



INTERNATIONAL LEADERSHIP TRAINING INSTITUTE

Going into all the world with the whole Word, making God's people whole

International Office: PO Box 84, Yannawa, Bangkok 10120 Thailand

U.S.A. Office: PO Box 934273 - Margate, Florida 33093-4273

Toll Free in the U.S.A. and Canada: 1-800-961-0345

From All Other Countries: (66) 81-960-5350

Website: www.ilti.org • E-mail: info@ilti.org

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ILTI-TOT Program Launched

This year, after several years of development, trial presentations and pilot projects, we launched our ILTI-TOT [*Training of Teachers*] program entitled "How to Study, and Understand, the Bible." This program is five fully loaded days of concentrated skills training, designed to provide much needed help to Christian leaders around the world.

We introduced it in Myanmar earlier this year (March 2011) by conducting a condensed presentation to a group of Baptist and Assembly of God pastors there. Most recently we conducted two 5-day intensive leadership training workshops in Kenya, where the pastors responded with open hearts and minds, quickly picking up what was being taught, and applying it to current issues and doctrines within their churches.

Anatomy of the ILTI-TOT Program - How to Study and Understand the Bible

The program's goal

The goal of this program is to give pastors and other Christian leaders the knowledge, skills, and experience needed so they may with all confidence and competence conduct their own studies of the Bible to find answers they need for ministry.

Most Bible schools today do not teach students how to turn to the Bible to find their own answers. Instead colleges and seminaries expound on the answers found in the past by other scholars. Teachers teach the dogma and doctrines of their particular branch of Christianity. Students study Christian history and review all the great scholarly debates which have formed our beliefs. Instructors instruct students how to defend the tenets of the faith, (apologetics) or help them acquire skills they need to be effective ministers.

Some schools do teach classes in the basic theories of biblical interpretation (hermeneutics and exegesis.) But fall short by not giving students the practical experience nor the skills they need to apply those theories. Sadly most Christian leaders have never been taught, instructed, or schooled with the basic skills they need to systematically study and understand the Bible itself. The simple fact is that many ministers never acquire the knowledge, nor the abilities needed to use the Bible as their primary source and tool for everyday ministry.

Our program provides that training, knowledge, and experience. The ILTI-TOT program provides 5 days of intensive, in-depth, "hands on" training. Using a pragmatic step-by-step approach, ministers learn principles and develop skills which enable them to comprehend and understand scripture correctly. In these workshops pastors learn through experience, acquiring and then immediately using each precept and skill.

Once a new precept, or skill is introduced, participants are then challenged to use it to correctly interpret the meaning (the one God had when He had the author write it) of a passage or set of passages. As the training progresses and they learn more skills and precepts, the class combines them to clarify and understand more complex and difficult passages.

This approach, learning through use, not only gives leaders the knowledge and skills they need to interpret Scripture, but also provides the experience necessary to refine, and implant those skills deep within. As these concepts, principles, precepts and skills become firmly ingrained in them, their confidence in their own ability increases, and they begin applying them with ease.

After the five days of training is complete, leaders have learned and practiced all the basic skills necessary to understand the Bible. However, this is only the beginning. If what they learned is to have any lasting affect they must be faithful and practice their skills on a regular basis. It is only through discipline and hard work that these gifts will mature. Our prayer is that the Holy Spirit gives them understanding and that they will remain faithful to continue refining their abilities by using these gifts

How the ILTI-TOT Program works

The first two days are spent learning precepts and skills. As each principle is introduced, it is immediately re-enforced by having the class apply that principle to passages where its application is needed to fully understand them. By the end of the second day, leaders have been acquainted with and practiced using all the basic skills and precepts of biblical interpretation. They will then spend the next three days in practicum workshops becoming familiar and comfortable using them.

Days One & Two - The first morning we establish common ground by laying out the foundational precepts on which our course is built. Concept by concept we discuss each and answer any questions they have. Once we have laid the groundwork for the course, and they understand the precepts on which the program is built, we begin introducing principles of interpretation.

Context, Context, Context

Of all the skills taught the most important set of skills are those used for studying context. The most common errors that people make when interpreting passages, come from simply not reading a passage in its context. This usually happens when we think we already know what a verse means and do not read surrounding verses to see if they match our understanding.

Context - **con** means *with* and **text** means *writing* so context is anything that goes with what is written

In this section we have the ministers read and then discuss passages whose common interpretation is questionable. We ask them what they have heard these passages mean? Then lead them through the process of finding their true meaning by reading the verses surrounding them. They learn to ask themselves questions like: Who was talking? Whom were they talking to? What were the circumstances at the time it was said? What was the topic being discussed? Why was it said to those people at that time? Only as they answer these and other questions does the true meaning of the passages become fully apparent.

Agreement of Scripture

After the group has learned to use context to uncover the true meaning of several passages we introduce the next set of skills based on the precepts that '*Scripture agrees with Scripture*' and '*Any important teaching of Scripture will be found in more than one passage.*' From those precepts we draw the principles that '*We must use Scripture to interpret Scripture.*' And '*We can form no doctrine based solely on the interpretation of one passage.*'

Taking those passages, the group searches the Bible for other passages which either corroborate and confirms their findings, or contradict and negates them. If their interpretation of the passages they previously studied is correct, they should easily be able to locate the same truth, teaching, doctrine, or concept somewhere else in the Bible. As they locate supporting passages, we study each in its context to verify that it too has a similar meaning.

Throughout the first two days as new skills are introduced, and pastors mentally grasp each precept and learn to apply principles of interpretation, they automatically start applying what they are learning to doctrines, passages or teachings which have troubled them. They then ask how that skill, precept, or principle could be used to help understand them.

We then guide them, using what they are learning, to take a fresh look at the teaching or passage of Scripture. When their findings agree with what they had been taught, their belief and trust in that teaching is strengthened. That belief becomes firmly rooted inside them not because they believe what was taught but because they have confirmed it. When their findings disagree or disprove the doctrine or the interpretation of a passage that had been taught, they can dismiss it, not because they have an uneasy feeling about it, or do not like it, but because they know it is false.

Promises & Commands

After the class has gotten to know the basic precepts and have practiced their skills, we have them apply what they have learned toward understanding God's promises and His commands. They quickly discover that most false doctrines, heresies, misapplications of God's commands or His promises, come from taking passages either out of context, or not understanding the conditions, requirements or limitations that God put on them.

Leaders learn that with patience and study they can know whether any promise or a command in the Bible applies to them. They do this by studying each passage containing the promise or command in its context while asking themselves questions

such as; To whom is the promise or command given, and did it apply only to them? Was this promise/command connected to a certain place or for a select period of time? What are the circumstances in which it applies? Are there any conditions for His promise/command? What are its qualifications for fulfillment? Why is God commanding/promising this?

For more on Commands and Promises go to our website at www.ilti.org or send us a request asking us to send a copy of our Newsletter of January 2010 entitled "How to Read and Understand the Bible."

Over the first two days of training much of what we teach is new to the leaders. It starts slowly, but as each thing falls into place the leaders begin to change. Usually by the end of the second day, and always by the end of the third day, there is a transformation which takes place; their eyes of understanding have been opened and they are excited about what they see.

It is as if someone had given them a key so that they could go to dimly lit places, unlock and throw open the shutters allowing light to pour through the window and illuminate the room. Things that seemed clear before suddenly take on a whole new crispness and clarity. What seemed dull and murky take on vibrant rich colors.

"Practice is the best of all instructors" (Publilius Syrus - first century BC)

Day Three - The third day is essential for solidifying this transformation. It is the crucial step in taking all that they have learned from being merely knowledge and theory in the brain to being a part of their thinking process. It is only through frequent use that skills transition from being knowledge to being a part of us.

On day three the pastors use everything they have learned the first two days by conducting a systematic study on a major topic which of special interest to them. The whole day is dedicated to studying all that the bible says on that topic, applying each of the principles of interpretation and employing all their new skills in order to fully understand it. In these interactive workshops pastors closely examine and analyze passages, doctrines and topics that are of particular interest to their group.

At this point we act more as facilitators than as teachers, suggesting which principle, precept, or skill might be applied at various times. First we help them collect and gather all relevant passages from both the Old Testament and New Testament. Then as a group we conduct an in-depth study of each passage and its surrounding context. As we do, we find that the Bible often interlinks topics. Sometimes one topic depends on another, or one is the effect or result of another etc. When this is the case, the group then needs to study all the passages related to the other topic too. *Only by fully understanding both topics can you truly understand either.*

By the day's end they will have adjusted their beliefs so that they match Scripture and will understand what the Bible does and does not teach on that topic. They no longer will believe simply because others taught them. From that time onward whenever someone asks a question about that topic, they can answer with the strength of belief that only comes from having made conclusions based on doing their own thorough and complete study.

Days Four & Five

As day three comes to a close, pastors have spent a long arduous day studying one topic. But the reward is great. For many this is the first time in their Christian life that they have ever studied God's Word to such depths. Not only had they been able to use concepts that just a few days before had seemed difficult but they had reached their own conclusions based on their use. In our experience the Pastors are exhilarated at this point. They have new abilities and the confidence to use them.

We tell the pastors that we will let them choose what we will study on the fourth and fifth day. Through the night they think of passages which trouble them, doctrines they question, and teachings they wonder about. By morning they come to class ready to study, ready to find answers. The next two days are spent using all that they have learned. We lead, moderate and facilitate as the leaders themselves determine which passages should be investigated, what doctrines should be examined, and which teachings should be questioned.

After five days of intensive training in our TOT program, the pastors know that to fully understanding God's Word is not an easy job. They also know that with their new skills comes an extra level of accountability. There can no longer be any lax teaching. They can only teach once they have carefully studied the scripture to know what they want to teach is correct.

The skills they have learned are just a start. If they want to be God's workmen who have no need to be ashamed, and who can present themselves to Him as workers who handle God's word correctly (2 Timothy 2:15) they must continue refining, and developing their skills. As leaders, they need to be willing and faithful to take all the time required to thoroughly and systematically study His word.

By examining case studies from new or unusually teachings being taught in churches today, participants learn to;

1. evaluate doctrines and teachings for biblical accuracy
2. examine the validity of their own beliefs
3. teach others how to find the truth in Scripture

Part of Paul's instruction to Timothy whom he appointed pastor at the church in Ephesus
"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth." 2 Timothy 2:15

In Christ, I remain, His servant and yours,

Doug Heil