Devotional Accountability:

Did probing the context of the passages give clearer understanding of the author’s intent?
Would you have interpreted any of the passages differently prior to your study?
Were there any perspectives or insights that were especially meaningful for you?

WORDS TO LOOK FOR

Words are the key to communication!

Wasn’t that insightful?
But it is amazing how much we communicate without actually paying close attention to the specific words that are being spoken. As a result, we often make wrong assumptions about what a person is saying simply because we didn’t listen carefully.

This is especially true when reading the Bible. We quickly read over “words” assuming we know what is being said, but often miss core truths because we don’t slow down and focus on the actual words the author chose to use. Keep in mind, we believe every word (in the original language and documents) was specifically inspired by God and therefore each word (not just the ideas) carries weight.

Sometimes it is the smallest words that give the greatest clarity when trying to study the Bible. In this session we want to look at just a few simple, common words that, if reflected on, could radically change how much you get out of the Bible.

The incredibly powerful, insightful words that we will look at are:

“But” (yet, however, etc.)
“And”
“Therefore” (since)
“So”
and “time” words such as “then”, “immediately”, “after”, etc.
“BUT”

What does value does the word “but” bring to a discussion?

The word “but” creates a contrast between two ideas or actions. Jesus often said, “You have heard it said…but I say to you…” He is setting a contrast between the popular perspectives of the day versus God’s perspective on the issue. Often in the Bible it will show a false belief and the relevant truth or it will differentiate between a sinful course of action and how someone chose to live righteously. By focussing on the contrast you will get a much clearer picture of what principle the author is trying to draw out.

Look at the following verses and discuss the power of the “but” in each case.

**Pr 11:24 (NIV)**
One person gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty.

In the above verse, the word “yet” is synonymous with the word “but”. Discuss the contrast created in each phrase.

How does each “but/yet” counter conventional wisdom?

Have you experienced this proverb to be true in your life?

**Pr 16:2 (NIV)**
All a person’s ways seem pure to them, but motives are weighed by the LORD.

How does the “but” create tension for us in this verse? How does it make us stop and reflect on our actions?

**Pr 15:1 (NIV)**
A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

Which response is usually our most natural response in moments of frustration?
How does the “but” help us to put things in proper perspective?

How effective are you at applying this proverb?

The word “but” is a very powerful tool for any author to use to create contrast. Whenever you see it in scripture, be sure to stop and consider what two concepts or actions are being compared and the resulting consequences. Simply slowing down to consider this one word will bring scripture to much greater clarity.

“AND”

The word “and” must seem like one of the most uninteresting and boring words on which one could focus. However, it is so vitally critical that we use it in almost every sentence – except this one. It combines two things or ideas together to create a complete picture for clearer understanding. I don’t recommend typing the word “and” into an online bible concordance…that’s just a bad idea (over 23,000 occurrences). Most concordances won’t even let you type it in, yet this is still a very powerful word of which to take notice.

**John 15:1-4 (NIV)**

*I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. 3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. 4 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.*

This is a passage that deals with the fact that God deeply desires for you to bear spiritual fruit in your life.

**What is the significance of the “and” in verse 1?**

The “and” adds excitement. Not only is Jesus the vine, but his Father is also the Gardener over the entire vineyard.

God is the ultimate caretaker and overseer of life and he has given Jesus as a gift to us, our source of life and spiritual growth. It is Jesus and the Father working together that produces a spiritual harvest in our lives; they are partners in the plan of salvation and kingdom growth. In other words, Jesus is not acting independently, but fulfilling the purposes of the Father to give us abundant, effective lives.

Bearing fruit is simply a sign that we are connected to Jesus the vine. When we are connected to Jesus, the Father will work to help us become increasingly fruitful.
What is the significance of the “and” in verse 4? How does it operate differently than in verse 1?

In verse one the word “and” brings two ideas together to work together, in verse four however, the word “and” creates a “condition” that must be met. Jesus will remain in us as long as we remain in him. We can only bear fruit when we are focussed on our relationship with Jesus and allow his life to flow through us. If we try to bear fruit apart from the working of Jesus in and through our lives, we will be unproductive. We will do a lot of business, but bear no lasting fruit.

What are some ways you’ve tried to bear fruit apart from a reliance on Christ?

People have been productive apart from Jesus in building businesses, charities, etc. What do you think Jesus would want to say to them about the fruit they are bearing?

The word “and” can create different effects depending on how it is used. Simply stopping to consider how the word is being used and “why” can bring greater understanding and impact.

“THEREFORE”

There is an old and often repeated cliché that says, “Whenever you see a ‘therefore’, look to see what it is there for.” As tacky as it sounds, it is very good and practical advice. The word “therefore” is often used to move us from a theological truth or principle - to a deeper understanding or life change. Whenever you see a “therefore” in scripture, you know that some significant point has just been made and you are about to be presented with an implication or practical application.

Before simply reading the implication or practical application it is usually good to know the rationale behind it. It means backtracking through the previous few paragraphs or sometimes even chapters, depending on how long the teaching point is to understand the initial argument.

Example: Turn to Romans 12:1 in your bibles.

Romans 12:1 starts with the word “therefore”.

It divides the book of Romans into two sections:

- Chapters 1-11 The theological points Paul wants to teach
- Chapters 12-16 The practical application of those truths to our lives

One frustrating note: Scholars in the 1500’s decided to place chapter and verse divisions in the New Testament to make it easier to find your way around - wonderful concept, but sometimes they placed those divisions in absolutely horrendous places. The word “therefore” draws this to dramatic revelation, as often the word is placed at the beginning of a new chapter indicating a break from what was previously said, instead of concluding the idea presented before it.
Philippians 4:1 is a perfect example of this:

**Philippians 4:1 (NIV)**
Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!

Then it moves on to a completely different theme and phase of Paul’s letter in verse 2. This verse should be the closing statement of chapter 3.

**Other examples:**
- Rom 2:1; 5:1; 8:1; 12:1;
- 2Cor 4:1
- Eph 5:1
- Heb 2:1; 4:1; 6:1; 12:1
- 1Pt 2:1; 4:1

When studying the Bible, you will want to quickly learn to look beyond the artificial structure created by the chapter and verse divisions.

**Hebrews 2:1-4 (NIV)**
We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. 2 For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, 3 how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. 4 God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

What is it that they have just heard that should cause them not to drift away?
It is obviously referring to the truths just taught in chapter 1.

**What is taught in chapter 1?**

God has now revealed himself in the most dramatic and powerful way in all history –through Jesus Christ.

- Jesus is superior to any prophet
- Jesus is superior to any angel and is served by angels
- Jesus is the creator of all
- Jesus is the very presence of God himself in human form
- Jesus is to receive worship
- Jesus sits on the throne over his eternal kingdom
- Jesus will destroy all his enemies’ authority
In light of these truths about the person of Jesus as expressed in chapter 1, how should we respond according to 2:1-4?

We should pay more careful attention to those truths.
We should not ignore the salvation offered to us through Jesus Christ.
We should embrace faith allowing it to impact our lives in every say so that we do come under judgment.

The “therefore” sets the stage for you to see the effect that the truth should have on your life. If you don’t see the correlation, you will miss the full spiritual impact of the passage.

Remember: TRUTH therefore DEEPER INSIGHT or PRACTICAL APPLICATION

“SO THAT”

The words “so that” are used to say one thing was done in order to make another thing possible. Whenever you see these words it is a clue to stop and take notice of what was initially done in order to understand the subsequent action. To miss the first part makes it difficult to understand the rationale for what follows.

Matthew 26:59-60 (NIV)
The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward.

What does the “so that” reveal about the motives of the Sanhedrin?
The Sanhedrin simply wanted Jesus dead. All their actions were driven by this one point and justice was not going to interfere. The desperate need to get rid of Jesus caused them to pervert justice and embrace evil actions.

Do you sometimes let the end justify the means? Can you provide any examples of this?

Mark 11:25 (NIV)
And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.

Which action prepares the way for the next action?
Our forgiving others paves the way for us to receive forgiveness from God.
How are these two actions related?
How can you be willing to receive grace but not give it yourself?
If we are unable to forgive others, but are willing to receive forgiveness from God, we are essentially saying their sin against us is more serious than our sin against our Father. God responds by saying that perspective reveals you do not yet understand the severity of your own sin, you are not truly repentant, and you do not understand the nature of grace.

Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you wanted to receive God’s forgiveness, but were unwilling to forgive someone else for how they wronged you? What does the “so that” speak into that situation?
God’s forgiveness can only be extended when we choose to extend forgiveness to others.

“TIME WORDS” (Then, immediately, soon after, the next day, etc)

Time words are words that indicate a significant chronological flow to a story. If you gloss over these words, you are missing a point or context the author wants to accentuate. Sometimes it is important to stop and reflect on what just happened and how that is related to what is coming next. The key here is in the flow, or the cause and effect sequence.

Mark 6:45-46 (NIV)
Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. 46 After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray.

Look in your Bibles and discover what stories preceded this verse.
Mk 6:47-52 Jesus needs alone time to rest, grieve and pray.

What story follows next?
Mk 6:47-52 Jesus walks on the water

Mark links the story of feeding the five thousand to Jesus walking on the water through the verses below.

Mark 6:51-52 (NIV)
Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed, 52 for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.
Mark is telling us the reason the disciples were completely amazed was because they did not understand about the loaves. These are not two separate stories – the feeding of the 5000 and Jesus walking on the water. They are one story with two parts, to communicate a point about Jesus.

What point is Mark making when he says they did understand about the loaves?
The disciples were constantly enthralled by the miracles Jesus performed, but they could never then make the transition to think about the nature of the miracle performer himself. They were more focused on what Jesus did than who Jesus was. Had they spent time thinking about the implications of who Jesus was when he multiplied the loaves and fish, they would not have been terrified when they saw him walking on the water. Despite all the miracles Jesus performed, people’s hearts remained blinded to who he was.

If you had missed the “immediately” in the passage, you might never have kept reading on to see how the story was meant to continue.

How would the impact of the story be much more limited if Mark had not indicated a time perspective in the narrative?

Timing, and the flow of a story often carry a key to thoroughly understanding the point of the story. If any timing is indicated in a story, there is a specific reason that author had for including it. Be sure to stop and consider the flow of events to catch the big picture.

START TO TAKE SPECIAL NOTE OF THE LITTLE WORDS THAT SO MANY PEOPLE HAVE TRAINED THEMSELVES NOT TO SEE!
Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. James 1:22 (NIV)

**DAY 1**

In this passage we want to look at the significance of the word “but”.

**Read Numbers 13:26 – 14:4**

Underline the two occurrences of the word “but” in this passage.

The word “but” always introduces a tension. What is the tension raised between vs. 27 and vs. 28?

Have you encountered this type of tension where blessing is there in front of you, but the obstacles to receiving it appear too big?

Has God ever called you to a task, but it seemed too daunting to consider?

What is the tension raised by the “but” in vs. 31?

Why does Caleb say go ahead despite the obstacles? Why do the others say they cannot go into the land?

The word “but” here makes all the difference between two potential outcomes. The word “but” forces us to choose sides and to make a decision.

God wants me to do….
BUT I don’t think I can do it.

What do you do? Allow God to lead or allow fear to dictate and control your life.

The result of the Israelites’ distrust and rebellion against God’s purposes meant they missed out on his blessing and every one of them would die in the desert except Joshua and Caleb.

Are there similar tensions that you are faced with where God is directing you one way BUT you are feeling pressured in another?
Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. James 1:22 (NIV)

DAY 2

In this passage we want to look at the significance of the word “and”.

Psalms 37:3-4 (NIV)
Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.

4 Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.

There word “and” creates a relationship between two ideas.

Since this is a short passage we encourage you to spend more time reflecting on everything you can learn from the “and” connectors here.

What are the implications of the word “and” in the first phrase?

What is the relationship between “trusting God” and “doing good”?

How is one rooted in the other?

What are the implications of the word “and” in the second phrase?

What does it mean to “dwell in the land” and to enjoy safe pasture?

What is the relationship between this phrase and the first phrase?

In vs. 4 the word “and” creates a “condition”.

What is the condition?

How are the two ideas in vs. 4 related?

What is the implication for life if we are not enjoying God?

The word “and” creates many implications in these verses. Life is usually not isolated – it is deeply connected and influenced by many things. Every time you see the word “and” you are combining influences that need to be understood together to get the big picture.

Scriptural distortion often occurs when we take one idea alone without the other ideas that need to accompany it.
Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. James 1:22 (NIV)

DAY 3

In this passage we want to look at the significance of the word “therefore”.

Remember, whenever you see a “therefore” look to see what it is there for.

Read Philippians 4:1

If you just read Philippians 4:1, how much benefit is it going to be for you in standing firm?

This is an example of a horrendous misplacing of a chapter break.

What is Paul referring back to when he says, “therefore”?

Read Philippians 3:12-21

Make of list of things that Paul could be referring to when he says, “that is how you should stand firm.”

Are you doing these things in order to stand firm?

Is there something Paul mentions here that reveals to you that you may be in danger of slipping?

You may also want to take note of the words “but” and “and” in this passage. They carry significant weight in helping you understand what Paul wants to communicate. Why not underline them and think through their implications?

So, in light of what you’ve just read, what do you need to do this week to stand firm?
Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. James 1:22 (NIV)

DAY 4

In this passage we want to look at the significance of the words “so that”.

Luke 1:1-4 (NIV)
Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

How does the “so that” make a dramatic punch to Luke’s gospel?

What action is undertaken and what is the implication for Theophilus?

If that is the implication for Theophilus, what implication should it have for you?

How might it affect how Luke decides to lay out his gospel differently than how the other gospels are laid out?

The next time you read through the book of Luke, you will want to take special note of the “orderly” account so that, it might give you a greater sense of confidence in what you are reading.
Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. James 1:22 (NIV)

**DAY 5**

In this passage we want to look at the significance of “time” words.

Mark 1:35 (NIV)

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.

What is significant about the timing of this verse?

What happened in vs. 32-34 that makes this morning so striking?

How emotionally, physically, and spiritually exhausted do you think Jesus must have been?

If you had just had an evening like the previous evening, what would you have prioritized the next morning? Sleep?

Why was Jesus motivated to get up so early after such a long day?

When we get busy, how does that typically affect our time with God?

When Jesus got busy, how did it affect his time with God?

By focussing on the timeline as Mark presents it, we can gain much deeper insight into the person of Jesus and his relationship with the Father.