

Bible Study Skills: *Learning to Diagram Scripture*



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Preface

The apostle Paul left Titus on the island of Crete to establish sound (healthy) churches. He later wrote to Titus, giving him instructions on how to establish these churches. Among these instructions was a strong exhortation to teach sound (healthy) doctrine. If God's people are to grow and be sound (healthy) in the faith, they must learn God's word - they must be sound (healthy) in the word. To be SOUND IN THE WORD, we must become more effective in our Bible reading.

The Role of God's Word

The Bible, the very word of God, is the primary means of revealing both the person and principles of God to us. For this unique, God breathed, book provides all that we need to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord; and to develop an intimate relationship with Him. As Paul told Timothy, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” - 2 TIM 3:16-17.

So, if we are to know our God and His ways, we must take time to read the Bible daily. We must search the Scripture to discover its doctrine (teachings) and its spiritual messages. Then, having uncovered God’s truth(s), we must meditate upon them that we might fully understand these truth(s). Finally, we must use these truth(s) in our daily lives as doers of the word; as those having God’s word written on our hearts; as those who are being changed from glory to glory into the image of Jesus Christ.

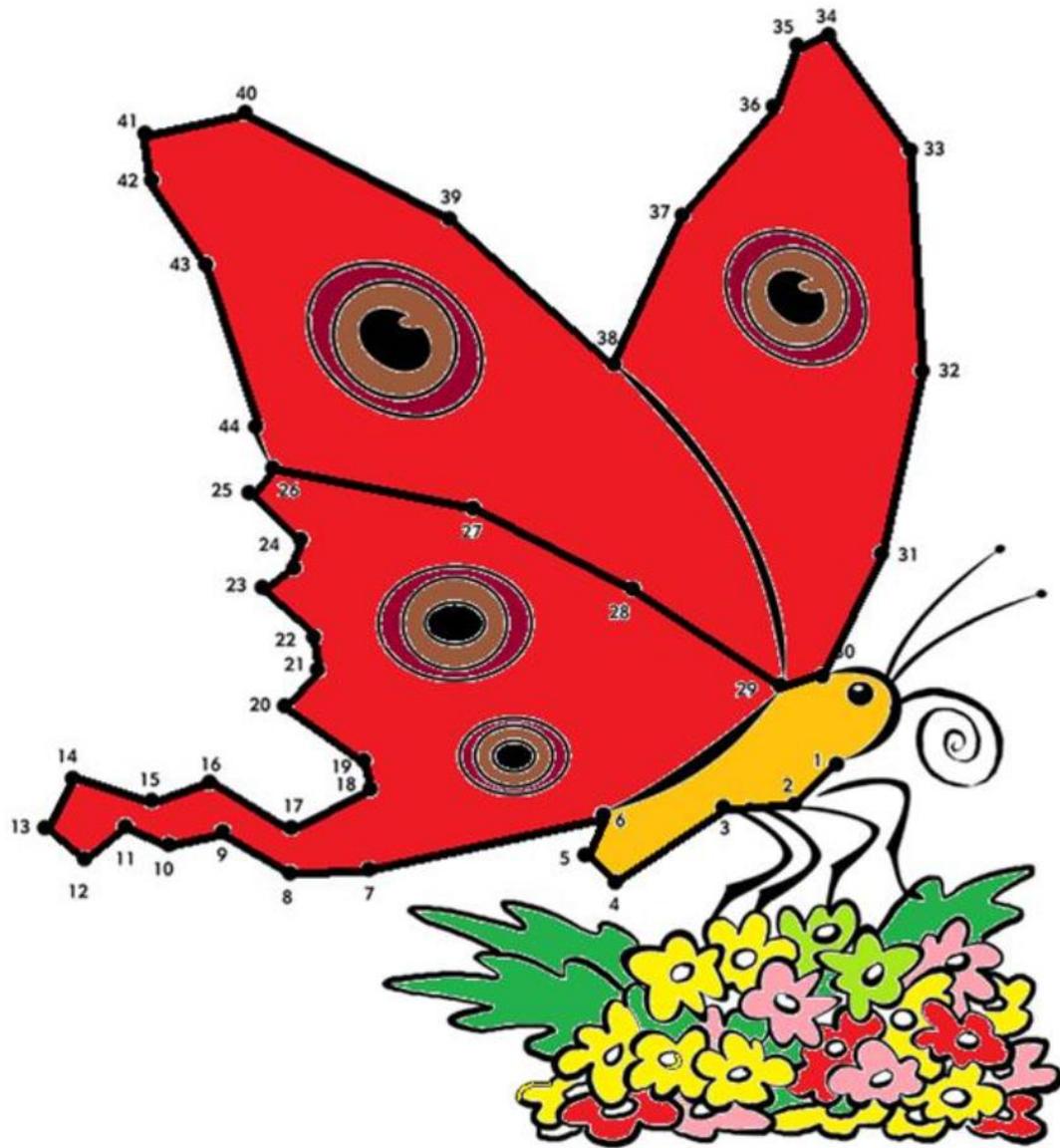
Seeing The Whole Picture

Since reading the Bible is critical to our spiritual health, we must develop sound reading habits. We must become good Bible detectives , who collect all the facts and then carefully assemble them so that the whole picture is clearly seen.

We must not be hasty and focus on certain words and phrases and miss the message of the Biblical passage before us. We must see the whole picture and be able to trace the flow-of-thought of the author. Consider the following “connect the dots” picture. What is portrayed in this picture?

Seeing The Whole Picture

Are those eyes that I see? And just what is that bug that seems to be there? We could go on guessing of course. But it is only when we connect the dots that we see what the author had in mind. When we connect the dots of our “connect the dots” picture, we see a ...



Seeing The Whole Picture

So, until we connected all the dots, we really didn't know for sure what the author had in mind.

Likewise, we must be able to connect the verses of a Biblical passage in order to understand the message being communicated. We must “Study to show ourselves approved, a workman that needeth not be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” - 2 Timothy 2:15

Structure Diagrams: A Visual Aid

The Structure Diagram is an effective tool in helping us to see the whole picture presented in a Bible passage. It lays out the text of a passage in a way that graphically portrays the author's intended meaning and flow of thought. It shows clearly the whole passage and how its individual parts are related.

Constructing a Structure Diagram

There are three (3) steps in constructing a structure diagram for a Biblical passage:

1. Break the text into paragraph segments - groups of verses that are dealing with the same subject (many of today's Bibles have done this for you).
2. Identify all the propositions in the paragraph segment.
3. Arrange the propositions to show their relationship

Identifying Propositions

A proposition is a statement or question that has a subject and a predicate. The subject or the predicate may, however, be implied. (This is like identifying the dots and numbers in a “connect the dots” picture)

The key to identifying the propositions in a verse is to look for the verb, the word(s) expressing the action or state of being.

Relating Propositions

Once we have identified the propositions in our Biblical passage, we must organize them in a way that allows their relationships to be easily seen. (this is like connecting the dots in a “connect the dots” picture). To organize the propositions, record them according to these guidelines:

1. Place each proposition, as well as any connecting words such as “for”, “but”, “and”, “therefore”, etc. on a separate line.
2. Place any independent (stand alone) proposition at the left margin.
3. Indent any supporting propositions and place them under the propositions they modify. (Note: place the supporting proposition above the one it modifies, if it appears first in the text).

Diagramming John 3:16

Normally, we make a diagram of one or more paragraphs; but that we might better understand the method, let's make a structure diagram for John 3:16 (KJV)

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

The Propositions of John 3:16

For God so loved the world,

that he gave his only begotten Son,

that whosoever believeth in him

should not perish,

but have everlasting life.

The Diagram of John 3:16

For (*Result/Reason/Explanation*)

God so loved the world

that he gave his only begotten Son

that whosoever believeth in him

should not perish

but (*Contrast*)

have everlasting life.

Note that every independent proposition is placed at the left margin; and that every supporting proposition is indented and lined up over/under the proposition that it modifies (over if the support proposition appears before the proposition that it modifies). This method allows us to see the main and the supportive ideas and how they relate. Also note that connecting words like **for**, **but**, **therefore**, etc., are placed on separate lines with parenthetical comments to explain their function.

Using a Structure Diagram

Having diagrammed our passage, we are now ready to examine it to uncover, understand, and use the truths revealed, looking for:

Emphasis

1. Main ideas
2. Supporting ideas

References

1. Scriptures quoted
2. Related scriptures

Relationships

1. Things that are alike or different
2. Things repeated

Applications (Best Places for action)

- | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. B lessings to enjoy | 6. L essons to learn |
| 2. E rrors to avoid | 7. A ctions to take |
| 3. S ins to confess | 8. C ommands to obey |
| 4. T houghts to ponder | 9. E xamples to follow |
| 5. P rayers to make | 10. S criptures to memorize |

Additional Analysis Activities

1. Identify the core expression that serves as the main idea or theme of the text.
2. Identify the time and place.
3. Identify the content of the text.
 - a. Identify the principles.
 - b. Identify the proper responses.
4. Explain the significance of the text in a summary narrative.
5. Look for applications in accord with 2 Timothy 3:16-17
 - a. Teachings
 - b. Reproofs
 - c. Correction
 - d. Instruction (training) in righteousness