”
Actions to Take	Actions to Take	Actions to Take
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Always begin with prayer, inviting the Holy Spirit to teach you. ◆ Read the passages in several versions of the Bible. ◆ Make note of terms, key words and phrases, grammatical structure, story line, and location, as well as geographic and cultural issues. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Meditate upon key passages (Col. 3:16). ◆ Use a good Bible dictionary to define key words and phrases. ◆ Use Bible atlases and manners and customs materials to research geographical and cultural settings. ◆ Use commentaries to learn what past and present scholars think about the passage. ◆ Study focal passages in literary, historical, cultural, geographical, and theological contexts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Begin the application phase by reflecting upon what you know about the passage. ◆ Relate the passage to your personal, family, church, and work life. ◆ Meditate upon or ponder the passage with a view toward letting it help or readjust your life. ◆ Practice the principle or truth in your own life.
Questions to Ask the Text	Questions to Ask the Text	Questions to Ask the Text
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ To whom is the author addressing his message? ◆ What is the historical, cultural, and geographic context? ◆ Why is the writer addressing the people to whom he is writing? ◆ What actions are the characters in the narrative engaged in? Are they unique to the culture of that day? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ What do the meanings and connotations of the key words and phrases suggest to you about the author’s intended meaning? ◆ What does the total context suggest about the author’s intended meaning? ◆ Are any doctrinal issues being addressed? ◆ What insights do other Bible passages lend to the passage you are interpreting? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ What transcendent truth must I believe and apply? ◆ What principle was the inspired writer asking his audience to apply within the context of their unique culture? ◆ How can I apply the principle in my life now? ◆ What instruction must I follow or command must I obey? ◆ What behaviors must I avoid?

► **Guiding Principles** — When interpreting the Bible for understanding and application, keep these principles in mind:

1. **Clarity of Scripture** - The Bible is the rightful possession of all people, written so that its essential message is open to any humble person of faith. Every Bible student should sharpen his/her understanding (or remedy his lack thereof) by utilizing the work of past and present scholars.
2. **Accommodated Revelation** - The Bible holds God’s truth, written in three known languages of man, accommodated to the human mind so that we can assimilate it. Biblical analogies, drawn from social environments, are understood as we learn the content of their environment.
3. **Progressive Revelation** - The Bible presents a movement of God, initiated by God, in which God brings man up through the theological infancy of the Old Testament to the maturity of the New Testament. Progressive revelation is the pattern of revelation.
4. **Scripture Interprets Scripture** - The entire body of Scripture is the context and guide for understanding the particular passages of Scripture. We must rest our doctrine upon those passages that are clear rather than those that are obscure.
5. **The Analogy of Faith** - The inspired authors discussed the fundamental points of faith and practice in clear, plain, and intelligible language. Scripture contains one system of truth or theology, and therefore all doctrine must cohere to or agree with each other.
6. **The Unity and Diversity of Scripture** - The books of the Bible address diverse situations with great variety in wording and emphasis, expressed through each writer’s personality and figures of speech. Nevertheless, behind the diverse expressions is a critical unity.
7. **Meaning Is Genre-Dependent** - The Bible contains many forms of literary expression: narrative, poetry, wisdom, prophecy, apologetic, parable, and epistle. The genre or type of literature in which a passage is found suggests its own particular set of hermeneutical principles for interpretation. For example, we would interpret the rather explicit language of a narrative differently than the figurative language of poetry.

Great Commandment Questions to Ask the Text in Step 1 and Step 2

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ What does this passage reveal about God’s heart? (Not every passage is about us. Sometimes it is about God. The more mysterious it is, the more intriguing it is.) ◆ Why did God give us this truth? What does the gift of this truth reveal to us about God’s heart? ◆ What does our knowledge of Who He is suggest to us about why He behaves as He does? ◆ What is my heart response to His heart for me? ◆ What does my heart response to Him motivate me to become? How would I like to be different because of my heart response to God’s heart for me? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ How am I responding to the relational interactions in this passage? What are my responses (reactions) telling me about myself? ◆ What does this passage suggest to me about either how I can love God more or how I can love others differently? ◆ How am I to respond both to God and to His response to the people in the text? (We presume that God wants us to know what is occurring in His heart. That is part of progressive revelation.)
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The Great Commandment and Bible Interpretation

Today in My Bible Fellowship

- **Talk It Over:** In groups of 3 to 5 people, read Luke 24:13-32 and answer the following questions:
1. What evidence do you find that Cleopas and his companion knew the Scriptures but did not understand them?
 2. What evidence do you find that understanding led Cleopas and his companion to be transformed from skeptics to believers?

► **Effective Bible Interpretation:**

- ◆ Accurate interpretation is important to understanding the Bible because the Scriptures point us to _____ and to the _____ and _____ we have in Him (Luke 24:27).
- ◆ The Scriptures are helpful in _____, in _____ and correcting, and in _____ in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16-17).
- ◆ The following three steps for studying Scripture can lead to correct understanding and life-changing application:
 1. _____ - "What do I see?"
 2. _____ - "What does it mean?"
 3. _____ - "How does it work?"

► **Points to Ponder:** Reflect for a moment on today's Scriptures. In light of the truths they present, meditate upon and respond to these questions:

1. What does the gift from God of these passages suggest to me about His heart for me?
2. When I consider His heart for me as it is reflected in these passages, I am motivated to become _____

 _____.

Today's Scriptures

Luke 24:13-32: ¹³Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. ¹⁴They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. ¹⁵As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; ¹⁶but they were kept from recognizing him.

¹⁷He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"

They stood still, their faces downcast. ¹⁸One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

¹⁹"What things?" he asked.

"About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. ²⁰The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; ²¹but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. ²²In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning ²³but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. ²⁴Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see."

²⁵He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" ²⁷And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

²⁸As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. ²⁹But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them.

³⁰When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. ³¹Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. ³²They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

2 Timothy 3:16-17: All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

**Next Week's Lesson:
God Desires Our Love**

Daily Reflections

Begin each daily reflection by meditating a few minutes on the suggested Scripture passage. Seek to listen to the Holy Spirit as He speaks to you. Then consider the comments and questions about the passage. Be aware of both your thoughts and your feelings. Respond to God through both.

Monday: *[Cleopas said,] The chief priests and our rulers handed him [Jesus] over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place.... He [Jesus] said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he [Jesus] explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. (Luke 24:20-27)*

Have you ever needed an interpreter to help you understand Scripture? Take a moment to thank God for those who help you understand the Bible through their interpretation of it.

Tuesday: *When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:30-32)*

Has your heart ever "burned within you" as the Holy Spirit opened your eyes to the meaning and application of Scripture you have read? Thank God for the Holy Spirit, the teacher of Truth.

Wednesday: *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17, emphasis added)*

Express your gratitude to God for the gift of His Word that has taught you the right things to believe. How is your life different because of what you believe?

Thursday: *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17, emphasis added)*

With a grateful heart, praise God for the gift of His Word that rebukes and corrects you. How do you want to grow because of His loving rebuking and correcting?

Friday: *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17, emphasis added)*

Thank God for the gift of His Word that "parents" or "nurtures" you, reconciling you to Him. In what practical ways can you respond to His desire for eternal loving relationship with you? Knowing that He loves you, in what practical ways can you express your love for others?