

#3 How to Study the Bible for Growth

Purpose of Living on Mission: Equip students to walk by faith, communicate their faith, and multiply their faith. Top 20 things to help you not just survive but thrive in your faith for a lifetime!

Goal of Seminar: How does studying the Bible correctly help us grow in our faith? Why is the Word so essential to our growth? What is hermeneutics and why is it important? Teach students to how to study a passage through inductive study:

Observation, Interpretation and Application. Observation in context, top-down interpretation, and personal application and action points are essential for growth. Help make online resources easier to navigate.

HOOK: Why is studying the Bible essential to living on mission?

1) THE VALUE OF STUDYING THE BIBLE ON OUR OWN

ILLUSTRATIONS:

Add your own thoughts and illustrations in this column.

What does God say about His Word?

Read **2 Timothy 3:16-17**

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

Read **Hebrews 4:12**

12 For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

What is wrong with this statement?

“This is what the passage is saying to me...”

The Bible has meaning - what the author intended the meaning to be - not what we want or feel like it means. It's important to know the author (his personality, background, style), the original audience (who was the writing intended for, what was their story and needs), and the purpose of the text (what, when, where, why) in order to study the Bible well and interpret it correctly.

2) GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF BIBLE STUDY

Objective: To understand the author's intended meaning and apply it in life-changing ways through Observation, Interpretation, Application.

OBSERVATION

1) Answer these 6 Questions:

Who? characters, significant meanings, pronoun references

What? context, cultural issues

When? “before,” “formerly,” “now,” “after”

Where? cities, countries, geography, “in,” “at”

Why? purpose, rationale, reason

How? directives, adverbs, importance of actions

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2) Look for these 6 Structural Clues:

Repetition- repeated words and phrases, is it coincidence or significant?

Compare & Contrast- similes, metaphors, “but,” “however,” “instead”

Commands- application, positive principles behind negative commands

Questions- explicit or implicit answers, rhetorical questions

Cause & Effect- “in order that,” “if...then,” “for this reason”

Connectives- relationship between two thoughts, “finally,” “therefore,” “also”

Why is close observation of the text so important?

The goal for Observation is to search the text exhaustively for clues and to take notice of what it is telling us. Without taking the necessary time to observe carefully, we will be unable to interpret with accuracy.

INTERPRETATION

Hermeneutics - Referred specifically to the sacred Scriptures, the science of interpretation is generally known as hermeneutics, while the practical application of the principles of this science is exegesis. In nearly all cases, interpretation has in mind the thoughts of another, and then, further, these thoughts expressed in another language than that of the interpreter.

A person has interpreted the thoughts of another when he has in his own mind a correct reproduction or photograph of the thought as it was conceived in the mind of the original writer or speaker. It is accordingly a purely reproductive process, involving no originality of thought on the part of the interpreter. The moment the Bible student has in his own mind what was in the mind of the author or authors of the Biblical books when these were written, he has interpreted the thought of the Scriptures. (“Interpretation” from International Standard Bible Encyclopedia)

Why is interpretation not an “original” process?

1) **Context Analysis:** Grasp the “Big Picture.” Consider: Genre, Historical Background, Context

a. **Genres:** Knowing the genre is key to understanding and interpreting.

Historical narrative- might not directly teach doctrine; descriptive and not prescriptive; do not give all the details but focus on what’s important

Law- As a believer in Christ we are no longer part of the Mosaic covenant; law was fulfilled in Christ; look at the law as revelatory, not regulatory (points toward Christ); see holiness of God; there is still truth and principles about righteous living

Prophetic- God speaking directly through men, warn of consequences to behavior, give God’s promises (coming Messiah)

Poetic- rhyme, imagery, hyperbole

Wisdom- Biblical “wisdom” might be defined as “skill in the art of godly living; that orientation which allows one to live in harmonious accord with God’s ordering of the world.”

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Gospels- Emphasized the qualities, characteristics of a person through compiling stories, sayings, teachings, events (not a day-by-day account of Jesus' life, see John 21:25); not chronological, but instead develop a theme (Matthew=Jews, Mark=Romans)

Epistles- letters to specific churches or people within churches; prescriptive as recognized in the context of the letter

Apocalyptic- End times; has yet to pass; the final judgment; second coming of Christ

How does knowing the genre impact interpretation?

b. **Context:** Identify the literary, historical and redemptive contexts of the text.

Literary- Why is this passage *here* and not elsewhere? How does it build on the previous verse and prepare for the next verse?

Historical- What is going on at the time with the people and place?

Redemptive- How does this point towards the life, death, and resurrection of Christ?

2) **Content Analysis:** Determine the meaning of the passage in its original setting with special attention to the author's "Big Idea." Analyze the structure, Examine grammar, Compare translations, Define Key Words, Study the historical-cultural background

a. Top-Down Interpretation

Find meaning through interpreting top-down... not the other way around.

Genre

"Big Idea" (of the unit of thought)

Paragraph

Sentence

Word

Draw the "Circles Diagram." (Word in the center, and concentric circles with Genre as the outermost circle) Top-Down Interpretation means that we identify the genre first and interpret the "word" last. Often people look at a verse or a word in a verse and come up with an erroneous meaning, without doing all the hard work of interpreting the text well.

3) **Correlation:** Evaluate your interpretation in light of the whole Bible. Do other passages speak to this topic? Do they temper or confirm your understanding of this passage? How have other Bible scholars interpreted this passage?

4) **Conclusion:** Describe the "Big Idea" along with sub-points, and paraphrase the passage in your own words.

The goal for Interpretation is to describe the author's "Big Idea." The author had a purpose and the text has meaning - we want to understand what the author was communicating to his audience when the text was written thousands of years ago.

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It's one thing to closely observe the text and even interpret the text according to the author's original Big Idea - but if we leave it at that, we've missed the main point of why we study the Scriptures. The goal of studying the Bible is for our spiritual nourishment and growth! We must apply it to our lives!

APPLICATION

- 1) **Understanding Original Meaning:** Step into their world, What is the author's intended meaning? What is the historical-cultural context? What did it mean to the recipients?
- 2) **Identify Timeless Principles:** Bridge the historical-cultural context, Continuity: God's character and purpose do not change--people are people. There are timeless principles about God, me, and situations. Discontinuity: We are in a different culture, some historical-cultural adjustments may be necessary. Be careful to not disregard the timeless principles with this mindset.
- 3) **Decide on a Personal Application:** How can I apply the timeless principle to my life? Is there a promise to claim? Is there an example for me to follow? Is there a command to obey? Is there a sin to avoid? What does this passage say about God, His plan or His people? What specific changes do I want to make 1) in my heart? 2) in my mind? 3) in my actions? How can I carry out these changes? Who can help me? Who can hold me accountable?

Two great questions to answer for gospel application:

- What does this passage say about my spiritual brokenness and the need for the redemptive work of Jesus Christ?
- How does this passage point me to Christ and the "good news" of the gospel?

3) PRACTICE THESE PRINCIPLES

Let's practice these skills on a passage. Read **Matthew 18:20**

20 For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them."

What is the genre of the passage? Gospel

Given the genre, what interpretive principles should we keep in mind?

develops themes; not chronological; about a person; main ideas and not necessarily every word of every conversation

What is the literary context of the passage? What is the unit of thought? In other words, which verses contain a unified thought or idea? vv. 15-20

15 "If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. **16** But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' **17** If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

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18 “Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. **19** “Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. **20** For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”

What has Jesus been talking about prior to verse 20? someone sinning against their brother

What is the main idea within this unit of thought? conflict

Why is Jesus addressing the subject? talking about the Kingdom of God; also the authority of God in believers' lives

What is the historical context of the passage?

view of the kingdom of God in the eyes of disciples and people of that time compared to the kingdom Jesus came to bring

What do we know about Matthew's audience for his book? mainly Jews

Is there any other important context to keep in mind? In other words, is Jesus referring to something that the audience would already know about?

2 or 3 witnesses needed to make a claim (Deuteronomy 17:6)

In light of the context, how do we understand Jesus' teaching in verse 20?

God's authority in confrontation (based on reliable witness)

Is this different from your previous understanding of the passage?

Are there issues today that would be similar to the issue involved in the passage?

From this passage, what do we learn that will help us to act biblically in when facing similar issues?

Online Resources for Bible Study Help

www.BibleGateway.com

www.BlueLetterBible.com

www.esvonline.org

Helpful Books

Bible Commentaries & Dictionaries

How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth, Fee and Stuart