

TNT

Dig and Discover

Hermeneutical

Principles



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TNT Dig and Discover Hermeneutical Principles

published by

Leadership Resources International
12575 S. Ridgeland Ave.
Palos Heights, IL 60463
United States of America

www.leadershipresources.org

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Welcome!

You're holding a booklet that contains all of the "Dig and Discover" hermeneutical principles taught by Leadership Resources International as part of TNT (Training National Trainers), a training program designed to "encourage and equip pastors around the world to teach God's Word with God's heart."

Even though this booklet is designed to explain hermeneutical principles, what we desire for you to understand more than hermeneutical principles is Scripture itself. Remember that hermeneutical principles are simply tools. We explain them only to help you better read, study, and understand the message of God's Word.

And as you study God's Word, keep in mind what the last Dig and Discover principle explains: that the ultimate purpose and goal of studying the Bible is not knowledge, but worship. Our desire is not simply for your mind to be filled with information about the Bible. Instead, our prayer is that your heart would be transformed through its message by the Holy Spirit and would overflow in worship as you come to know God more through the person of Jesus Christ.

May God indeed do this in your heart. May He bless your study of His Word and cause you to love Him more each day and live out His Word in thankful, trusting obedience – all in praise and glory and honor to Him.

Contents

Beneath the Surface of Expository Preaching	7
Staying on the Line	8
Text and Framework	9
The Basics of Inductive Bible Study	10
Asking Good Questions	11
Genre	12
The Egg Illustration	13
The Egg Yolk – The Text and Its Literary Context	14
The Egg White – The Historical Context	15
The Egg Shell – The Biblical Context	16
Traveling Instructions	17
Finding the Meaning of Important Words and Phrases	18
Structure	19
Getting the Big Idea	20
Finding the Big Idea of a Book	21
Biblical Theology	22
Christ – The Focus and Fulfillment of Scripture	23
Tracing Biblical Themes	24
Preaching from the Old Testament Looking Forward to Christ and the New Testament	25
Preaching from the New Testament Looking Back to the Old Testament	26
From Text to Sermon	27
From Text to Life	28
Glorify God and Enjoy Him Forever	29

Beneath the Surface of Expository Preaching

Expository preaching is supported by four convictions:

God has spoken. (This is our authority.)

- From the beginning of the Bible (Genesis 1:3), we see that God speaks and His word is powerful and life-giving.
- At the end of the Bible (Revelation 21:2-4), we see that a word from God ushers in the culmination of history.
- The Bible contrasts God, who is all-powerful, with idols that cannot speak or do anything (Psalm 115:3-8).
- Ultimately, God has spoken to us by His Son (Hebrews 1:1-2), the Word made flesh (John 1:14-18).
- From beginning (Genesis 1) to end (Revelation 21-22), our faith is rooted in a God who speaks.

It is written. (This is our message.)

- Because God has spoken, there was something worth writing down. In Scripture, God's words are revealed and preserved.
- Because God's Word is written, God's revelation was fixed or settled at a particular time. This makes His Word a point of reference that reveals who He is and His purpose and plan for all time.¹
- The fact that God's Word is in written form reveals that when God spoke, He had two audiences in mind – the generation that was present and future generations.²

Preach the Word. (This is our mandate.)

- God's Word is not simply a set of facts about God, it is God proclaiming to us who He is and how we might have a relationship with Him.
- Our task is to give voice to what God has written down and preserved. It is to proclaim what He is proclaiming.
- In Scripture, those who spoke for God spoke the words, the message, that He gave them, ultimately in and about Jesus Christ. Their authority rested in receiving from God the task of proclaiming His message.
- The charge in 2 Timothy 4:2 is to "preach the word." The essential thing in ministry, the necessary thing for the health of the church, is to proclaim the Word of God.

His Word brings life. (This is our hope.)

- God fed His people with manna so they would know "that man does not live by bread alone, but . . . by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD" (Deuteronomy 8:3). He said they would live if they loved Him, trusted Him, and obeyed His Word (Deuteronomy 30:15-20).
- Jesus, in the wilderness, stood against temptation with that same truth, that "man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). He knew and believed that God's Word brings about true life and that the only way to experience that life is to trust in and obey God's Word.

¹ Peter Adam, *Speaking God's Words* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 27.

² *ibid.*

Staying on the Line*

What does it mean to “stay on the line”?

- Staying on the line illustrates the task of the teacher or preacher to discover what God has actually said in His Word and to preach or teach nothing more and nothing less.
- The line itself represents what God actually says in His Word:

_____ God’s Word

- To go above the line means to add something that is not really there – to say more than what God’s Word says. Going above the line means to add something that God did not say. It leads to error, often in the form of legalism.
 - To fall below the line means to leave something out that is there – to not be wholly true and faithful to what God’s Word is saying. It leaves something out of the truth of what God says and often leads to liberalism.
 - Going above and below the line may be compared to the promise a witness in an American court must make: “I promise to tell the truth, the whole truth [not to go below the line], and nothing but the truth [not to go above the line].”
 - The task of the preacher or teacher of God’s Word is to discover and stick to the line of God’s Word. He is not to go above it, saying more than God said, nor is he to go below it, saying less than God said.
- ▶ What does staying on the line involve?
- 1) Carefully discerning and understanding what God’s Word actually says.
 - 2) Communicating it faithfully in our teaching and preaching and living.

The Importance of Staying on the Line

- ▶ The Nature of God’s Word
- From the very beginning, in Genesis 1, we find that God’s words are beyond compare. From there, and through the rest of the Bible, we see that His word is powerful, life-giving, good, and certain.
- ▶ Our Task as Preachers and Teachers
- We have an awesome privilege and responsibility to preach and teach God’s words – and not our own.
 - Like Timothy, we have been charged with a sacred duty: to preach the Word (2 Timothy 4:2)! We must be faithful to what God has said.
 - We want people to hear God’s voice rather than our own – His truth rather than man’s opinion and ideas.
- ▶ What does staying on the line require?
- A commitment to God’s Word
 - Diligence and care in handling it and living it out faithfully

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Text and Framework*

The Principle: “We must let the Bible shape our frameworks rather than letting our frameworks shape our ‘interpretations’ of the Bible.”³

What do we mean by “text” and “framework”?

- ▶ The **text** is any passage from the Bible that we might study and preach or teach.
- ▶ A **framework** is our basic way of thinking. It affects how we read and understand the text.

More on “What is a Framework?”

- A framework is a person’s basic way of thinking. It is the underlying thought structure that shapes his understanding about everything. It organizes all of his thoughts and holds them all together.
- Everyone has a framework. It develops over time by our parents’ teaching, our education, culture, personal experience, and our place in history.
- During our lives we encounter new information. We have to figure out how it fits in with our previous understanding of things. In the end, we either decide to ignore or reject new information, or we take it in and allow it to reshape our framework.

How Frameworks Affect how We Read the Bible

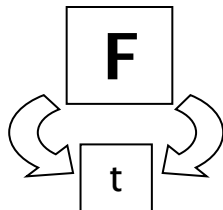
- When we sit down to study the Bible, we bring our framework with us – including the way we see and understand God, man, sin, Christ, suffering, redemption, and many other important things.
- Frameworks, in and of themselves, are not necessarily bad. They are necessary. However, they can influence the way we understand the text.

The text should rule over and shape our framework.

- We believe that the Bible is from God (2 Peter 1:21), inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16a), without error (Matthew 5:17-18), and sufficient for our faith and practice (2 Timothy 3:16b).
Yet we often do not recognize when our framework overpowers the way we understand the text, and sometimes, even when we are aware of it, we are unwilling to let go of our framework.
- In order to rightly understand God’s Word and preach it faithfully, we must let the text rule over and shape our framework.
- Where there is a difference between the text and our framework, we should recognize it and allow the text to control and shape our understanding. We should not ignore the text or make it say what we want it to say; instead, we must understand and preach God’s Word for what it really says.
- We need to ask God to help us see the text with fresh eyes, become aware of our own framework, and truly understand what He is saying through His Word.

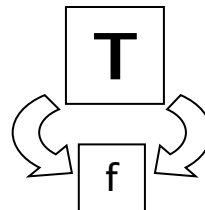
What often happens:

Our framework influences and shapes our understanding of the text.



What should happen:

The text rules over and shapes our framework.



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³ The Charles Simeon Trust, “Principles of Exposition,” <http://www.simeontrust.org/media/wbe-principles.pdf>

The Basics of Inductive Bible Study

What Is Inductive Bible Study?

- “Inductive” describes a kind of approach to understanding something. It begins with the facts and allows those pieces of evidence to lead to a conclusion. It is the opposite of “deduction” – beginning with a conclusion and using it to explain the facts.
- Inductive Bible study begins by paying close attention to what the Bible actually says and letting it form our conclusions. It works hard to see what is there and, with God’s help, to understand it.

The Importance of Inductive Bible Study

- Inductive Bible study is important because it helps us discover what the Bible has to say for itself. It starts with what the Bible says and not with our own ideas or even with books that explain what the Bible says or means.
- Inductive Bible study allows the Bible to tell its own story and proclaim its own message (and not our own). It works hard to see what is there, understand it, and take hold of its message. It is concerned with hearing God speak through His Word.

The Three Parts of Inductive Bible Study

Inductive Bible study involves:

Observation

- ▶ Asking “What does it say?”
- ▶ Specific things to look for:
 - Key words – important theological words (words important in the message of the Bible), transition words, people, places, events
 - Repetitions
 - Surprises
 - Comparisons/contrasts
 - Connecting words or connecting ideas in the context
 - A key verse

Interpretation

- ▶ Asking “What does it mean?”
 - What does this word or phrase or idea mean in light of the rest of the passage or the whole book?
 - What is the passage saying as a whole? What is the main thought or the Big Idea?
 - What is the significance of this passage in light of the rest of the book? How does the passage fit into the larger story of the Bible?
 - How do these words point to or speak of Christ?

Application

- ▶ Asking “What does it mean for me or for us today?”
 - Is there an application already in the text? Does the passage give some command or exhortation for how we should live?
 - How does the situation of our lives today correspond with the situation of the original audience? What is similar? What did God say to them about that, and how would that apply to the similar circumstances in our lives?
 - (1) What does this passage tell us about God? (2) How should we live in light of that?

Asking Good Questions

The Importance of Asking Questions

Asking questions helps us to observe and understand what the Bible is actually saying. It helps us to discover the meaning of God's Word and to be faithful to what it says.

What is a Good Question?

A good question is one that helps us understand the author's intended meaning of the biblical text.

How Do We Ask Good Questions?

Consider these different approaches for coming up with good questions:

► Basic Questions

Begin by asking the basic questions of observation:

- Who? ▪ What? ▪ When? ▪ Where? ▪ Why? ▪ How?

► Categories

It may help to think in terms of different categories when coming up with good questions to ask about a passage. Ask questions about:

- **Context** – First, the historical context – the life situation of the author and original audience that would have affected what the text meant to them. Second, the literary context – how the text fits into the flow of what is written in the rest of the book or passage
- **Key Words** – important or repeated words or ideas; central characters; places
- **Curiosities** – things that are curious or seem difficult to understand
- **Christ** – how the passage speaks of or points to Christ
- **Intent** – why the author wrote what he did
- **Central Point** – the main point or Big Idea of the passage
- **Application** – the implications of what the passage says for us today

► Essential Questions

Essential questions for any Bible text:

- What does the author say?
- How does he say it? Why does he say it in this way? Why here?
- How would the recipients have heard this?
- What is surprising about it?
- What is it saying as a whole?
- How does this fit into the flow of thought?
- How does it point to or speak of Christ?
- How is this important for us today?

► What's Not Obvious

A good question asks about something that may not be obvious in the text but is essential for understanding its meaning.

The Attitude of the Heart in Asking Questions

Three attitudes of the heart are essential in our pursuit to know what God's Word is saying and in helping us develop the skill of asking good questions.

- **Curiosity.** Ask questions with the curiosity of a child.
- **Discernment.** Learn to ask questions that go beyond obvious answers.
- **Perseverance.** Keep asking questions and working to understand.

Genre

What Is Genre?

“Genre” is a word that refers to the type or kind of literature or written material that we find in the Bible. We know the different kinds of genres by differences in literary features like the style of writing, the form, the content, and the purpose of what is written.

Different Genres in the Bible

There are many different literary genres found in the Bible. Below are some of the major genres generally recognized in the Bible (with a list of books that contain that kind of genre):

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| ▪ Historical narrative | Genesis, the first half of Exodus, Numbers, all of the books from Joshua through Esther, and Jonah |
| ▪ Law | The last half of Exodus; Leviticus; Deuteronomy |
| ▪ Wisdom | Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes |
| ▪ Poetry | Psalms, Song of Solomon, and Lamentations |
| ▪ Prophecy | All of the books from Isaiah through Obadiah and Micah through Malachi |
| ▪ Apocalyptic | Daniel and Revelation |
| ▪ Gospel | Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and perhaps Acts |
| ▪ Epistle | All of the New Testament books from Romans through Jude |

Although whole books of the Bible are usually associated with certain genres (as they are above), each book of the Bible can contain different genres within it or subgenres – more specific classifications of literary genres.

Why Is Genre Important?

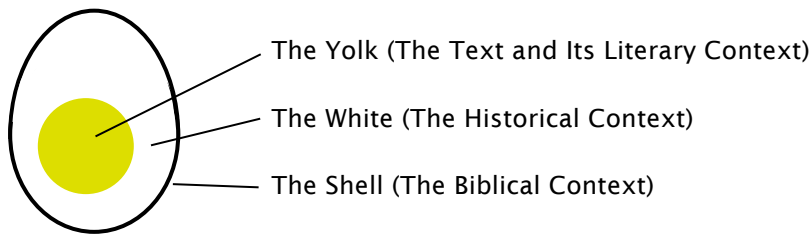
- “Genre is the key to understanding what sort of information a Biblical author is trying to convey.”⁴
- “Until you know the purpose and kind of a text, what it intends to say or convey, you don’t know how to read it properly” (C. S. Lewis).⁵
- Knowing the genre gives us certain clues (even understood rules) for how to read and interpret the meaning of a text.

⁴ A summary by Ben Witherington of a part of a book reviewed in “The Living Word of God (in an Age of Truth Decay)” (October 31, 2007) at <http://benwitherington.blogspot.com>.

⁵ Quoted indirectly by Ben Witherington, “Hermeneutics – A Guide for Perplexed Bible Readers” (August 21, 2007) at <http://benwitherington.blogspot.com>

The Egg Illustration

The Egg Illustration

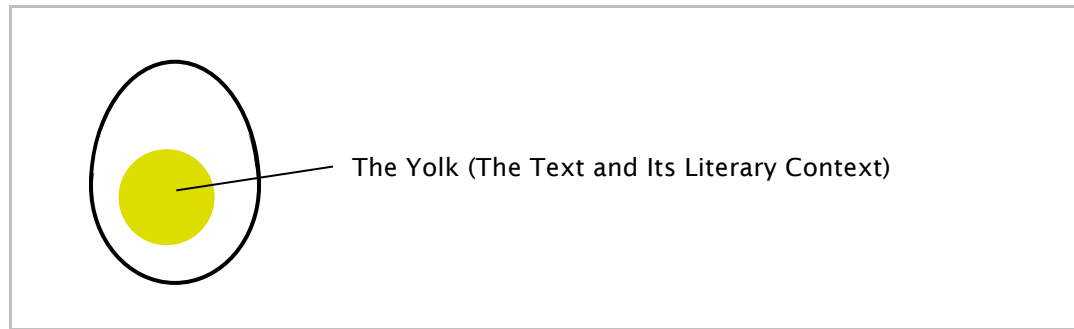


The Egg Illustration

Thinking about the different parts of an egg is a helpful way to think about context when studying the Bible.

- **The Yolk** represents the **text and literary context** of the passage you are studying – not only the words, phrases, and sentences of a passage, but also the surrounding paragraphs and chapters of the rest of the book.
- **The White** represents the **historical context** – what was going on in the history and culture of the people in the book or the passage. (This may not just be the historical context of the people written about in the text, but it may also be about the historical situation of the people the text was written to or of the person the text was written by, such as the writer of one of the psalms.)
- **The Shell** represents the **Biblical context** – the place where the text stands within the Old or New Testament and within the overarching message of the whole Bible.

The Egg Yolk – The Text and Its Literary Context



Focusing on the Yolk – the Text and Its Literary Context

- Bible study and teaching and preaching must begin and end with the text. The text must always shape and determine our message. And we're not just concerned with the text of our passage, but with the surrounding text of the rest of the book. The literary context shapes our understanding of the text of the passage. Our task as teachers and preachers of God's Word is to study and understand the text within the context of the book in which it was written.

► Studying the Text and Its Literary Context Involves:

- **Observation and Interpretation** – We'll first ask, "What does the text say?" Then, we'll discover how the rest of the book sheds light on our passage. We'll ask: "What does the text mean in light of what comes before and after it?"
- **Looking for Connections** – finding connections between the words, phrases, and ideas of the passage you are studying and the words, phrases, and ideas of the surrounding paragraphs and chapters of the book.
- **The Big Idea** – discovering the overall message – the Big Idea – of the passage and of the book. We'll ask: "What's the Big Idea of the text?" "How does that fit into the Big Idea of the book?"

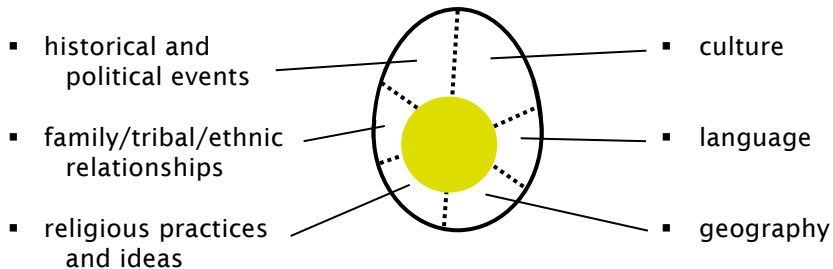
Understanding a Passage In Its Literary Context

Here are some helpful questions to ask:

- What are some important ideas found throughout this passage? Where do some of those important ideas from the passage appear in the rest of the book?
- What is the Big Idea of this passage – the main point the passage is getting at? How does the Big Idea of the passage relate to the message of the rest of the book?

The Egg White – The Historical Context

The Egg White represents the **historical context** surrounding the text. We use the label “historical” to refer to many aspects of the real-life context of the people and events of the passage, as well as the author who wrote it. The historical context includes:



All of these made up the real-life, historical setting of the passage – the world in which the people of that day lived and thought.

The Historical Context

The historical context of a passage is the real-life world of the time and place that surrounded the people that the passage was written about, written to, or written by. The historical context is made up of different elements including the

- historical
- political
- cultural
- linguistic
- family/tribal
- geographic
- religious

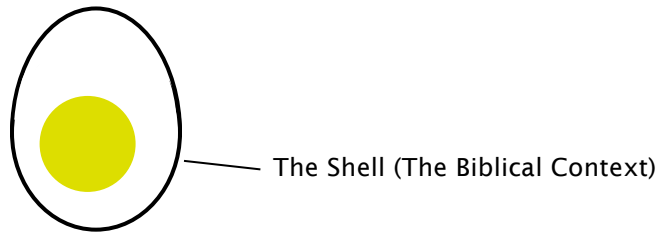
Why Is It Important?

- Understanding the historical context is important because we could wrongly interpret a book or passage if we don't understand how the original hearers understood it.

How Do We Get There?

- If we are to interpret a book or passage correctly, we must travel back in time to the place where the original readers lived. If we are going to understand the text, we must first understand it how the original audience understood it – and that means understanding the historical context.
- See more about this point under the principle, “**Traveling Instructions.**”

The Egg Shell – The Biblical Context



The broadest level of context is represented by the shell of the egg. The shell addresses these questions:

- How does the passage or the book fit into the rest of the Bible?
- What major themes or ideas found in the rest of Scripture emerge in this book or are expanded upon by this book or passage?
- How do the things in this passage or book point to Christ?

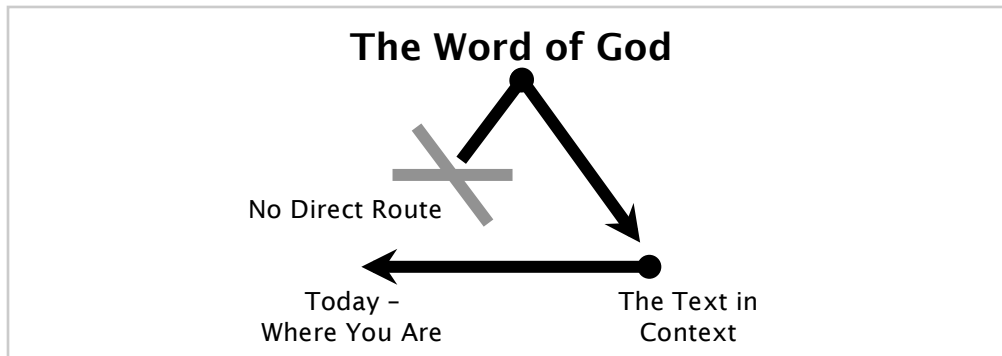
Understanding Biblical Context – Seeing the Big Picture of the Bible

- Understanding the Biblical Context of a passage or book means seeing the big picture of the story of the Bible and how a particular book or passage fits into it.
- The overall plan of God is progressively revealed through the Scriptures. Every book of the Bible is either a continuation or expansion of what God has revealed before or may be further explained by what will come afterwards in the rest of Scripture. Important truths begin in seed form in the early chapters of the Bible and then grow and fully develop as Scripture unfolds.
- The overall story of God’s plan undergirds each book of the Bible. That plan is also known as
 - the “Big Idea of the Bible” or
 - the “Story of Redemption” or
 - “Salvation History”

How to Look at the Text in the Broader Biblical Context

- First, think about where the passage or the book you are studying fits into the rest of the Bible and its story.
- Second, look for major themes or ideas in the book or the passage that connect with themes found in the rest of the Bible.
- Next, think about how this book or passage points to Christ.
- Finally, look at the Big Idea of the Bible and how the book or passage you are studying connects with that overall message.
- For more about these ideas, see the principles starting with “**Biblical Theology.**”

Traveling Instructions*



What do we mean by “Traveling Instructions”?

- Traveling Instructions helps us think about the context of a passage.
- Traveling Instructions is an illustration to help us think about how to understand the meaning of a passage through the context in which it was written. It causes us to go back in time and think about what the author meant in the situation he was writing from or writing about. After that, it helps us to understand what the text means for our own situation and time.

Why do we need Traveling Instructions?

- As a preacher and teacher, your goal is to bring the truth of Scripture, which is thousands of years old, to the present day where you live. You are asking the question, “How can I bring the truth of these ancient words to the people where I live?”
- The answer is always, “There is no direct route.” You must always travel through the context in which the Bible was written.
- We often read the words of the Bible and make an immediate application to ourselves. We immediately ask, “What does this mean to me?” We have not thought or taken time to ask, “What did these words mean to the original audience? In light of their situation, how would they have understood the message they heard?”
- Until we have asked questions like these, we cannot be sure we have understood the message of God’s Word, and our application of it to our own lives will, no doubt, be far less penetrating than what God intended.
- It is better to take the longer path. We need to travel to the place where the original readers lived and to understand the message they heard and what it meant for them. Then we will be in a far better position to apply it to our own lives, to ask: What does this mean for me?

What are the parts of Traveling Instructions?

- First, we need to travel to the place and time in which the original reader(s) lived and to understand the message they heard. This involves **observation and interpretation** – discovering what the passage meant in light of the original context.
- Second, after we have traveled through the time and place of the original audience, we can travel to our own time and place. This step involves **application**. After discovering what the passage meant to the original readers, will be in a far better position to apply it to our own lives, to ask, “What does this mean for me?”

Why is this important?

- In order for us to correctly apply the words of Scripture, we need to understand the context in which they were spoken.

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Finding the Meaning of Important Words and Phrases

What do we do when the meaning of a word or phrase is unclear?

- We should first observe the **literary context** for clues of what the author meant when he used that word or phrase.

Errors to Avoid

- (1) Avoid looking in a dictionary and choosing the most interesting meaning, or the meaning that fits what you want the word to say.
- (2) Avoid the danger of looking for the meaning of a word in the origin of the word (often given by dictionaries).
- (3) When interpreting the passage, don't put too much weight into the definition of one word or phrase. Even if a word or phrase has a significant theological meaning, the author was trying to convey a bigger message than is captured by any one word.

How to Pick What Words or Phrases to Study

- Look for:
- important theological words, or words that are important in the overall message of the Bible
 - words whose meaning seems unclear⁶
 - words that are repeated in a book or passage, or words that seem to grow in importance in the message of the author

How to Find the Meaning of Words:

► First, find clues in the context.

- The words around a word or phrase help us to understand its meaning. If we find enough clues to help us understand the meaning, we can stop there. If we don't see enough clues about the meaning in the passage we are studying, then we need to look more broadly.

► If necessary, look nearby, in the rest of the book.

- Look for clues in the book we are in, because that is the most immediate literary context. Different people and different pieces of literature can use the same word in different ways. So, we first want to look in the book we're studying to see how the author uses that particular word in that book.

► If necessary, look more broadly, in the rest of the Bible.

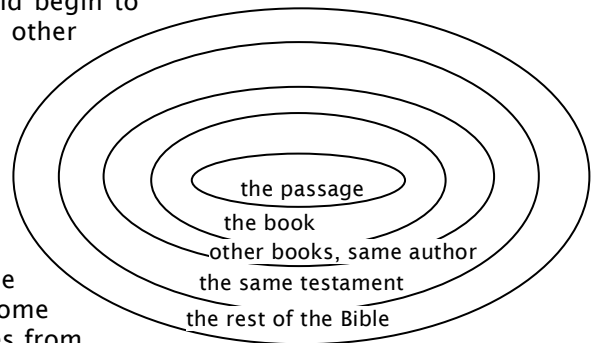
- If we don't have enough clues, then we should begin to look more broadly. First, we should look in other books written by that same author.
- If we still don't find enough clues, then we can begin to work our way outward, as in concentric circles. We should look in the rest of the same testament, and then the rest of the Bible.

► Come back to the passage.

- Finally, after gleaning clues from the rest of the book or other parts of the Bible, we should come back to the passage we are studying. The clues from the passage will ultimately help us determine the specific meaning of the word or phrase as it is used in our passage.

► Use the Right Tool

- A concordance will help us find the occurrences of the word, not just in the book we're studying, but in the rest of the Bible as well.

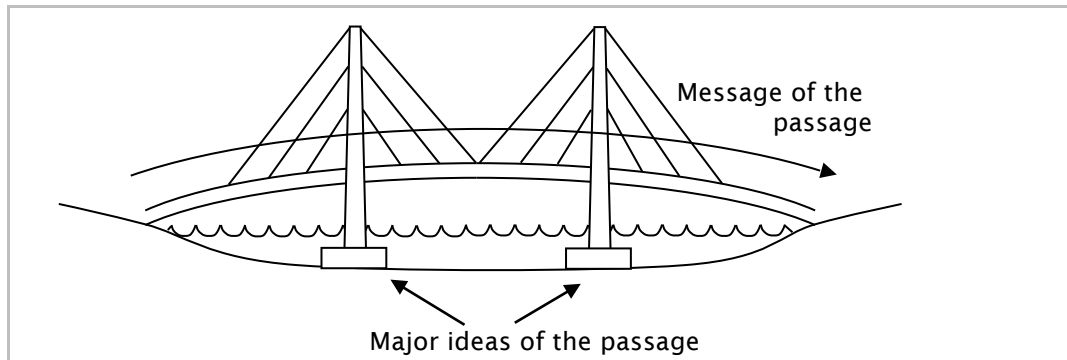


From Interpretation to Application

After we know what an important word or phrase meant to the original readers, then we can know how to think about its meaning in our lives today.

⁶ Adapted from Gordon D. Fee's *New Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors*, 3rd ed., pages 80-81. © 2002 Gordon D. Fee. Used by permission of Westminster John Knox Press. www.wjkbooks.com

Finding the Structure of a Passage (or Book)



What is structure?

- The structure of a passage involves: (1) units of information – the sections of a passage that contain the **major ideas** of the passage – and their arrangement within the passage, and (2) the **patterns** of words and thoughts that connects the ideas in a passage together.

Why is structure important?

- Seeing the structure helps us identify the major ideas of the passage as well as how an author has designed the development of thought between them.
- Structure is important for our preaching and teaching because we want to make sure that the way we arrange the ideas in our teaching is the way the author arranged his thoughts in the passage. An awareness and understanding of structure in the Bible brings a clarifying power to our preaching.

How do you find the structure of a passage?

1. **Look for shifts in thought.** Read the passage. As you read, where do you detect a transition or a shift in thought or direction?
2. **Divide the passage.** After seeing these transitions in thought, divide the passage into sections that contain the major ideas. Write down the verse numbers for each section.
3. **Look for patterns.** What kind of patterns do you see in and among each section or group of verses, and how do those patterns point to an idea that the author is trying to express?

Look especially for:

- **Repetitions**
- **Progressions**

Also look for:

- Commands
- Contrasts and comparisons
- Identical ideas as bookends
- Questions asked and answered
- Key transitions, summary statements, or a climax

4. **Describe the major ideas.** State the major idea of each section of the passage in one complete sentence.
5. **Find the connections between the major ideas.** How does one major idea connect or lead to the next. How does each connect to the others? How do all of them together lead to the Big Idea?

(Seeing the structure leads naturally to discovering the Big Idea. In light of what you find about the structure, ask, "What is the Big Idea of this passage?")

Getting the Big Idea

What is the Big Idea of a passage of Scripture?

- It is the main point or main idea of what a passage of Scripture is saying.

The Importance of Finding the Big Idea

In Scripture:

- It helps us to discover what God is saying through a passage of Scripture.
- It helps us to see the focal point around which other ideas in the passage are organized.

In preaching and teaching:

- It is key to good expository preaching and teaching, since it helps us to remain faithful to what God is saying in His Word.
- It becomes the focal point around which everything in a sermon or lesson is organized.

Finding the Big Idea involves

- praying for God's wisdom and insight
- looking for clues in the text

There are objective clues in the text that point to the Big Idea of a passage.

Look for:

- connections between the way a passage **begins and ends**
- the **repetition** of key words or ideas
- a **summary verse**
- **conclusions** or **purpose** statements (that begin with words like "therefore" or "so that")
- the flow or **development of thought** through the passage
- the ideas in **smaller sections** of the passage and the way those ideas connect to each other

- asking certain questions about the passage

The Big Idea is made up of the answers to two essential questions:

1. What is this passage talking about?

Example: What is this passage talking about?
This passage is talking about . . . the kindness of God.

2. What is it saying about what it's talking about?

Example: What is this passage saying about the kindness of God? This passage is saying that . . . the kindness of God should lead us to repentance.

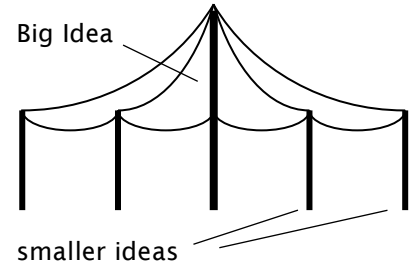
- stating the idea as a complete sentence

The statement of the Big Idea

- should be a complete idea – not a title, but a complete sentence (with a subject and verb)
- should be specific enough to get at the main, driving point of the passage
- should be broad enough to include some of the smaller key ideas of the passage

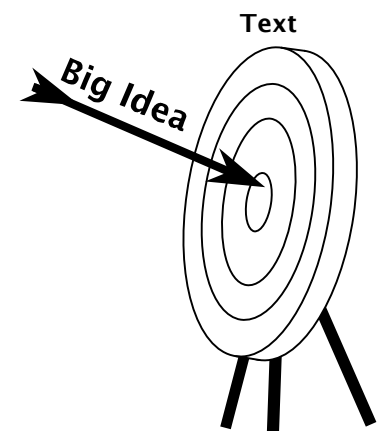
Illustrations of the Big Idea

The Main Tent Pole



The Big Idea is like the main pole that holds up a tent. While there are smaller important ideas, the Big Idea, like the tallest pole, is (1) the most important idea of all in the passage and/or (2) the main idea that connects and holds together all of the smaller ideas in the passage.

A Target or Bull's Eye



We want the statement of the Big Idea that we come up with to be close to hitting the bull's eye of the target of what the text really says.

Finding the Big Idea of a Book

What is the Big Idea of a book of the Bible?

- Just like the Big Idea of a passage, the Big Idea of a book of the Bible is a statement that captures the main idea of what the book is really saying – its central message.
- The Big Idea is the overall message of a book. It is the theme that runs through it and unites all of the thoughts together as a whole. The better we understand the Big Idea, the better we will communicate each part of the book.

Why is the Big Idea important?

It acknowledges that the writer had a message he was trying to communicate with the whole book, not just different ideas in separate passages.

How do we find the Big Idea of a book?

Finding the Big Idea of a book is much like finding the Big Idea of a passage.

1. **Read through the book several times.**
2. **Ask lots of questions.**
3. Look for clues to the Big Idea in **the way the book begins and ends**. Often a writer introduces the main reason he is writing as he opens the book and comes back to it as he closes.
4. Break the book into **smaller sections** and try to summarize what those sections are about. The ideas in the sections of the book make up the supporting ideas for the larger Big Idea.
5. Ask: What are the **connections** of thought between the sections of the book? Understanding how they relate helps us to see what the author is getting at.
6. Look for patterns, like the **repetition** of key words and ideas.
7. Ask **the two questions**: “What is this book talking about? What is it saying about what it’s talking about?”

How should we state the Big Idea?

Just like the Big Idea of a passage, state the Big Idea of a book in a sentence.

First, answer the two questions,

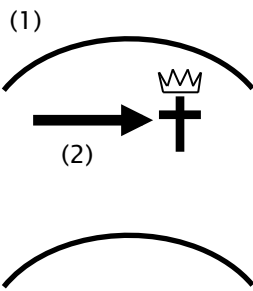
- **What is this book talking about?**
- **What is it saying about what it’s talking about?**

Then state the answers to those questions as a complete thought in a sentence: “This book is saying that _____.”

How should we use the Big Idea of a book?

- Work hard to understand how a passage in a book connects to the Big Idea of the book.
- Allow the Big Idea of the book to shape the message we preach or teach.
- When preaching, draw attention to the Big Idea regularly. That will bring clarity and power to our preaching.

Biblical Theology



What is Biblical Theology?

- Biblical theology is a way of looking at the Bible that helps us see (1) the big picture of the overarching story of the Bible and how each smaller piece (the individual passage or book we are studying) fits into that overall story. It also looks at (2) how each part of the story points forward to Christ, since the overarching story about God and His purposes and plan is fulfilled in Christ.

(1) The Overarching Story

- The Bible is not a random collection of books. Together, those books tell a story and show how God's plan unfolds to reveal Himself and His purpose – all with its focus and fulfillment in Christ.
- Biblical theology helps us see how each part of the Bible is connected to the rest and how each smaller piece (an individual passage we are studying) is connected to the whole and fits into the overarching story and message of the Bible.

A Rope

- The Bible is like a rope. A rope has many strands, but there is one rope. The Bible has many events and themes, but they are all woven together into one story with one message. Biblical theology helps us to see how each of those events and themes are woven together into the overall story and message of the Bible.



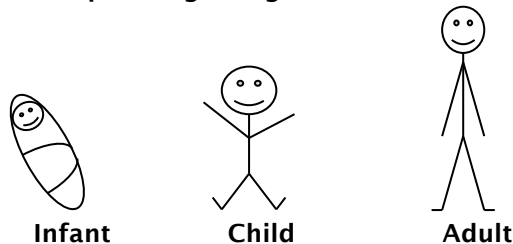
"1" Book, Story, Person

- Another way to describe what we're talking about: The Bible is one book that tells one story about one person.

**1 Book
Story
Person**

- Biblical theology also helps us to see the development and unfolding of the overarching story of the Bible – and how everything comes to fulfillment in Christ.

Seeing a Person Develop through Stages of Life



- Biblical theology is like seeing how a person grows and develops throughout the different stages of life. A truth that we might find first in the first five books of the Bible (like the infant stage) develops through the rest of the Old Testament (like the stage of childhood), and then it is fully realized in Christ (the adult stage).



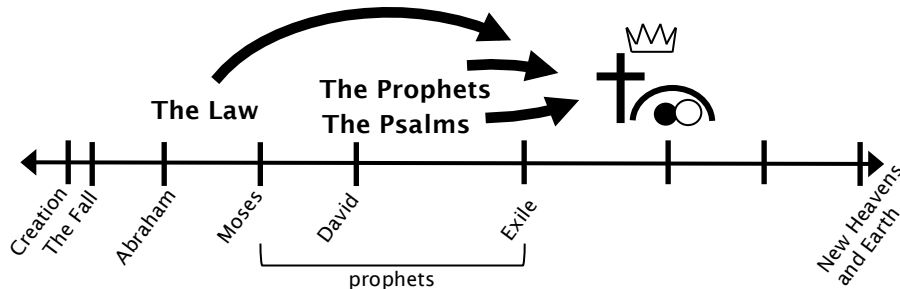
(2) Pointing to Christ

- Biblical theology also helps us to see how every part of the Bible – not just the New Testament, but the Old Testament as well – points to Christ.
- See more about this under the principle, "**Christ – The Focus and Fulfillment of Scripture.**"

Christ – The Focus and Fulfillment of Scripture

Why We Should Preach Christ from All the Scriptures

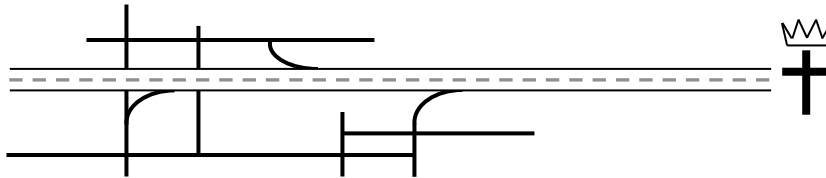
- We are Christian preachers, and the Christian preacher must remember always and everywhere and every time he preaches that his calling is to preach Christ – to preach the good news of Christ. This is true not only when we are preaching from the New Testament, but when we are preaching from the Old Testament as well.⁷
- In Luke 24, Jesus explained that “everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled” (24:44).
- So when we preach from the Old Testament, we can preach Christ because all of the Old Testament as a whole is **pointing forward** to Christ.



- Does every verse in the Old Testament point **equally** to Christ? No. There are big, important themes or ideas or events in the Old Testament that point directly to Christ. Then there are smaller ideas or themes. In some way, they eventually connect to the larger themes, and in that way, point to Christ.

Main Highways on a Map

We may think about the Bible as a map, and on that map we see that all roads in the Old Testament lead to Christ. Not all roads are the main highways. The main highways are those passages from which a direct connection to Christ can be clearly seen. But there are many boulevards, avenues, side streets, and alleys that are not on the main highway, though they eventually connect to it.



We may be studying a passage that is on a side road off of the main highway. The important question to ask is: *How* does this passage get me to the main highway? Or, How does this passage connect with a main theme that points me towards Christ? How does this passage aid my understanding of Christ and what He has done? Being mindful of these questions will help us know how the Scriptures point to Christ.

How does this affect how we study and preach an Old Testament passage?

- (1) Study the passage in its own original setting and context.
- (2) Look for connections to the rest of the Bible and to Christ.
 - Is there an explicit connection, like a verse quoted in the New Testament?
 - Does the passage somehow point to Christ? (Example: the Suffering Servant in Isaiah)
 - Does the passage prepare the way for Christ? (Example: Does it point out some need from our fallen condition that is met in Jesus?)

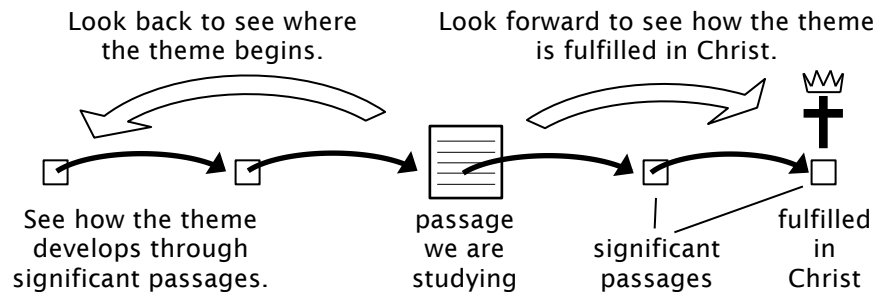
⁷ John Woodhouse, “Preaching from the Pentateuch,” audiotapes of a series of talks, *Preaching from the Old Testament*, by John Woodhouse presented at the Proclamation Trust (UK) Assistant Ministers Conference 1992. Based on original material © The Proclamation Trust with kind permission. www.proctrust.org.uk

Tracing Biblical Themes

A Part of Doing Biblical Theology

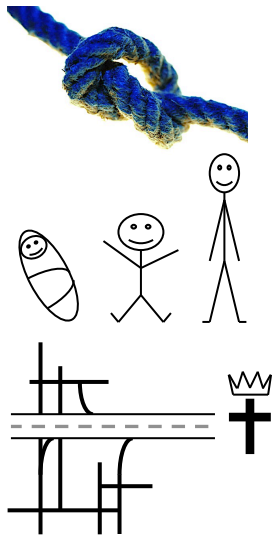
- Biblical theology is about seeing connections – seeing how the parts (the individual passages we study) are connected to the whole (the overarching story of the Bible with its fulfillment in Christ). Biblical themes are what connect the parts together to form the whole story and message of the Bible.
- When we trace a Biblical theme, we want to see where an important theme in the Bible begins, how it then continues and develops throughout the Bible, and how it is finally fulfilled in Christ.

Tracing Biblical Themes



A Reminder of Illustrations

- We said that the Bible is like a rope. With a rope there are many strands, but one single rope. In the Bible, there are many themes, but one overall story and message. The goal of Biblical theology is to discover that message and to see how the themes run from beginning to end and connect the whole story and message of the Bible together.
- We also said that Biblical theology is like seeing how a person grows and develops throughout the different stages of life. A truth that we might find first in the first five books of the Bible develops through the rest of the Old Testament, and then it is fully realized in Christ. Tracing a Biblical theme helps us see that development from its beginning all the way to its fulfillment in Christ.
- The Bible is like a map. The major Biblical themes are like major highways that lead and point straight to Christ. Some passages are along those highways and contain those major themes, and so the connection to Christ is easy to see. Other passages are along the side roads, and it takes some work to see how they connect to the main highways – the main themes – that point to Christ. Tracing Biblical themes helps us see the highways that lead to Christ and to see how an individual passage connects to those themes.



How do we trace Biblical themes?

1. In a passage, pay attention to important words or ideas, or even people, places, or events.
2. Find where these words or ideas show up in other places of the Bible by using a concordance or a computer search tool.
3. Look at the development of the theme throughout the Bible and how it is fulfilled in Christ.
4. Think about how the passage you are studying fits into the development of this theme through Scripture.

Preaching from the Old Testament

Looking forward to Christ and the New Testament

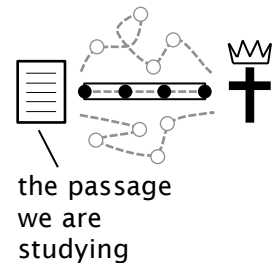
We Can and Should Preach Christ from the Old Testament

- We can preach Christ from the Old Testament because all of it, as a whole, is pointing forward to Him. And we should preach Christ from the Old Testament because we are preachers of the good news of Christ. We want to show how the truth of God's Word in the Old Testament is fulfilled in Christ.



Our Responsibility and the Dangers to Avoid

- There are two dangers to avoid:
 - (1) Not "connecting the dots" that lead us to Christ.
 - When we study an Old Testament passage, we may fail to see the connections that point us to Christ.
 - (2) Connecting dots that aren't there.
 - An equal and opposite danger is imagining or creating connections to Christ that aren't really there!
 - When we connect the dots properly, a beautiful picture of Christ as the focus and fulfillment of Scripture emerges. When dots are imagined or improperly connected, we create a mess!
 - "It's not our job to *make* the Old Testament speak of Christ. It's our job to discover *how* the Old Testament *does* speak of, or point to, Christ."⁸
 - If we simply try to "see" Christ in the Old Testament without doing the work of discovering how it points to Christ, then we may end up imposing our thoughts about Christ onto the text.⁹
- We must discipline ourselves to dig and discover, to be faithful to what the text says, and to understand the connection of the passage to the Biblical themes that point to Christ.



How do we preach Christ from the Old Testament?

- (1) Read, study, and understand the passage in its Old Testament context.
 - Look especially at the broader literary context of the Old Testament passage.
- (2) Look for connections to the New Testament and to Christ.
 - See if the passage is quoted or alluded to in the New Testament.
 - If the passage is quoted or referred to in the New Testament, study and understand the New Testament passage in its own context.
 - See how the New Testament writer understood the Old Testament passage in connection with Jesus.
 - After that, try to understand the connection between your study of the Old Testament passage and your study of what the New Testament says about it.
 - If the passage is not quoted in the New Testament, ask:
 - Is there a major Biblical theme (a "main highway") that points to Christ? Or is there a smaller situation or issue that connects to a major theme? How is that theme strengthened or perfected in Jesus?
 - What does this passage teach me about how God does things and what He is like? Jesus makes God's character and ways even more clear. How does this passage point toward how God does things in Jesus?
 - Does the passage prepare the way for Christ by raising a question or dilemma that is answered in Jesus?

⁸ John Woodhouse, "Preaching from the Pentateuch," audiotapes of a series of talks, *Preaching from the Old Testament*, by John Woodhouse presented at the Proclamation Trust (UK) Assistant Ministers Conference 1992. Reproduced from original material © The Proclamation Trust with kind permission. www.proctrust.org.uk

⁹ John Woodhouse, "Preaching from the Pentateuch,". Based on original material © The Proclamation Trust with kind permission. www.proctrust.org.uk

Preaching from the New Testament

Looking back to the Old Testament

The New Testament Reveals and Explains the Fulfillment of the Old Testament

- To understand the New Testament, we have to understand the Old Testament.
- The New Testament continues the story begun in the Old Testament. But the New Testament not only continues that story, it reveals the fulfillment of the story. The New Testament shows and explains how God's purposes toward His people in the story of the Bible are fulfilled in Christ.
- In order to understand how the New Testament explains that fulfillment, we often have to read the New Testament looking back to the Old Testament. Sometimes that means we simply need to know parts of the Old Testament to fully understand or appreciate what the New Testament is talking about. At other times, the New Testament authors quote or refer to parts of the Old Testament in order to remind their readers (and us) of some truth or some part of the story.
- Those reminders help to weave the threads of the Old Testament story into the New Testament. The fulfillment in the New Testament is made richer and fuller when we understand where that part of the story began or how that truth began to grow and unfold in the Old Testament.

How do we preach from the New Testament looking back to the Old Testament?

(1) Read, study, and understand the New Testament passage in its own context.

(2) Look for connections back to the Old Testament.

- ▶ Is there a direct Old Testament quotation or indirect reference (allusion)?
 - If not, think about how important ideas in the passage may connect to important Biblical themes that find their beginning in the Old Testament.
 - Is there something in the Old Testament that can more fully explain what the New Testament author is talking about?
 - How does this New Testament passage more fully develop a Biblical theme that arises from the Old Testament?
 - If there is an Old Testament quotation or allusion, find out where in the Old Testament it comes from.
 1. Read, study, and understand the Old Testament reference in its Old Testament context.
 - Study the Old Testament passage in which the reference is found.
 - Be sure to look at the broad literary context.
 - Understand the historical context.
 - Determine the Big Idea of the Old Testament passage.
 - Understand how the verses quoted in the New Testament fit into the meaning of the Old Testament passage.
 2. Understand how the New Testament author was using the Old Testament reference and how he understood its meaning.
 - Think about how the connection back to the Old Testament influences the meaning of the New Testament passages.
 3. Adjust and restate the Big Idea of the New Testament passage, if necessary.

From Text to Sermon

Understand, First of All, the Preacher's Relationship to the Text and the People

- A preacher stands under God's Word and before God's people. He is under God's authority and is commissioned to communicate God's message to His people. (See Jeremiah 1:6-9; Mark 4:3-14; 2 Timothy 4:1-2.)

Choose a Passage to Preach On

In order to determine where a passage you will preach on should begin and end,

- ▶ **Know the text.**
 - Read the book to know how the smaller parts fit within the big picture.
 - Identify the natural breaks in the book, where the author transitions from one idea to the next.
 - After finding the beginning and end of a passage, read the surrounding text to understand the flow of thought and how the story or material unfolds.
- ▶ **Know yourself.**
 - Know how much of the text you can adequately explain in the time you have. A larger passage means you have to move through it quickly. A shorter one means you can spend time on the details.

See What Is There and Communicate It Effectively

- ▶ **First, see what is there in the text.**
 - Understand the text through hard work and careful study.
 - Seek to understand what the passage is saying and what it meant to the people it was first written to.
 - Read and re-read. Investigate key words or phrases. Outline the flow of thought of a passage on your own before seeking help from commentaries or study Bibles.
- ▶ **Then, communicate it effectively to an audience.**
 - State the Big Idea in one brief, clear sentence in order to clarify what the passage and the sermon are about.
 - State the aim of your sermon in a sentence. This will clarify the purpose of the sermon – what you want to see happen in the hearts and minds and lives of the listeners.
 - Form the main points of the message that walk the listeners through an understanding of the Big Idea. Do this by looking at the major ideas of the passage and the flow of thought that connects them together.
 - Explain each point by connecting it to the Big Idea, the words of the text, and the lives of the listeners.
 - Use illustrations to help listeners think through a point you have made.
 - Use a conclusion to sum up where you have been and the appropriate response the listeners should make.
 - Prepare an introduction last. It should stir the listeners' interest and make them want to listen by raising a question that is addressed by God's Word.

From Text to Life

The Need for Good Application

- If we don't apply God's Word to our lives, we begin to have Christians who know a lot of information in their minds, but their lives and hearts have not changed.
- Believers can only grow if they see, by God's Spirit, the specific ways in which the truth of God's Word can come into and affect their own life situation by changing who they are and how they live their lives.

Jesus, Our Model

- Matthew 4:3-4 says, "And the tempter came and said to [Jesus], 'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.' But he answered, 'It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."'"
- Jesus knew that God's Word was the source of life. So, faced with temptation **Jesus took hold of God's Word, made it his own, and applied it to his life situation.** This is what it means to move from text to life.

How to Do Application

(1) The Goal: Not Behavior Change, but Transformation

Often when we think of applying God's Word, we think of behavioral change. But fundamentally, we need and are called to transformation – a change of heart and mind. From this change of heart and mind flow right behavior and character.

- ▶ **Ask:** What does this passage tell us about God? How should that change our hearts? How should we live as a result?

(2) Look at How the Text Does Application

Application should flow out of the intended purpose of the passage. We need to ask how the author applied what he was saying to the lives of his readers.

- ▶ **Ask:** Is there an application already in the text? Does the passage give some command or exhortation for how we should live? Does it give a reason?

(3) Think about How Your Situation is Similar

- ▶ **Ask:** How does the situation of our lives today correspond with the situation of the original audience? What is similar? What did God say to them about those things that are similar, and how would that apply to the similar circumstances in our lives?

Glorify God and Enjoy Him Forever

The Purpose of All Principles of Bible Study

- This last principle is the culmination, the goal, of all the others. The ultimate purpose of all of our study and teaching and preaching is **to glorify God and enjoy Him forever**.
- The phrase “to glorify God and enjoy Him forever” comes from an important document known as the Westminster Shorter Catechism, written by believers in England and completed in the year 1648. It asks the very important question: “What is the chief end (or the primary purpose) of man? The answer it gives is this: “The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.” It points to the fact that there is a huge difference between knowing the facts about something and embracing it with our whole being.
- In other words, the goal of studying the Bible and preaching and teaching is **not knowledge, but worship**. We do first need knowledge – to see and know who God is from His Word, but that is not the end. The ultimate purpose is for our hearts to be transformed through His Word by His Spirit, and then to respond to God in love and worship with all of our mind and heart and life.
- To glorify God and enjoy Him forever is what we need to do ourselves and to help our people to do through our preaching and teaching and ministry to them.

How do we do this?

- Glorifying God and enjoying Him forever in our lives and ministries begins by **praying** and asking God to help us read the Bible not only with our minds but with our hearts as well.
- As you read the Bible, **ask these two questions**:
 - (1) What does this teach us about God – His character and the way He relates to us?
 - (2) What does it teach us about how we should respond back to Him?