Crave Exercise 4: God, Show Me!

Quick recap as to where we are in creating a craving for God's Word:
Exercise 1: A look at the enduring, everlasting, and transformational nature of God's Word.
Exercise 2: A dive into how God Word asks to be ingested for maximum impact.
Exercise 3: An introduction to how learning styles can enhance our experience with God's Word.
Exercise 4: **YOU ARE HERE!** The first of three requests that lead to life-change in God's Word.

You can find many approaches and methods to experience Scripture in a deeper, more meaningful way. I've found that in all the approaches, and over the centuries of Bible scholarship, every high-impact approach has, in some form, three basic steps at its core: observe, interpret, apply. In my personal and ministry journey, I have distilled these steps to three requests which not only help me explore and apply a passage, but also help me to be meditative in my time in God's Word.

1. God, show me! (observe)
2. God, teach me! (interpret)
3. God, change me! (apply)

For this exercise, we will look at the first of these three steps: "God, show me!" Steps two and three will be covered in the next two exercises. Here's the thing. People get Ph. D.s in this process of observation, interpretation, application (which is known in seminary hallways as exegesis and hermeneutics; it's known more popularly as inductive Bible study). We, on the other hand, will be spending just a few minutes on each step. But hopefully it's enough time to move your Bible engagement into a more meaningful experience.

Barry Shafer

God, Show Me! (Observation)

Context is king:
Picture those movie shots that start big (like a satellite picture) and zoom in seamlessly to a neighborhood and then move through a window into the room of a home. That's a film device for setting context and it serves as a great illustration for setting context in Bible study. Knowing the big picture of a passage puts us in better position to more accurately, and thus more powerfully, apply the truth of that passage.

Start big:
Let's say you have a Bible passage you want to explore (a book, a chapter, a verse). Two questions to ask: First, where in the panorama of God's revelation is this passage placed? Secondly, what's the genre (history, prophecy, etc.) of the passage?

For help with these questions, here's a satellite snapshot of God's panoramic revelation and the Bible's genres:

Old Testament:
History: Genesis to Esther (creation to post-exile)
Poetry/Wisdom: Job to Song of Solomon (the era of kings to post-exile)
Prophecy: Isaiah to Malachi (end of the kings era to post-exile)

New Testament
Biography: The Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, John (the ministry of Jesus)
History: Acts (the first years of the early church, after Jesus)
Letters (Epistles): Romans to Jude (letters to the early churches during the era of Acts)
Prophecy/Apocalyptic: Revelation (one of the last books written, a letter addressed to seven early churches)

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Finish small:
After locating where your passage fits in God's panorama and identifying the genre, then you can start asking questions like: What's going on around the passage I'm studying? Is this a good time or a bad time in Israel's history? To whom is Jesus teaching this parable? Who are Paul's readers and what prompted this letter?

In fact, the best questions to help us engage in a passage come straight from the disciplines of journalism and police investigations: *Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?* (You may know these as the "Five Ws and the H"). You'll find that just the act of asking these questions will slow you down in your Bible engagement, which increases your opportunity to hear from God. But there is another layer to consider. It's repeatedly been proven that the more senses we incorporate into learning, the more likely we are to remember the information. And the more we remember truth from God's Word, the more likely we are to be changed by it. So, after you find an answer to one of those probing questions, do something to engage multiple senses.

The most convenient senses to use while exploring the Bible are touch and sight. An easy exercise that combines these two senses is simply to mark or draw symbols over the info you find, whether in your Bible, or Scripture sheets you've printed, or an e-Bible version that lets you highlight. For example, if the obvious *whos* in a chapter are Jesus, God, and the Holy Spirit, you might mark references to Jesus with a cross, God with a cloud, and Holy Spirit with a dove (that simple two-arc bird you learned in grade school) or a flame of fire. If you're highlighting in an e-Bible, consider designating highlighter colors such as red for Jesus, blue for God, and yellow for the Holy Spirit (keying off the three primary colors and giving a nod to nuanced biblical connections between each God-head and their colors).

Here are a few other possible observations and suggested symbols you might use to engage your touch and sight senses.

<u>PHRASES</u>
Promises [rainbow]
Commands/Instructions [exclamation point or two stone tablets)
Warnings [orange barrel]
Statements of conclusion (e.g., *therefore, so that)* [arrow pointing back to info setting up the conclusion, e.g., "what is the 'therefore' there for")
Phrases of contrast (e.g., *…but God…*) [lightning bolt]
Phrases of comparison (e.g., *like, as, just as*) [circle the two items of comparison and draw a connecting line]

<u>WORDS</u>
Love [heart]
God [cloud]
Holy Spirit [dove (those two-arc birds we used to draw in grade school)]
Jesus [cross]
Time references [clock face]
Light [sun, or the color yellow]
Apostles [sign of the fish (ichthus)]

Quick Pause:
I don't know how this prompt of marking words and phrases resonates with you. At first blush it may seem too obvious or even tedious. But ponder this: once you've marked up a passage, you have done more than give the words a cursory read. You have taken a first big step in ingesting the truth of the passage in a profound way. Think about it:

- You've slowed yourself down (see Jesus' example in Mark 1:35).
- You've looked purposefully with an expectation to find something (see the value and payoff for this in Proverbs 2).
- You've displayed trust that God has something wonderful to show you (see Psalm 119:18 and any set of five verses in Psalm 119).

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Here are some sample passages for you to try the observation step on your own. The last passage (Acts 4:1-13) will actually be used through the other two steps as well.

Colossians 1:
Read the Colossians passage below and draw an appropriate symbol over every mention of God, Jesus, or the Holy Spirit (or highlight with a color). Be sure to include pronouns such as *he* and *him*. The fun challenge is to keep track of which pronouns refer to God and which refer to Jesus.

> **Colossians 1:9-20 (NIV)**
> *9 For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, 10 so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, 11 being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, 12 and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. 13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. 15 The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. 17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. 19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.*

Jude 1:
As you read the following verses from Jude, draw a circle around anything that refers to the first readers, the original recipients of this letter. Don't forget to key in on pronouns such as *who*.

> **Jude 1:1-4 (NIV)**
> *1 Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James,*
> *To those who have been called, who are loved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ:*
> *2 Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance.*
> *3 Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people. 4 For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.*

Recap note:
Hopefully after just one pass you are now more familiar with messages of Colossians 1 and the book of Jude than you were just a few minutes ago.

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Acts 4 Exercise

To give you a practical handle on how these three requests (show me, teach me, change me) can work in your daily Bible time, this exercise is a hands-on example for exploring and applying a passage of Scripture. We'll use this same passage to practice all three steps (observe, interpret, apply). The exercise below is a sample to help with observation. We'll use the same passage for the next two exercises that explain the steps of interpretation and application.

Start Big:

The passage comes from the book of Acts. So, that gives you a clue about the genre and the place in God's panorama.

Since we're picking up action in Acts 4, here's a summary of events leading up to our passage.

- **Acts 1:** Just before He ascends to the Father, Jesus tells His disciples to go to Jerusalem and sit tight until the Holy Spirit shows up.
- **Acts 2:** The Holy Spirit shows up, and the church explodes.
- **Acts 3:** Newly empowered by the Holy Spirit, the apostles begin to do things Jesus did, including healing people such as a beggar who'd been lame since birth. This catches the attention of some Jewish leaders who thought they had properly disposed of the Jesus threat.

Because Acts is a history book, it helps to reference people, places, actions, and time to give us a framework for understanding the passage. As you read the passage below, look for answers to *who, what, when,* and *where*. To engage a couple of senses, mark each of these things with a unique symbol. Suggestions: Consider using a Star of David to mark the Jewish leaders and an Ichthus (sign of the fish) to mark the apostles, two of the key *whos* in this passage; use a clock face for references to time (the *when* question).

Take a moment to breathe a prayer asking ask God to show you what he wants you to see. Then, take a deep breath and dig into the passage.

Acts 4:1-13 (NIV)

[1] The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. [2] They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. [3] They seized Peter and John and, because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. [4] But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand.

[5] The next day the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. [6] Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and others of the high priest's family. [7] They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?"

[8] Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! [9] If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, [10] then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. [11] Jesus is "'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.' [12] Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."

[13] When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.

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Processing your observations:
Now that you've noticed some things in this passage, take a minute to journal your thoughts to the questions below, questions intended to help observe the detail.

What kind of timeframe do you see in this passage? Is it over a matter of hours, or days?

What type of Jewish leaders do you see on the first day represented in this passage?

What apostles did you see in this passage?

What was the attitude of the Jewish leaders toward the apostles on the first day?

What type of Jewish leaders do you see on the second day represented in this passage?

How did Peter reply in response to the authorities' question?

How did the Jewish leaders respond to Peter's reply?

How were the apostles described in this passage?

What is God saying in this passage?
Caveat: this is not to ask what God is saying to you or what this passage means to you (that comes later), but what is God saying in this passage? It's a subtle but profound difference. Another way to ask the question: Why did God see to it that the information in this passage was recorded and given to us?

And that's it for now. This exercise is to help you become familiar with what it feels like to simply observe a passage, making the request for God to show you what He wants you to see. It's also an exercise in patience when engaging in Scripture. We tend to want to jump to application before we really understand what God is saying. The upcoming exercises will step into the next requests to ask of a passage, *God, Teach Me!* (interpret) and *God, Change Me!* (apply).

Thank you so much for being a part of this journey!

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