

Biblical Preaching Handbook



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DEDICATION:

This book was inspired by African pastors who readily take up the responsibility of leading congregations. We hope and pray that you will continue to be led by the Holy Spirit as you labour to study the Bible, commit to preach the Scriptures as the whole counsel of God and instruct the Body of Christ in the way of righteousness. May you continue to stand firm in the battle for the Church and may this book equip you to lead the people of God in grace and truth to fulfill the Great Commission to disciple the nations, teaching obedience (Matthew 28:18-20).



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May you be blessed with strength and energy as you strive to see the Church of Christ stand strong and victorious against her foes.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Contents	Page
1	A Useful Instrument	1
2	Biblical Preaching	5
3	Types of Biblical Preaching	8
4	How Not to Preach	10
5	Why we Don't Preach	12
6	Preaching with Power	14
7	Biblical Interpretation	16
8	Practical Preaching Preparation	36
	Appendix: Effective Public Speaking	40
	Other Resources	44

A USEFUL INSTRUMENT

Do you have a desire to see Revival sweep over your country? What about Revival in your town or even your church?

When I refer to Revival, I mean that God, the Holy Spirit works in our hearts and we repent; turning from our sin and turn toward the Lord Jesus Christ in faith, understanding that only He can wash us of our sin and make us acceptable before God.

Do you have this desire that Revival will start in your own heart? The state of your heart should be a great concern to you. Do you bear **“fruit worthy of repentance”**? (Matthew 3:8). Fruit of repentance includes turning away from sin, loving yourself less and loving God and other people more - according to the Ten Commandments: **“If you love Me, keep My Commandments.”**, **“He who has My Commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.”** John 14:15 & 21.

The sad truth is that in spite of a desperate spiritual need in Africa, we do not often see a desperate search for holiness amongst most pastors. Charles Spurgeon said: **“...whatever call a man may pretend to have, if he has not been called to holiness, he certainly has not been called to the ministry.”**¹

Your Kingdom Come

The Lord Jesus Christ taught His disciples to pray in this way: **“...Your Kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven...”** (Matthew 6:10). His authority will extend over this Earth in the same way as it is in Heaven and He has called you and me to be a part of His advance. **“A holy minister is an awful weapon in the Hand of God”.**²

“Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.” 1 Timothy 4:16

We should learn from Paul's command to Timothy to make sure his life and doctrine are pure because the preacher's own life and the lives of those that listen to him depends on it!

The fruit reveals the state of the heart

“For every tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they gather grapes from a bramble bush. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.”

Luke 6:44-45

How can your preaching be described? Your preaching will reflect the “abundance” of your heart; that which fills your soul and reflects your desires. Your desire might be to please God, to see how He is glorified through your life and your ministry and to experience the conviction of the Holy Spirit concerning sin, righteousness and judgement. (John 16:8). Alternatively, you might desire wealth, fleshly happiness and the praise of people. Jesus condemned the religious leaders because **“all their works they do to be seen by men”** (Matthew 23:5), **“who desire to go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces, the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts, who devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation.”** (Mark 12:38-40). Your preaching will be no more holy than the desires of your heart.

A teacher who was found inadequate

When Nicodemus came to Jesus in John 3, he seemed to be impressed by the “signs” that Jesus was performing. Jesus did not waste any time, but He addressed the most important issue: **“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.”** John 3:3 Nicodemus was **“the teacher of Israel”** but he did not understand salvation, (John 3:10). Jesus said very clearly to him that his position in religion did not guarantee him to **“enter the Kingdom of God.”** John 3:5. These words of Jesus also applies to us as preachers.

You must be born again!

“It should be one of our first cares that we ourselves be saved men.” Charles Spurgeon

“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His Name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

John 1:12-13

In this passage, we learn who has the right to be children of God: those who are born of God. They are not His children because they were born **“of blood”**: from a certain lineage or family, or because of **“the will of the flesh or of the will of man”**: because they responded to an altar-call and **“prayed the sinner’s prayer”**, no, they are His children because they are born **“of God”**.

When Jesus said to Nicodemus that a believer must be **“born of water and the Spirit”** in order to enter the Kingdom of God (John 3:5), he referred to Ezekiel:

*“Then I will sprinkle **clean water** on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put **a new spirit** within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put **My Spirit** within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.”* Ezekiel 36:25-27.

Being **“born of water and the Spirit”** is therefore a sovereign work of God and not because of the will or the works of a man. God cleans those that are His and He puts His Spirit into them. God causes a believer to desire to live in God’s holiness and do His will.

In John 3, Jesus teaches Nicodemus that without this sovereign, heart-renewing work of God, he will not go to heaven. Jesus answered and said to him, **“Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?”** John 3:10. This also means that a teacher who does not know the life-transforming work of God, will not be able to teach others the Gospel!

Repentance and Faith in Jesus Christ

The natural question to ask when hearing the Gospel, as presented by Jesus and His disciples, is: **“Men and brethren, what shall we do?”** (Acts 2:37). We must respond with repentance and faith in Jesus Christ:

“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the Name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Acts 2:38. *“Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to **repent**...”* Acts 17:30 (also see Acts 5:31 and 2 Timothy 2:25).

While repentance and faith is commanded to all people everywhere, it is the fruit of salvation and not the cause of salvation; God **“...granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.”** Acts 11:18.

A Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing?

In Matthew 7:1-5 Jesus concludes the Sermon on the Mount with a serious warning about hypocrisy: **“Judge not, that you be not judged...”** Jesus warned against hypocrisy in our judgement; we cannot correct another when we are guilty of the same or even a worse sin! We must remove “the plank” from our own “eye” so that we will have a good judgement, purity, righteousness, wisdom, love, humility, accuracy and gentleness to correct another. We are commanded to remove any known sin from our lives before we will make an impact on the lives of others. We must use the same Biblical standard for ourselves as for others (Matthew 7:12). In the same chapter, Jesus gives us three warnings:

1. **“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.”** Matthew 7:13
2. **“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in Heaven.”** Matthew 7:21
3. **“But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.”** Matthew 7:26

When we preach a message that sounds convincing to others, but we ourselves do not do it, we are **“false prophets, who come...in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.”** Matthew 7:15. If we are not willing to live out our own message, why then do we preach it? It must be with evil motives and these motives make us ravenous wolves who preach an appealing message for our own evil gain. Jesus concludes each of His three warnings with a condemnation: such a person’s end will be in utter destruction – he will be condemned to hell!

What are your motives for being in the ministry?

“Examine yourselves...”

A Useful Instrument

When we examine ourselves, we are not only concerned with rooting out wickedness, but we must also be concerned that spiritual growth is present. Repentance does not only mean to turn away from sin, but to also turn towards Jesus Christ in faith.

To the apostle Paul this is a very serious matter when he gives a warning to the Corinthians:

“Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the Faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?--unless indeed you are disqualified.” 2 Corinthians 13:5

Every believer, but especially a preacher should examine himself daily and search his own heart for evidences of faith, which include:

A life of repentance (Acts 26:20)

Faith in Christ unto salvation (Hebrews 3:6; 1 Timothy 1:15),

Loving the Lord, Jesus Christ by keeping God’s Commandments (Psalm 1; John 14:15, 21, 23; 1 John 2:3),

Obedience to God (Matthew 7:21),

Forsaking sin and continuing in the Christ-following life (Hebrews 12:1),

Pursuing holiness (Ephesians 1:4; Hebrews 12:14; 1 John 3:3; 1 Peter 1:15&16),

Seeing the fruit of the Holy Spirit in your life (John 16:7&8; Galatians 5:22 & 23; Ephesians 5:18-33),

Love for other Christians (1 John 3:14),

Displaying Christian virtue which positively influences your society (Matthew 5:16),

Adhering to the Apostolic teaching (1 John 4:2)

Having the testimony of the Holy Spirit within you (Romans 8:15 & 16).

Continually renewing your mind (Romans 12:1 & 2)

Does anyone understand?

The Apostle Paul teaches Timothy: ***“Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith, from which some, having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk, desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm.”***

1 Timothy 1:5-7

Even as shocking as these words are, it can also be said of many preachers today. They do not spend time looking into God’s Ten Commandments in order to repent from their own sin and prepare their own hearts to be pure. They do not confess their sin to have a good conscience. They do not have saving faith in Jesus Christ the Saviour. Many preachers are more concerned with “*idle talk*”; unproductive speech-making. The worst of this is that they do not understand their own speaking, but expect others to respond to their babbling.

Become useful!

“But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honour and some for dishonour. Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honour, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work. Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.”

2 Timothy 2:20-22

Paul teaches Timothy about usefulness. We are servants of the Master, Who does not use any defiled vessel for His work. When we look at men who achieved great things for God, we should realise that they were committed to a holy life.

None of us will one day look back on his life having regret of being too holy! Paul instructs Timothy to “clean” himself from the dishonour of youthful lusts and to “fill” himself with the fruit of the Spirit. Purity therefore is not only in a clean, yet empty, life, but a pure, fruit-filled heart. This signifies an attractive life to those around us, and is also desirable to God, Who will be glorified by His ministers. In Paul’s second letter to Timothy, Paul

calls his disciple to spiritual maturity and strength, perseverance, an ability to suffer hardship, to a life that will give all the glory to God – just as Paul’s life.

The purpose of a minister of God is to preach God’s messages. Therefore he must be mature to be **“approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth”** (2 Timothy 2:15), he **“must be gentle to all, able to teach,”** (2 Timothy 2:24) and he must **“Preach the Word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.”** (2 Timothy 4:2). In your country, there are many lost people who need to hear the Biblical Gospel message **“if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil...”** 2 Timothy 2:25-26.

If you do not consider the doctrine of salvation important enough to study for your own sake, you will not have a burden to understand it for the sake of many other lost souls.

“You cannot expect maximum blessing from minimum commitment. Wholehearted surrender to God is essential. What you surrender to God He accepts, what He accepts He cleanses, what He cleanses He fills, and what He fills, He uses.”³

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled.” Matthew 5:6⁴

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BIBLICAL PREACHING

Biblical preaching is proclaiming God's Word with boldness and accuracy. This means that the Bible is the authority from which the preacher creates his sermon. It is both the foundation and content of his message.

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” 2 Timothy 3:16 (NKJV).

Preach the Word

Biblical preaching involves studying God's Word and proclaiming it to others: ***“For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel”*** Ezra 7:10. Before Jesus ascended into heaven, He left us with the instruction to ***“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations... teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you”*** Matthew 28:19-20. Naturally, the commandments of Christ are revealed in Scripture.

Biblical preaching should be Bible based and Christ centred. God chose to use human writers to document exactly what He wants us to know. He breathed His Words out with no errors, so that they could be recorded and leaned upon for as long as mankind exists. The Word of God holds a higher authority than any other piece of literature, person, political party or organisation in the world. The implications of this are literally life-changing. The Word of God reigns supreme in our lives and we should look to it as our final authority in all matters of faith and conduct.

Without God's Word, preaching is an endless search for topics and techniques to tickle people's ears. Without the Bible, opinions and emotions will formulate the sermon instead of the Word itself.¹ When sinful men use their own fallen opinions and emotions to preach, they are bound to go wrong. This destructive negligence of the Bible is observable in the sinful behaviour of Israel in the Book of Judges when ***“Everyone did what was right in his own eyes”*** Judges 17:6.

Preaching remains a relevant practice in any culture. Not just any preaching, but Biblical preaching. Preaching is powerless if it is not from the Word, for it consists of the life changing written Word of God. It includes proclaiming, teaching, speaking and bearing witness.² It calls people to action, it confronts satanic worldviews, and it challenges people to break away from sin.

“And they continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine...” Acts 2:42.

Preaching Christ

When we talk about preaching from the Bible the obvious implication is that the entire sermon must be firmly rooted in Scripture. While this is true, one should never forget that the Bible continually points the reader to Christ. One can easily preach through an entire book of the Bible with academic accuracy, but unless the sermon points the listeners to Christ, the preacher has not fulfilled his mission.

God has revealed Himself to the world in the Person of Jesus Christ. God the Father and God the Holy Spirit both point us toward Jesus Christ. On the mount of Transfiguration God the Father declared, ***“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him!”*** Of the Holy Spirit, Jesus said: ***“But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of Truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me”*** John 15:26. When Jesus Christ told of the power of the Holy Spirit He was very careful to emphasise the reason and the result of the power. Many preachers like to preach on Acts 1:8 but they miss the main point of it all ***“you shall be witnesses to Me.”*** Jesus Christ promises power, with the result in us being witnesses to Him. Power without Christ is pointless; in fact, power without Christ is no power at all.

Jesus Christ must be the banner of every ministry because that is the Biblical example set before us. In Colossians 1:28-29, Paul makes his motives for preaching clear: ***“Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labour, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.”*** After Paul was with the church at Corinth for 18 months he said ***“For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified”*** 1 Corinthians 2:2. Evangelism in the early Church is recorded in Acts 8:5: ***“Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them.”*** The Book of Acts is full of examples of the early Church ministers preaching Christ; in fact, one could say that the sole theme of the early Church is preaching Christ.

The Biblical Example

Jesus Christ, who is our model in all things, had a strong preaching ministry. ***“From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, ‘Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand’”*** Matthew 4:17. The preaching of Jesus was not based on something abstract; it was thoroughly Biblical. Jesus Christ confirmed the Old Testament as the inspired Word of God. He taught that the Words of the Law and the Prophets were to be admired, loved, and applied to one’s life. ***“Then He said to them, ‘These are the Words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me’”*** Luke 24:44.

The ethical teachings of Jesus were firmly rooted in the Old Testament Scriptures (Matthew 5:17); therefore, they were based on the very character of God. Not only were they rooted in Old Testament Scriptures, but they went beyond the outward emphasis which people tried to keep. Jesus struck at the heart of sin and morality by striking at the heart of the sinner. Jesus showed that adultery and murder begin in the heart (Matthew 5:22-28).

Our Lord was an excellent teacher and preacher. He would use the Scriptures as the basis of His teachings, explain them, and then apply them to His listeners. ***“And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself”*** Luke 24:27. If we have a desire to preach like Jesus, we too must begin in the Scriptures and explain them to our listeners. After Jesus preached from the Scriptures, the disciples said ***“Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?”*** Luke 24:32. Surely this is the desire of every preacher, to see people deeply impacted by the Word of God.

The Church was born through preaching on the day of Pentecost. Preaching continued even as the New Testament Church grew. The Holy Spirit uses the Word of God to convict, confront, and convert men.

“‘Is not My Word like a fire?’ says the LORD, ‘And like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?’”

Jeremiah 23:29.

Preaching calls people to **action**. It instructs people by teaching doctrine. Churches are planted and nourished through the proclaimed Word of God. Peter wrote that ***“Having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the Word of God which lives and abides forever... This is the Word which by the Gospel was preached to you”*** 1 Peter 1:23-25. Preaching identifies the Church as the Body of Christ. Through preaching God revives, convicts, and calls people to submit to His Lordship.³ Preaching is a serious matter, it has well been said, “we dare to speak for God”.

Preaching is useful for correcting false doctrine. This is a reason Paul tells Timothy to preach. ***“Preach the Word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers”*** 2 Timothy 4:2-3. Since false teachers and false prophets abound today, God’s Word needs to be accurately proclaimed with passion and intent! Preaching should be done out of obedience to God, and it will accomplish the purposes which God intends for it.

Because the source of the sermon is the Word of God, the preacher needs to labour to ensure that his sermon will be accurate.

Preach like Paul

“For our exhortation did not come from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit. But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the Gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts” 1 Thessalonians 2:3-4.

In this passage, Paul reminds the Thessalonians of the excellence of the Gospel in his exhortation. We read an account of Paul’s exhortation in Acts 13 when he and Silas are in Antioch. After the Law and the Prophets are read in the synagogue, Paul stands up and gives an exhortation. Using the Scriptures, Paul preaches a Bible-based, Christ-centred message. The Apostle tells the Thessalonians that his preaching did not come from error. There may have been those who were pointing their fingers at the founder of the congregation saying that his preaching was wrong, but the church should have remembered that Paul’s preaching was Scripture rich and Christ focussed. Paul had a daily concern for his congregations, and he prayed for them constantly. I have no doubt that Paul would have spent time preparing his heart and mind, so that he would not preach in error.

Biblical Preaching

Paul wrote that he did not come by way of deceit – or quite literally, baiting a hook (“guile” in the KJV). Paul would not compromise his message by softening it. He would not deceive people into believing the Gospel. Paul was not interested in tickling ears. **“we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the Word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God”** 2 Corinthians 4:2.

Have you examined your exhortation? Do you spend time preparing your heart and mind for ministry?

Are you willing to seek God and study His Word so as not to minister in error?

There are many preachers and teachers who do not prepare themselves for ministering; especially preaching. Many pastors have a lax attitude toward the ministry of God’s Word. The only sermon preparation they do is to spend a few hours in front of “Christian television”! There needs to be no small amount of time spent in labouring in prayer and in the Word.

Can your exhortation be described as baiting the hook?

It is not easy to preach a strong Gospel message to people who do not want to hear it. It is easy to tell people what they want to hear.

It is not easy to preach repentance. It is easy to preach *your best life now*.

It is not easy to preach on man’s depravity, but it is easy to preach the gospel of a good self-image.

It is not easy to preach on holiness. It is easy to preach prosperity.

It is not easy to preach the truth, but it is easy to bait a hook.

Have your motives been checked? Can you say with Paul, **“We have been approved by God to be entrusted with the Gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing to men but God who examines our hearts”** 1 Thessalonians 2:4?

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TYPES OF BIBLICAL PREACHING

There are two major types or styles of preaching which are practiced today. These are *topical sermons* and *expository sermons*. While there are other forms of preaching such as narrative, drama, and ethical sermons, these are not as widely used. Additionally, these types of sermons can fall into the topical or expository category.

Topical Preaching

A topical sermon is built on a subject or idea which addresses personal or social issues. These two areas usually involve economics, politics, society, culture, or current issues facing the world.¹ Theologically, certain Biblical issues are only understood with the whole Counsel of Scripture. Topical preaching, which is not only based on one text, is an ideal form of preaching to address these doctrines (such as the Trinity). Topical preaching speaks to a topic, yet it is not an exposition of one specific text.²

Expository Preaching

The word expository means to explain or make plain. Therefore, when a minister is explaining a portion of Scripture, it is referred to as expository preaching. While the expository sermon can take a few different forms, expository preaching is a sermon which clearly explains a selected portion of Scripture.³ Chapel stated that "*Expository preaching attempts to present and apply the truths of a specific Biblical passage*".⁴ An expository sermon can be made from a phrase or several verses which contains a complete thought. It can be derived from a longer portion of Scripture such as a chapter from the Bible. Sometimes an expository sermon can be similar to a topical sermon. A doctrinal theme or topic may be found in a passage; In order to develop this thought further, a lot of cross referencing may be required. The preacher may take an entire passage and focus on a central doctrine. Sometimes this requires the preacher to go beyond a single passage of Scripture in order to explain the doctrinal statement more clearly. An expository sermon always draws its theme, main points, and application, from the Bible.⁵

Choosing to Preach

You may be wondering which type of sermon you should be preaching. A comparison of expository and topical preaching may be helpful for you to decide which type of sermon you should be preaching in your given situation.

In the expository sermon, the content of the sermon comes from the Bible. An advantage of expository sermons is that the listeners will have a deeper understanding of doctrine from specific verses rather than having an understanding of a theme. A theme is more likely to be presented in a topical sermon.

An expository sermon can be beneficial for someone who is not familiar with the entire Bible. The reason for this is the main idea and theme of a specific book or chapter is explained by the preacher. One need not know the entire Bible to understand a sermon delivered in such a way. By way of contrast, one may need to know the context of many books of the Bible when listening to a topical style sermon in order to critically evaluate the sermon. The preacher may use passages from many different portions of Scripture, and unless the preacher digs into the context of each passage, the listener will have to know the context in order to fully appreciate, or evaluate, what is being heard.

Another advantage of the expository sermon is that in shorter passages, the structure of the sermon is already laid out for the preacher. Biblical exposition ensures the preacher and the congregation will be bound to the only means of true spiritual renewal – the Bible.⁶

One danger of the topical sermon is that it does not draw out its structure, main points, and conclusion from any one specific text. On a positive note, the topical sermon allows for one to speak on pressing issues faced by a generation. The topical sermon is of use when preaching on a theological subject because the whole range of Scripture is in use which could shed more light on a given idea. It also reveals that the Church can speak to modern issues.

While there are advantages to topical preaching, a warning should be issued for those who preach topical sermons. As the preacher focuses on the theme at hand, he may lose sight of the Bible in favour of preaching about the topic.

A few more words should be mentioned about expository preaching. Expository preaching is not reading a long portion of Scripture while making a few of your own remarks as you read. It is not simply preaching based

on many verses. Expository preaching is not repeating a long list of commentaries on a specific Bible passage. It is not an academic study of a particular portion of Scripture.⁷

Expository preaching presents and applies the truths of the Bible so that the hearers will be impacted by the Words of God. It involves questioning and interrogating the text so that the true meaning is plain. This message is then organised, illustrated, and applied to the listeners.⁸

Evaluation of Expository Preaching

It is my opinion that expository preaching is the best type of preaching. There is life-transforming power in the Word of God, and expository preaching is the form of preaching that is most faithful in relating God's Words to people. Only the Word of God can change lives, and expository preaching is the proclamation of that Word. Exposition of the Biblical text implies that the meaning of the passage is the sermon; that is why it is the best form of preaching for life transformation.

Even though the existence of God is something which is made plainly known to each person (Romans 1:20), many people are rejecting the Creator of the universe. I personally know many people who were known to be Christians when they were younger, but today very few of them are worshipping God. Many of the same people who used to attend churches do not even acknowledge God as Lord, and some are outright atheists. It seems to me that nothing short of the faithful preaching of God's Word and a dynamic move of the Holy Spirit can revive people whose hearts are hardened. When Ezra read from the Book of the Law day by day at the assembly of the people of Israel the Israelites turned from their wickedness.

"Then those of Israelite lineage separated themselves from all foreigners; and they stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for one-fourth of the day; and for another fourth they confessed and worshiped the LORD their God" Nehemiah 9:2-3.

Many preachers neglect difficult passages of the Bible in order to please people. The doctrines of hell, repentance, wrath, and even the true nature of God's love are probably unknown by the average church member. When a preacher makes his way through the Bible, he is forced to handle difficult doctrines.

We need to return to Biblical preaching because the Word of God accomplishes God's purposes (Isaiah 55:11). Expository preaching seems to be the most faithful and accurate form of preaching in relation to the Bible. For these reasons, I believe that expository preaching is the best form of preaching for any culture.

"I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His Kingdom. Preach the Word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching." 2 Timothy 4:1-2

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(Endnotes)

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HOW NOT TO PREACH

Many people may be reading this thinking that there is nothing wrong with their current method of preaching. Unfortunately, I have run into many pastors who either ignorantly, or carelessly, make a terrible mess of pulpit ministry. Some people tend to think that a loud voice, or a charismatic personality, makes for good preaching: However, this is immeasurably far from the truth. It is possible to receive an “amen” from the congregation, preach with an open Bible, and have people respond to altar calls without really delivering a sermon of any practical value. Read the following examples of preaching pitfalls to see if one of them describes your method(s) of delivery.

Allegorical Preaching

Allegorical Preaching is one of the most dangerous preaching styles because the preacher actually uses the Bible and may even put a lot of effort into the sermon preparation, but his interpretation will be far from the true meaning of the Text. The Allegorical method of preaching will take a portion of the Bible, usually a narrative, and add a more “spiritual” meaning to the text. This form of interpretation is open to abuse because the interpretation is subject to the preacher. Instead of finding out what the text meant in its original historical grammatical context, the preacher claims to have a new revelation from Heaven about the text. Clearly the allegorical approach can be very dangerous because it is open to the apparent spirituality and prejudices of the interpreter.

Concordance Preaching

Concordance Preaching may be the easiest way of developing a sermon. Some preachers will chose a theme or a word and preach an entire sermon on it. The preacher will simply go to his concordance, find the word he is looking for, and write down all the Scripture references that match his chosen word or theme. Seldom will such an individual actually do research about the passage he has chosen. He will simply say whatever he wants and try to squeeze all of these verses into his sermon. The result is a sermon filled with Scripture, yet it remains unbiblical. Many of the chosen Bible verses will be pulled out of their contexts and forced into an imaginative idea preached from a pulpit.

Blind Boldness

Blind Boldness is another way of preaching which sounds convincing while lacking any real authority. Many pastors and evangelists will boastfully stand behind a pulpit and preach without any preparation. They may even shout and use impressive words to win over their audience. Yet this type of proclamation actually shows a contempt for God’s Word and a lack of dedication to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Believers, especially preachers, are meant to lead lives which are controlled by the Holy Spirit. How can a minister of God’s Word neglect the Spirit’s guidance in preparation to proclaim God’s Holy Word?

Imaginative Exposition

Imaginative Exposition is a very common way of preaching which also lacks any real preparation. A minister will open the Bible, read a portion of Scripture, close the Bible, and “allow the Spirit to lead him”. The best part about this type of preaching is that the Bible has been read, but after the Bible-reading, the congregation is left wondering where the content of the sermon is coming from. What makes this even worse is the attitude of many pastors who rebuke congregant members for questioning “God’s anointed” preacher. People should never be prevented from asking honest questions. Just because someone read the Bible before he preached does not mean that his message accurately represents the Word of God. Everything that the preacher says must be proven from God’s Word. The preacher should welcome anyone who wants to question him because everything he said should be directly referenced to the Bible.

Preaching like a Bully

Preaching like a bully is not really a way of interpreting the Bible, but it has more to do with the way a person presents his sermon. Some preachers know that their sermons lack meaningful content, so they try to convince people that what they are saying is true by appealing to their emotions. Some preachers take it to the extent of abusing their congregation. I have seen cases where people will even cut a “sermon” short in order to perform some sort of “deliverance” which involves slapping and kicking the women of the congregation. Most cases are not that extreme, but many preachers verbally abuse their people. There are those who shout and scream until they lose their voices in order to scare their people into submission, and they neglect the fruit of the Spirit such as “*gentleness and self-control*”. Just because someone stands in front of a congregation and shouts, does not excuse him from conformity to Christ. Such preachers urgently need to reform their way of presentation. The Apostle Paul stated, “*Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh*” (Galatians 5:16). Some

ministers seem to think that it is okay to display lusts of the flesh such as “*outbursts of wrath*” when they are in the pulpit. The scary thing is that a pastor who lacks any self-control may actually be unsaved! (2 Timothy 1:7).

Take Courage

The sermon styles mentioned above are all incorrect ways of preaching. Perhaps you have identified some ways you deliver your sermon while reading through these preaching pitfalls. The good news is that you can change the way you preach, and this manual will show you how!

“Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:11).

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SCRIPTURAL REQUIREMENTS for MINISTERS

1 Timothy 3:1-13

An **elder** must be:

- above reproach,
- the husband of but one wife,
- temperate,
- self controlled,
- respectable,
- hospitable,
- able to teach,
- not given to much wine,
- not violent, but gentle,
- not quarrelsome,
- not a lover of money.
- He must manage his own family well (if anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?) and see that his children obey him with proper respect.
- He must not be a recent convert or he may become conceited.
- He must also have a good reputation with outsiders so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil’s trap.

Titus 1:6-9

an **elder** must be

- blameless,
- the husband of but one wife,
- a man Whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.
- Since an overseer is entrusted with God’s Work, he
- must be blameless,
- not quick tempered,
- not given to much wine,
- not violent,
- not pursuing dishonest gain.
- Rather he must be hospitable,
- one who loves what is good,
- one who is self controlled,
- upright,
- holy
- He must hold firmly to the trustworthy Message as it has been taught
- so that he can encourage others - by sound doctrine
- and refute those who oppose it.

“The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, and especially those who work in preaching and teaching.” 1 Timothy 5:17

WHY WE DON'T PREACH

There are many factors in Christian communities which have contributed to a dangerous lack of Biblical preaching.

Obstacles to Preaching

One hindrance to Biblical preaching is a focus on numbers rather than on depth. Pastors are pressured to succeed rather than preach doctrinal truth. The problem with this way of thinking is that it begins with what works rather than the Bible. Instead of discovering a message from Scripture, the preacher is concerned with how many people he can please. However, the Bible makes it clear that the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation. Watering down the Gospel to try and accumulate a large congregation denies the sufficiency of Scripture by ignoring the biblical method of evangelism which is preaching the Gospel. John MacArthur wrote, *"We don't need to market the Gospel, disguise it, tone it down, or otherwise try make it acceptable to unbelievers... Apart from Christ and the ministry of His Spirit we can accomplish nothing"*.¹ This insight from MacArthur shows the lack of Biblical discernment on behalf of the many preachers. Romans 1:16 clearly indicates that true Salvation comes through the preaching of the Gospel. For those who do not preach the Gospel, their churches might grow, but the Kingdom of God remains stagnant with relation to their efforts.

Another hindrance to Biblical preaching is the idea that doctrine is divisive.² In reality, it is actually *false* doctrine which is divisive. This is the claim of the Apostle Paul to the church at Rome, *"Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them"* Romans 16:17. Preaching the truth may cause divisions, but it will divide the sheep from the goats. Those who are of Christ will love His Word, but those who are of this world will either be converted by it or hate it.

A stumbling block to Biblical preaching is the materialistic approach people have toward choosing a church.³ Loud music is higher up on the list of importance than solid Biblical teaching. Because so many people actually worship themselves, they believe that God exists to serve them. By extension of that belief, people demand that the clergy and the church should also exist to serve them. With an attitude of self-centredness such as this, it is no surprise that people are not interested in hearing the God-centred truths of the Bible being proclaimed. They would much rather hear a sermon about themselves.⁴ One popular Zimbabwean preacher preached a three-part series entitled *"love yourself"*. People who place themselves as the centre of importance are far more likely to choose a church which entertains them over a church which holds a high view of Scripture and God.

A problem for pastors who have a real passion for preaching is the emotional and feeling oriented approach toward Christianity.⁵ One should remember that while faith does involve experience, it is not merely an experience. True faith is based on the objective truths of Scripture.⁶ *"So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God"* Romans 10:17.

Christian indifference, or insensitivity, toward Theology is another hindering factor for Biblical preaching.⁷ Perhaps this is because of the non-confrontational societies in which we live. It could also be that people do not like to be confronted with a system of thought which opposes their way of living; therefore, they decide it is easier to simply be indifferent to the whole system of Biblical study. In any case, the preacher of the Word should not relent in preaching the Truth of Scripture.

"Preach the Word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching" 2 Timothy 4:2.

Some people may also view the study of God's Word as unspiritual! Truth, they believe, should come directly from God to the individual who is sensitive enough to receive it. While it is true that God does speak to His children, the Apostle Paul mentions hard work as a means to correctly handle the Word of God, *"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth"* 2 Timothy 2:15. Many preachers rip Biblical passages out of their original context. A catchy word or phrase might be viewed as true simply because it sounds good. Understanding doctrine and preaching doctrine is hard work! Those who do not work hard cannot hope to pursue and understand it. We are also commanded to love God with all of our minds (Mark 12:30-31). There is an intellectual aspect to worship.

Tradition may also cause an obstacle to sound teaching. People are more inclined to believe their tradition than doctrinal preaching which conflicts what they have been taught for generations.⁸ At this point, the strong Words of Jesus Christ as He quoted Isaiah ring loudly: **“He answered and said to them, ‘Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: ‘THIS PEOPLE HONOURS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR FROM ME. AND IN VAIN THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE COMMANDMENTS OF MEN’”** Mark 7:6-7.

Some people may have had bad experiences with expository preaching. Perhaps they have heard boring, dull, weak, or irrelevant expository preaching. Some preachers turn their sermons into commentaries or academic studies without any application to modern listeners. This is a shame, and it does not truly reflect Biblical exposition. True Biblical preaching should be enlightening and exciting for Church members because it is the proclamation of the Word of God. Those who love the Word should also love the explanation and application of the Word.

“And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” 2 Timothy 2:2.

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PREACHING WITH POWER

“And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God” 1 Corinthians 2:4-5

We all want to preach with power. We want to see the Holy Spirit working in the lives of people who listen to the proclaimed message of God’s Word. We want to see God being glorified by people coming to Salvation and living in obedience to Him. Most preachers will desire to preach under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, but what does that mean and what does it look like?

The Power of Preparation

A lie that has been believed by far too many preachers is that it is unspiritual to prepare for a sermon. The false assumption is that the Holy Spirit will guide an individual while he preaches an unprepared message, but He cannot guide a person who prayerfully and carefully prepares a message for the Body of Christ!

The truth is that the more time we spend reading and thinking about the Word, the more the Holy Spirit speaks to us. How can a preacher expect the Holy Spirit to remind him of a Biblical truth if that person has not read and thought about and practiced that Biblical truth before he stands behind a pulpit? The Holy Spirit does not reward laziness and arrogant apathy.

The Apostle Paul preached under the power of the Holy Spirit. He makes two things very clear about his preaching in Colossians 1. First, he preached Christ. Second, he laboured in hard work. ***“Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labour, striving according to His working which works in me mightily”*** Colossians 1:28-29

Be Filled with the Holy Spirit

Christians should be filled with the Holy Spirit according to Ephesians 5:18-20. This is a repeatable action of filling which results in renewed worship and thanksgiving toward God, renewed relationships toward others, increased holiness, empowerment for Christian service and ministry. This is observed in Peter before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:8) and the disciples speaking the Word of God boldly (Acts 4:31). To be filled with the Holy Spirit is something which happens continually throughout the Christian life. It is not a once off event. We should expect an increased capacity for the Holy Spirit’s influence and empowerment in our lives.¹ The preacher should expect the Holy Spirit’s abiding presence as he prepares and presents God’s Word.

Have You Experienced the Holy Spirit?

Many men and women claim to be filled with the Holy Spirit, but what does it mean to be filled or empowered by God’s Spirit?

The filling of the Holy Spirit should result in preaching the Word of God with courage. When the Sanhedrin threatened the disciples severely: ***“that from now on they speak to no man in this Name.” Peter and John answered: “whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak of the things which we have seen and heard.”*** (Acts 4:17-20)

The Holy Spirit guides us into truth. (John 14:26 & 16:13: ***“But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My Name, will teach you all things and will remind you... But when He, the Spirit of Truth comes, He will guide you into all truth...”***)

The Holy Spirit leads and guides us so that we will be more like Christ. (Romans 8:14: ***“...because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.”***).

He fills us with supernatural power (Luke 24:49: ***“...clothed with power from on high.”***).

He directs our prayer life (Ephesians 6:18: ***“...pray in the Spirit...”***).

He produces the fruit of the Spirit in our lives (Galatians 5:22-23: ***“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control”***).

The Holy Spirit gives gifts to each part of the Body (1 Corinthians 12:11).

He empowers us for worship (John 4:24: ***“God is Spirit, and His worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth...”***).

The Spirit empowers us for Evangelism (Acts 1:8: ***“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses...”***).

Call and direct us into ministries (Acts 13:2: “... **the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’**”).²

Do you have courage to preach God’s Truth? Are you being led into holiness and Christ-likeness? Does God’s Spirit lead you into truth? Have you experienced God’s supernatural power in a way that converts sinners and brings glory to Christ? Is your prayer life controlled and directed by the Spirit? Is there evidence of the fruit of the Spirit in your life? Are you being led into deeper worship with God? Are you evangelising the true Gospel of Jesus Christ? Have you been self-appointed, or Spirit led into your ministry?

Holy Spirit Boldness

The clear result of Spirit-filling in the Book of Acts is preaching the Gospel with boldness (Acts 4: 16-20). When Paul wrote to the church of Thessalonica he said “**We were bold in our God to preach to you the Gospel of God in much conflict**” (1 Thessalonians 2:3).³

This boldness is not being loud, or having charisma. There have been many great Gospel preachers who were not necessarily great speakers. When a man who has boldness in God speaks, he has an uncompromising Gospel message. When a preacher speaks up in holy boldness he will preach the Gospel of God even in the face of persecution as we read “**we were bold in our God to speak to you the Gospel of God in much conflict**”. 1 Thessalonians 2 especially emphasises the fact that the apostles preached the Gospel to the church. Paul was never, in his life as an Apostle, ashamed of the Gospel. Boldness is closely tied with Gospel preaching.

Clearly this boldness does not mean to have a persuasive personality or great public speaking skills. One example is the great preacher Johnathan Edwards. Edwards would come up to his pulpit, speak rather plainly, read much of his sermon, and simply preach the Bible. There was nothing fancy about him, nothing flashy in his approach to addressing the congregation, but he would preach the Word of God with accuracy and passion. There was nothing flamboyant or exaggerated about his conduct, but there was careful effort placed upon the use of each word. He would preach the truth without flinching, as he called sinners to Christ and dealt with difficult passages of Scripture. This was blessed with the Great Awakening Revival.

When the great evangelist George Whitfield would preach he would, at times, experience people mocking him. On occasions, people even threw pieces of dead animals and human filth at him while he was preaching, but he would not refrain from exalting God’s Truth.

This holy boldness is seen in Jesus Christ when He preached in the face of opposition. Even when He was accused of being possessed by a demon in John 7, He continued to preach. Such boldness is seen in Stephen preaching the Gospel of God in the face of death in Acts 7. This is Paul continuing to preach even after he is arrested in Philippi in Acts 16. As soon as he was done in Philippi, he preached the Gospel at Thessalonica in Acts 17. He was driven away by persecutors, and then he went to continue preaching in Berea. The same persecutors from Thessalonica followed him to Berea and he was sent away by the church there. But Paul was bold to preach the Gospel of God even in much conflict.

Holy boldness is having the passion to preach the truth of God even when it was unpopular. It is preaching the Gospel of God even in the face of opposition. It is preaching the Word of God in season and out of season; when it is acceptable and when it is unacceptable; when you are cheered and when you are mocked; when you are before friends and when you are before enemies. We need to preach with holy boldness!

Do you have boldness? Are you willing to preach and proclaim God’s Word in the face of opposition? Will the Gospel message which comes out of your mouth be seeker friendly or Spirit filled? Will the Gospel you preach be Christ Centred or man centred? Will you stay true to God’s Word or will you be swayed by this world? Many people become ministers in an attempt to become popular, but preachers of truth will be persecuted. Only preachers who are filled with the Holy Spirit will be able to preach clearly, boldly, and truthfully in the face of opposition.

“Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the Gospel according to the power of God” (2 Timothy 1:8).

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BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

As followers of Jesus Christ, the greatest joy we have is to be in relationship with the Living God. In order for people to be in relationships there has to be communication between people. So it is with our relationship with God. As Christians we hear the very Words of our Heavenly Father when we read the Bible, and we have the joy of talking to our Father in prayer. The Scriptures are the primary way that God speaks to His people today (Exodus 31:18; 32:16; Isaiah 30:8; 2 Peter 3:2). Therefore, since through the Bible God speaks to us, it is of supreme importance that we correctly understand what He means to communicate to us. Just as when we speak we want people to rightly interpret us, so too when God speaks through His Word, He wants His children to seek to rightly understand Him. We come to properly understand the Bible through the process of Biblical interpretation. In the task of interpretation we are seeking to answer the question, “*what does God’s Word mean?*” We will set out in this chapter on a journey to understand correctly how to learn what the Holy Spirit is saying to us through His Word.

Suppose, I were to tell a friend, “Although at times my wife and I argue, I love her more and more everyday.” Certainly, I would not want my friend to go around saying, “He said, ‘my wife and I argue.’ I think he might be getting a divorce soon. It seems like things have gotten really terrible in their marriage!” Think about what happened here. My friend quoted what I said, “my wife and I argue” but he took it out of its proper context and therefore twisted the true meaning of it. In context the emphasis was upon how much I love my wife even though we “argue sometimes,” but when taken out of context instead my friend created a new meaning for my words that had nothing to do with what I meant to communicate. It is easy to see that this would be a wrong and a dishonest way for any friend to interpret my words. Yet too often Christians misuse and misinterpret the Words of God by taking them out of context and by simply deciding for themselves what they want God’s Word to mean. Duvall and Hays explain the common mistake of many Christians today, “If the text looks as if it could be applied directly to them, they attempt to apply it directly. If not they take a *Spiritualizing approach* to the meaning”¹ in which they make up new spiritual meaning for difficult passages in God’s Word.

So what is **interpretation**? It is the process of understanding what God’s Word meant to the original audience and how rightly to apply it to our lives today. Interpretation is not about what the Bible means to me. This comes later in the process in the application stage. It also is not about what seems or feels right to me. Rather interpretation is about **what the Bible meant to the original audience**. Lets look at Jeremiah 29:11 to see what we mean by this: “*For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.*”

Some people will come to this verse and think, “what does this mean to me?” They may say this means that God wants to prosper me by making me healthy, wealthy, and prosperous. It says that the LORD has “plans for welfare” for me. This must mean that he wants to give me everything I know to truly be the best for my welfare. Maybe the Lord will fill my bank account with lots and lots of money!

This verse in Jeremiah actually has nothing to do with making us financially prosperous. Let us think through this verse as what it meant to the Biblical audience and not jump to what it means to us just yet. **Who is this written to?** It was written to Israel. **When was it written?** It was written during a time when God was sending judgment on Israel for their long history of rebellion, idolatry, and sin against the LORD. **Who is writing this?** Jeremiah. **Who is Jeremiah?** He is a prophet of the LORD, who is warning Israel about the judgment to come and calling them to repentance. **What is this verse talking about in context?** That God is going to punish his people, Israel, by sending them into seventy years of Babylonian captivity (29:10), and Jeremiah 29:11 is a promise that although God is sending judgment, He has greater plans for His people. Even this discipline of exile is for their “*welfare and not for evil, to give [them] a future and a hope.*”

See how different we come to understand this passage when we come asking questions of what the Bible meant to the original audience? It is far different than the interpretation we got when we asked “what does this mean to me today” because that would be jumping straight to application. **Although the Bible was written for you it was not written directly to you.** All our study of Scripture ought to transform our lives as Jesus says in John 17:17 in His prayer to the Father before His execution, “*Sanctify them in the truth, Your Word is truth.*” The whole reason we are here learning how to study Scripture is because we want to be transformed by the Truth and lead our churches in how to be transformed by the Truth of the Everlasting God.

The Journey of Interpretation

Since we do not want to simply create new meaning for the Bible but seek to understand what God and the human author actually meant to communicate, let us begin on a trip together. It is helpful to think of the joy of interpreting Scripture as a journey that we are setting out on in order to come from the world and culture of the Bible to our world and culture today. In *Grasping God's Word* it explains the task of interpreting Scripture as a four step journey across great rivers of time, culture, language, and situation.

The First part of the journey is to understand “the Text in their Town.”² This means that we first need to understand what the Bible meant to the original audience who heard it.

The Second step is to Measure “the Width of the River to Cross.”³ This means that we want to understand how different the context of the original Biblical audience is from our own.

Third, we want to cross the bridge made by a Theological principle. We want to understand what principle God intended to communicate through the passage we are studying to all believers throughout time.

The Final part of the journey is “Grasping the Text in our Town”⁴ in which we seek to apply God's Word to our lives in our different situations today.

When we rightly interpret the text it is like going on a journey in which we safely cross over the river and make it to the other side. However, when we misinterpret the Word it is like falling into the river and getting carried down stream. When we misinterpret the Bible and start drifting down the river, as pastors we will also be taking our congregations down the river with us where they can fall into all sorts of errors. This is why Paul tells Timothy, “**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. He says that the way in which we present ourselves to God as approved is by “rightly handling” His Word. This is why it is important as we set out on this journey to constantly be in prayer. We need to have a dependence on the Holy Spirit, because we have been given the holy task to be the messengers of the King of the Universe. This is why the psalmist prays, “*Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your Law.*” Psalm 119:18. The Holy Spirit helps bring to light the Scriptures as we read them. Therefore we need to prayerfully depend on God the Spirit during every step of this journey and pray that He would open the eyes of our hearts to understand rightly the Words of the King as we diligently study them.

Considering Context

Imagine a Christian man is sitting out under a tree on a nice sunny day, spending time with the Lord. This man desperately wants to know God's will for your life, he prays “God please tell me what to do with my life.” He sits there in silence and doesn't hear anything. He waits several minutes and he still doesn't hear anything. He decides that he will flip open his Bible and obey the first thing he reads. He grabs his Bible sitting peacefully on the grass besides him. He opens it up and reads the first words his eyes fall on: “*they use their tongues to deceive*” Romans 3:13. Then he quickly turns the page and sees, “*You go, and do likewise.*” Luke 10:37. This man thinks that he has just received a command from the Lord. He must go and lie to people!

This story shows how dangerous it can be for us to apply verses out of context to our lives. The **context** is “the parts of something written or spoken that immediately precede and follow a word or passage clarify its meaning.”⁵ So when we say a verse is “out of context” we mean that we are not considering the whole story or paragraph surrounding a Bible verse. Although reading only one verse is not always harmful, it can be theologically dangerous to do so without understanding the context around it. As in the story, the Christian man may have been genuine and sincere in seeking guidance from the Bible, but he was going about doing it in a wrong way. What went wrong in the story? He was reading only isolated verses and applying them directly to his life without considering what the verse even meant in context. It is vital that we look at the whole story rather than just reading a single Bible verse, for we must considering the context.

When we read only one verse the meaning of what we are reading can be confusing, but when we read the whole story it brings it to life! If someone were to hear you speak for only fifteen seconds, then assumed they knew all about your life, you would think they were crazy! That person did not understand your whole life but only knew about fifteen second of your life. God is a God of wholeness and completion. Thus, everything in this world takes place in a specific background and context. Therefore, we need to see the whole story in order to properly understand people, books, countries, and most importantly the Bible in all its fullness and richness.

Let us look at the first verse in the story taken out of context: *“they use their tongues to deceive”* (Romans 3:13) and see if we can see more clearly what this means. When we read the immediate context of Romans 3 we see that Paul is talking about how all the world has gone astray from God:

*“None is righteous, no, not one;
no one understands;
no one seeks for God.
All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;
no one does good,
not even one.
Their throat is an open grave;
they use their tongues to deceive.”* Romans 3:10-13

Then Paul explains, *“Now we know that whatever the Law says it says to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be stopped and the whole world may be held accountable to God.”* Romans 2:19. Paul in context is not giving a command to use our tongues to deceive, rather he is telling how terribly sinful humanity has become. He tells them that the Law will silence all sinners before God, because they will all see that they are accountable and stand condemned before a holy God. In context it is clear that this is not a command from God to lie, rather it is a condemnation of those who are in rebellion against God.

The second verse that was read out of context, in the story, was Luke 10:37, *“You go and do likewise.”* This verse falls at the end of a story in Luke’s Gospel. So we must go back and read the whole story from Luke 10:25-37. If you have a Bible open up to this story now. Let us see what is taking place here in the literary context. In this story, a lawyer (v. 25) is trying *“to justify himself”* (v. 29) and is seeking to be free of the demands of the Law to love *“your neighbour as yourself”* (v. 27). So Jesus tells the lawyer, the parable of the Good Samaritan where three different people pass by a man robbed, beaten, and left for dead (v. 30). *“A priest”* and a *“Levite”* pass by the nearly dead man in apathy (v. 31-32). But a Samaritan, (who was from an opposing tribe that was looked down upon), comes by the man and has *“compassion”* on him (v. 33). The Samaritan helps the man get medical attention and gives sacrificially of all he has to help care for him. Jesus after telling this parable asked the lawyer, *“Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbour to the man who fell among the robbers?”* He said, *“The one who showed him mercy.”* And Jesus said to him, ***“You go, and do likewise.”*** Luke 10:36-37. Jesus is challenging the lawyer to have mercy as the Samaritan did (v. 33-35, 37) and to love his neighbour as himself (v. 27).

See how once we read the whole story it brings the words *“You go and do likewise”* to life? We now understand that this command is not God ordering us to lie to others. Since God is holy, He would not command us to violate His Laws and sin by lying. Rather in context, this is a beautiful command to love our neighbours as the Samaritan did. This verse is about having compassion on those in need and giving of ourselves to help our neighbour. *“By honouring the context of Scripture, we are saying that we would rather hear what God has to say than put words in His mouth. **Context determines meaning!**”*⁶

Summary: Remember, what we did here is called observing the context. The verse you are looking at always falls within a bigger story or paragraph that we must read in order to bring the immediate verse to life. We always want to be sure when studying the Bible that we read the larger section in which a passage is written.

Literary Context

Now that we have looked at the overarching principle of context let us move on to looking at literary context. Literary context starts with the verse we are studying and moves gradually outward to the context of the whole Bible. It is like dropping a rock in a lake and watching the waves move farther and farther out. The splash starts in one specific place then the waves move a little bit further out, then further and further out, until the waves have covered a huge area of the lake.

Literary context works in the following way when we are studying a Bible verse. Suppose we are wanting to study Genesis 50:20, *“As for you, **you meant evil against me but God meant it for good, to bring about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.**”* Just as a rock dropped in a lake enters at one specific point, so we likewise begin with a specific verse or passage. What happens next is the ripples move out to the context of the whole story, then to the context of whole book of Genesis, then to all the books that Moses wrote (Genesis-Deuteronomy), then to the whole Old Testament, and finally to the whole Bible.

One of the most important principles to remember when studying a passage is that understanding the immediate context helps determine meaning more than looking at the larger context. So when reading Genesis 50:20 it is more important to understand how this fits into the whole story of Joseph (Genesis 37-50) than to understand what Romans 8:28 says about God causing ***“all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose”*** (NASB). Although this verse is relevant to Genesis 50:20 it does not help us understand the immediate context. But let’s look at the whole story of Joseph and see how the immediate context brings this verse to life.

- **Who exactly is speaking?** Joseph (50:19).
- **Who “meant evil” against Joseph?** His brothers did (50:15) when they *“they conspired... to kill him”* (37:18) and sold him into slavery (37:28).
- **How did God mean it for good?** He meant it for good by using Joseph’s slavery to put him in a position of high authority in Egypt (41:40) *“to bring about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today”* (50:20).

The immediate context of the story paints this verse with vibrant colour whereas the verse in Romans 8:28 did not even help explain exactly what *“you meant evil”* even was referencing.

Historical Context

If you were to visit England you would not necessarily understand why the people are more individualistic and do not live as part of a united community. In order to know why they behaved this way, you would first have to get to know the people. Then you would need to find out what their culture, traditions, and values were that drove this behaviour of living disconnected from community. Likewise we may not understand the culture of the Bible when we come to read it without researching what their customs, traditions, and values were.

The original authors and audience of the Bible came from cultures different from our own and it is important to understand their culture so that we can better understand God’s Word. The historical context helps explain specific words or the background of our passage. Let us see how this works by looking at Ephesians 6:12: *“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”* We are able to learn about this historical background of this verse in a couple of different ways. First, we can look up the story of Paul’s visit to Ephesus in the book of Acts to better grasp the background of Ephesus. In Acts 19 we find the story of Paul’s visit to Ephesus, where he spent two years (v. 10) and three months (v. 8) evangelizing and discipling the people. Acts 19:18-20 records: *“Also many who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. And a number of those who had practised magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver. So the Word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.”*

We see here that as believers came to salvation and repentance they were bringing their books of *“magic arts”* to burn them *“in the sight of all.”* There was a mighty work of transformation taking place in this city. In fact the occultic books that were burned amounted to a modern day equivalent of \$6 million US dollars.⁷

This led to controversy in the city, as *“a silversmith who made silver shrines of Artemis”* was afraid of losing his livelihood (Acts 19:24). So he gathered his fellow idol-making friends together and warned them about how Paul was going around all of Asia and turning people away from the gods (Acts. 19:25-26). The craftsman of idols explained, *“And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship”* (Acts 19:27). This outraged the citizens of Ephesus and they dragged two of Paul’s travelling companions into the theatre, crying out *“Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!”* This confusion carried on for two hours and eventually the town clerk warned the crowd that they may be *“charged with rioting today”* (Acts 19:40). After he calmed down the fuming crowd, *“he dismissed the assembly”* (Acts 19:41).

From reading this story in Acts of Paul’s missionary journey to Ephesus, we can begin to grasp the depth of the idolatrous demon worship in Ephesus. Before the Ephesians came to Christ, they were partaking in the worship of Artemis and the *“magic arts.”* Therefore, Paul encourages the Ephesian church saying, *“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places...”* Ephesians 6:12.

Secondly we can further study the background by looking up the word “Ephesus” in a Bible Dictionary or Encyclopedia. *The New Bible Dictionary* tells us that Ephesus was an epicenter of worship to false gods in the ancient world. A temple to the goddess Artemis was in Ephesus and was seen as one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Additionally, the Ephesians were awarded for having three temples of worship to the emperors in their city. They received an honoured title because of their devout emperor worship.⁸ This background of the worship of human leaders, worship of false gods (or demons), and extreme idolatry is the historical context which the Ephesians believers faced. These are the real “*spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places*” that the Ephesian Christians were facing then, much like believers throughout the world have to face today.

Whenever we are studying a Bible verse and we are struggling to understanding a word or what the author is trying to communicate, we can look to Biblical tools to help us. Bible Dictionaries and Encyclopedias will be essential for our background study. A good study Bible will also be a very critical tool to have. (Also, visit www.williamcareybi.com for resources both online and in print that will help you in your interpretive journey).

A good place to start researching is to look up the name of the Book of the Bible we are studying in a Bible Dictionary or Encyclopedia (if we are studying 1 Kings, we would look at the entry “Kings, books of”). Specific things we may want to look up would be “Head coverings,” when we are reading 1 Corinthians 11:2-16. We will also want to see what “slave, slavery” is to understand what Paul means when he refers to “slaves” or “bondservants” in Ephesians 6:5-9. We may want to research “crucifixion” to better understand what exactly Jesus went through when He was crucified (See Matthew 27:37; Mark 15:26; Luke 23:38; John 19:19–22).

These are some important questions to ask when researching the historical context of the book we are studying:

- “Who was the author?”
- What was his background?
- When did he write?
- What was the nature of his ministry?
- What kind of relationship did he have with the audience?
- What were their circumstances?
- How was their relationship with God?
- What kind of relations did they have with each other?
- What was happening at the time the book was written?
- Are there any other historical/cultural factors that might shed light on the Book?”⁹

Remember that although **historical context** is very important, it is even more important to read the **literary context** of this verse to understand the meaning. For example the historical context of Ephesus explained what some of the “*spiritual forces of evil*” were that the Ephesians were facing but it does not explain what the relationship is between believers and these demonic forces. When we look in the context of the whole Book of Ephesians we can see that this idea of spiritual “rulers” and “authorizes” of darkness has been spoken of throughout the whole Book. In 1:20-21 Paul shows how Christ triumphed over the rulers and authorities of darkness and was placed above every name that is named. Then Paul demonstrates how the Ephesians were once part of this world following the prince of darkness and were heading for destruction (2:3) as they too were once of the darkness (5:6). Now as a new creation in Christ (2:10, 4-8), they are to fight against these powers of darkness in their lives (6:10-12). They are to gain all their strength from the Lord in order to engage in the fight: “***be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil***” (6:10-11). The background gives us some insightful information about the passage, but the literary context still is key to understanding what the author meant.

Observation and Interpretation¹⁰

God’s Word is best understood by drawing out the meaning from the text,¹¹ which is the goal of interpretation. We do not want to put our own ideas into the passage we are reading; rather we must understand the meaning that is already there in the passage. The way we begin doing this is by observing the details of the Biblical passage. We need to read, read, and reread the passage again and again, observing as much as we can about it in order to understand what the Biblical author was meaning to communicate. This first part of the journey is

all about observation and learning what the text meant to the original audience. As Dr. Michael Kyomya notes, “*Good observation leads to good interpretation.*”¹² At this point in the process we are simply looking for what the Bible says and not asking, “*What does it mean?*” The following list¹³ is a helpful guide to making observations of a Biblical passage:

1. Repeated words

When we read the text it is important to take note of any repeated words in the text. Repetition signifies an emphasis or a theme being formed in a passage. For example let us read John 15:18-19 and note all the repeated words you see: “*If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.*” Notice how the word “*hate*” is repeated three times in verse 18 and again at the end of verse 19. Also, “*world*” is repeated six times in this passage. Indicating an emphasis on the hatred of the world.

2. Contrasts

Take note of contrasting ideas, things, or people in the text. A contrast focuses on differences between things. Key words: *but, rather, yet, and however.*

“*So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit.*” Matthew 7:17

Notice how the “*healthy tree*” and its “*good fruit*” are contrasted to the “*diseased tree*” and its “*bad fruit.*” There is both a contrast between healthy and diseased trees, as well as a contrast between good and bad fruit. One tree produces good results and the other tree produces bad results.

3. Comparisons

Look for ideas, things, or people whose similarities are being compared. Whereas contrasts look at differences, comparisons look at similarities. Key words: *like, as, just as, or likewise.*

“*For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.* ³ *While people are saying, ‘There is peace and security,’ then sudden destruction will come upon them as labour pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.*” 1 Thessalonians 5:2-3. Notice how verse 2 compares “*the day of the Lord*” coming with the unexpected coming of “*a thief in the night.*” Verse 3 compares the “*sudden destruction*” that is to come with the intense and unstoppable “*labour pains [that] come upon a pregnant woman.*”

4. Lists

Anytime you see more than two things being itemized you can note them as a list. “*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.*” Galatians 5:22-23

There is a list made of nine items (1) love, (2) joy, (3) peace, (4) patience, (5) kindness, (6) goodness, (7) faithfulness, (8) gentleness, and (9) self-control, that is said to be “*the fruit of the Spirit.*”

5. Cause and effect relationships

Often the Bible uses cause and effect relationships to explain the outcome (or effect) of a particular action or event (or cause). Key words: *so that, and that.*

“*I have stored up Your Word in my heart, that I might not sin against You.*” Psalm 119:11

“*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*” Ephesians 2:8-9. **The cause** is that salvation is solely a gift of God's grace and not due to humanity's works. **The effect** is that “*no one may boast*” for his or her salvation because they played no part in saving themselves.

Notice how “*I have stored up Your Word in my heart*” is the cause (or action, or event), and “*that I might not sin against you*” is the effect (or outcome).

6. Figures of speech

A Figure of Speech is a word or phrase that is used in a way that is not literal, in order to illustrate a concept in Scripture. “*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*” Isaiah 53:6

Isaiah says that we all are “*like sheep*” and “*have gone astray,*” but we are not literally sheep. He is simply painting a word picture for us, in order to help us better understand our foolishness in wandering from our Creator.

7. Conjunctions

Conjunctions have many uses and purposes in writing, but “if we imagine the Biblical text to be like a brick house, then conjunctions are the mortar that holds the bricks (phrases and sentences) together.”¹⁴

Key words for conjunction: *and, also, but, rather, even, thus, so, therefore, for, since, because, namely, by, through,* etc.

- a. And or also show continuation of a thought or idea. “For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God’s truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy.” Romans 15:8-9

“Deal with your servant according to your steadfast love, and teach me your Statutes.” Psalm 119:124

- b. Even shows the final addition or point of **focus**. “And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” Philippians 2:8

“For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God...” 1 Corinthians 2:10

- c. But, rather, yet, and however show contrasting ideas. “Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.” Ephesians 5:11

“Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbour.” 1 Corinthians 10:24

- d. Therefore, so, and thus show the conclusion of an argument or thought. The word *therefore* is always there for a **reason**. It sums up an argument or thought. “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship...” Romans 12:1

Paul in the first twelve chapters of Romans has made a lengthy argument for God’s mercy in saving sinful humanity. Now he gives the conclusion of this argument by calling the Roman believers to action: “Therefore... present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, and acceptable to God.”

“And with many other words he [Peter] bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, ‘Save yourselves from this crooked generation.’ So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.” Acts 2:40-41. In this context Peter is preaching the Gospel on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem and this is the conclusion to his preaching “So those who received his word were baptised, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.” Acts 2:41.

- e. For, since, and because shows the cause or reason for something. These conjunctions answer the question: **Why?** “Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” Romans 5:3-5. Why does hope not put us to shame? Answer: “because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” Romans 5:5.

- f. By, or through shows the means, action or way in which a result is brought about. These conjunctions answer the question: **How?** “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” Romans 12:1. How does Paul appeal to the Roman believers? Answer: “by the mercies of God”

“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” Romans 5:1-2 How do believers have peace with God? Answer: “through our Lord Jesus Christ.” How have they obtained access into this grace? Answer: “through him” and “by faith”

- g. That, for, namely gives the explanation of an idea or action. These conjunctions answer the question: **What?** “The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God...” Romans 8:16. What does the Spirit bear witness with our spirit concerning? Answer: “that we are children of God”

- h. In order that, so that, that, to, or for shows the purpose of an action. These conjunctions answer the question: **Why?** “We know that our old self was crucified with Him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.” Romans 6:6. Why was our old self crucified with

Christ? Paul says that the purpose it happened was “*in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing*”
“*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*” Ephesians 2:8-9. Why are believers saved as a gift of God? Answer: “*so that no one may boast*”

“*For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God’s truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.*” Romans 15:8-9

- i. *So that* or *that* shows the result of an action. These conjunctions answer the question: **What?** “*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.*” Romans 15:13. “*And he wept aloud, so that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it.*” Genesis 45:2

There are many other conjunctions that hold great significance in the Bible, but this is an overview of some different categories of conjunctions. This should help bring the flow of God’s Word to life. These conjunctions can hold great significance in our passages of study, which is why it is important that we observe the text of Scripture very carefully.

8. Verbs: is the verb a past (he ran), present (I am running), future (I will run) or perfect (I have run) tense?

In literature, verbs (the action words) bring the story or letter to life. Without verbs everything is lifeless. Yet with verbs we see action and adventure (Judges 7; Matthew 14:22-33), repentance and faith (Matthew 3:8; Acts 16:30-31), rebellion and hostility (Ephesians 2:1-3), as well as judgment and steadfast love (Revelation 20:10; John 3:16-21; James 4:6; Psalm 145:4-9).

There are four main tenses to look for when making observations: Past, present, future, and perfect.

- a. **Past**—an action taking place in past time (i.e. “he was” or “he believed”)

“*And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the Word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.*” Acts 13:48-49

“*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*” Genesis 1:1

“*Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law... and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed.*”

Exodus 3:1-2

- b. **Present**—an action currently taking place (i.e. “he is” or “he believes”)

“*For to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given; and the Government shall be upon His shoulder, and His Name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*” Isaiah 9:6

“*I cry out to God Most High, to God who fulfills His purpose for me.*” Psalm 57:2

- c. **Future**—an action that will take place in the future (i.e. “he will” or “he will believe”)

This tense is formed using the helping verb *will*, or *shall*

“*Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new Covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah...*” Jeremiah 31:31

“*For to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given; and the Government shall be upon His shoulder, and His Name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*” Isaiah 9:6 Notice in this passage from Isaiah there is a shift from the present tense (“a child is born”) to the future tense (“His Name shall be called”).

- d. **Perfect**—a past action, with consequences that are presently continuing (i.e. “he has” or “he has believed”).

This tense is formed using the helping verb *has*, *have*, or *had*.

The perfect tense can be illustrated by looking at a house on fire. We would say, “the house has caught on fire.” The perfect tense expresses that the house caught fire in the past, although we did not see when the first spark ignited the house on fire, we see the present fire right now.¹⁵ Likewise Paul says, “By grace you have been saved through faith” (Ephesians 2:8). He is expressing that they were saved in the past when they believed in Christ, and the results are still continuing. They were saved by God’s grace when they believed, and God continues to keep them in a state of salvation. This is the most Theologically significant tense to take note concerning.

“No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God.” John 3:9. Those who have been born of God in the past, now have the result of not continuing in sin. They were born of God when they believed in Christ and now there is presently fruit resulting in their lives. They currently do not make “a practice of sinning.”

9. Is the verb active (I hit), or passive (I was hit by the ball)?

a. Active verbs

In an active verb the subject is doing the action.

Peter (Subj.) threw (Verb) the ball.

“Peter” is the subject, “hit” is the verb (or the action), and “the ball” is the direct object, which receives the action of the verb. Likewise when we look at Scripture we want to take note who is doing the action.

“The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as He walked by and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God!’³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.” John 1:35-37. All the actions in this passage are active since the subjects are performing the actions of the verbs. “John” is “standing,” “looked,” and “said.” Jesus “walked.” “The two disciples heard” and “they followed.”

b. Passive verbs

In a passive verb the subject receive the action of the verb from the indirect object.

“...with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.” In this phrase Paul indicates that “we” are the ones receiving the action of “comfort” from “God.” The subject (“we”) is passively receiving the action of “comfort” from the activity (or agency) “of God.”

“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Romans 5:1. “We” are the passive recipients of justification (being declared righteous) received through “faith.”

“You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus...” 2 Timothy 2:1. Paul is encouraging Timothy to receive the action of being “strengthened” by or through the instrument of “the grace that is in Christ Jesus.”

“... so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.” 2 Corinthians 1:4. In this clause Paul indicates that “we” are the ones receiving the action of “comfort” directly from “God.” The subject “we” is passively receiving the action of “comfort” from the activity (or agency) “of God.”

10. Pronouns: I, you, he, she, it, we, they (who do they refer to?)

Pronouns are words such as I, you, he, she, it, our, us, you, they, etc. that stands in the place of another word. For example who does the “I” and “you” refer to in look at Ephesians 1:15-16?

“For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers” Ephesians 1:15-16

We can figure out whom the “I,” “my,” and “you” in this passage are referring to by going back to the first verse of this letter. “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus...” Ephesians 1:1. By going back to earlier verses in the text it is easy to see that Paul is the one writing this letter to the Ephesians. Therefore, the “I” and “my” is referring to Paul and the “you” is referring to the Ephesian Christians.

Look at Colossians 2:6-7 and see who the pronoun “him” is referring to: “Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.” It is easy to see here that “him” is referring back to “Christ Jesus the Lord.” Notice how we had

to look back in the sentence to see whom the pronoun referred to. Whenever we are unsure whom the text is pointing to, we must go back and look in context and see to whom it is referring.

11. Questions and Answers

Often times the NT writers use questions and answers to reinforce their main points of argument.

"We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous." 1 John 3:12. John asks the question: *"And why did he murder him?"* He answers this question: *"Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous."* In answering this question it exposes the wickedness of Cain murdering Abel.

"What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!" Romans 6:15

Paul raises an expected objection in the form of a question: *"What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace?"* Then he answers by emphatically negating this idea: *"By no means!"*

12. Dialogue: is there an interchange between more than one person?

The Book of Habakkuk is a conversation between the Prophet and God. In Chapter 1, Habakkuk questions why the LORD is allowing His people Israel to become evil and is not doing anything about it: *"why do you make me see iniquity and idly look at wrong?"* Habakkuk 1:3. Yet the LORD answers: *"For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation..."* Habakkuk 1:6. God explains that He is not going to allow His people to go unpunished, as He is bringing up the Chaldeans to discipline His people for their sins.

Anytime we come across a conversation between two or more people it is helpful to take note of what each character says.

13. Actions/role of God

Since God is the main Character in Scripture it is important to take note of his actions, attributes, and roles.

"Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: I led you up from Egypt and brought you out of the house of slavery. And I delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of all who oppressed you, and drove them out before you and gave you their land." Judges 6:8-9. Notice that *"the God of Israel"* 1) led His people *"up from Egypt,"* 2) *"brought"* them *"out of the house of slavery,"* 3) He *"delivered"* them *"from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of all who oppressed"* them, 4) *"the Lord"* drove the Egyptians and their oppressors *"out before"* them, and 5) He gave them *"their land."* Since God is sovereign over redemptive history, He is the Supreme Character in Scripture. Therefore, it is important to take note of what His role is throughout the story of Redemption.

14. Actions/roles of people

The other main characters in Scripture are the people (and the creatures) God has created. Therefore, we must also look at how people act and what role they play in the passage. Let us observe the next verse in Judges 6 to see the role God's people are playing in the story. *"And I said to you, 'I am the LORD your God; you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell.' But you have not obeyed my voice."* Judges 6:10. Here God is speaking to the people of Israel, and although He commanded them, *"you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites,"* the people did not obey the LORD's voice (Judges 6:10).

Again observe the role of humanity in Ezekiel 36:26-27: *"And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules."* Here the role of humanity is passive, meaning that they are the ones being acted upon by God. The part God's people play is 1) they will be given *"a new heart"* and God will put within them *"a new spirit,"* 2) their *"heart of stone"* will be removed by God and He will give them *"a heart of flesh,"* 3) They will be given God's Spirit within them, and 4) God will cause them *"to walk"* in His statutes and they will carefully obey His *"rules"* (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

15. Emotional terms

Often times the writers of Scripture use emotional language. It is important to take note of this, so that we preach the passage with the same emotion as the authors intended to communicate.

a. Anger

John the Baptist is angry at the hard hearts of the religious leaders saying, *"You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance."* Matthew 3:7-8

Paul is angry with the Galatian church which is beginning to fall into legalism saying, “*O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. ²Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? ³Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?*” Galatians 3:1-3

b. **Joy**

Paul expresses great joy towards the Philippian church, “*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.*” Philippians 4:4

Psalms 113:1 says, “*Praise the LORD! Praise, O servants of the LORD, praise the Name of the LORD!*”

c. **Sadness**

The psalmist sorrowfully writes, “*My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all the day long, ‘Where is your God?’... Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise Him, my salvation and my God.*” Psalm 42:3, 5-6a

Whenever you are studying a passage, look for words expressing emotions: anger, joy, sadness, fear, peace, etc.

16. Connections to other paragraphs or stories

Many of Paul’s epistles in the New Testament are written in a **logical structure**. He regularly advances his point in an organized outline in order to strengthen his main points. We see this in the book of Ephesians, as the first three chapters (1-3), he lays a foundation of Christians’ identity and position in Christ. Then for the last three chapters (4-6), he exhorts them “*to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called*” (Ephesians 4:1). Paul connects the idea of believers being chosen in Christ (1:3-4), sealed by the Spirit (1:13-14), having their hearts opened to see the glory of Christ (1:16-23), being made alive even when they were spiritually dead in their sins (2:1-10), being ethnically united in Christ (2:11-22), having the mystery of the Gospel revealed to them (3:1-13), and having Christ strengthen them to understand His incomprehensible love (3:14-19), in order to urge the Ephesians Christians to live lives in obedience to God (Ephesians 4:1-6:20).

17. Shifts in the story/pivots

In the Books of 1 and 2 Samuel we read of the story of David’s rise to power in Israel despite incredible opposition by king Saul. Saul was anointed king of Israel, yet the Lord rejected him due to his neglect of God’s commands (1 Samuel 15:10-11). Therefore, the Lord commands for David to be anointed as king of His people. David has great military success during the reign of Saul and the Israelites begin to love David. Because of this Saul seeks to murder David. Despite many attempts he fails and he ends up eventually dying in a battle against the Philistines (1 Samuel 31).

Thus, David finally becomes the rightful King of Israel (2 Samuel 2:1-7). God makes an everlasting covenant with David, and king David continues to see great military success and national prosperity. However, a major shift comes in the story when Israel goes out to war, “*But David remained at Jerusalem.*” (2 Samuel 11:1). Here he gives in to lust and commits adultery with Bathsheba the wife of Uriah, who was a dedicated soldier fighting for Israel (2 Samuel 11:2-5). So David has Uriah murdered to cover up his sin of adultery and so that he can take Bathsheba to be his wife (2 Samuel 11:14-26). From here on in the story, God removes His favour from David. Although David repents of his wickedness, he suffers the consequences for his abuse of spiritual leadership, sexual abuse with Bathsheba, and the murder of Uriah. Because of this David’s own family begins to fall apart and his own son seeks to take over the kingdom.

Everything changes in the story when David fails to go into battle with his men and falls into sin. Although God forgives David, His favour is removed from David. Therefore his kingdom and family fall apart. This is the major pivot in the story of king David.

18. Interchange: Does this passage change back and forth between two characters or stories?

In the Book of Acts there is an interchange between the characters of Peter and Paul (or Saul as was his Hebrew name). The Book begins by focusing on the ministry of Peter, who preached at Pentecost and thousands were converted, who healed the sick, and was persecuted for the sake of the Gospel (Acts 1:12-5:42). During this time, Saul was aggressively persecuting the Church (Acts 8:1-3). Meanwhile Peter is preaching the Gospel to Simon the magician and many Samaritan villages (Acts 8:9-25). Then as Saul is on his way to persecute the church in Damascus, Christ appeared to him, and radically transformed his life (Acts 9:1-25). From on here in Acts, Saul, who began to be called Paul among the Gentiles, is the main character. Paul went throughout the known world preaching the Gospel to the nations, healing the sick, and being persecuted for Christ sake (as Peter did).

We see this interchange between Peter and Paul in the beginning of Acts, which transitions to the ministry of Paul throughout the rest of the book. This is significant because we see the way in which the Holy Spirit used these two men to start the Church and expand it to the ends of the earth.

19. Bookends (Inclusio)

At times the Biblical authors will begin and end a section of Scripture with the same Theological principle in order to drive home their point. For example, Matthew begins and ends His Gospel with Principle that *Jesus Christ, the God-Man, is present with His people*. Observe the following verses from the beginning and end of Matthews Gospel.

An angel of the Lord speaks to Joseph in a dream saying:

*“She will bear a Son, and you shall call His Name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.’ All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: ‘Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and **they shall call His Name Immanuel**’ (which means, **God with us**).”* Matthew 1:21-22

Again at the end of the Gospel Jesus gives the Great Commission to His disciples:

*“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. **And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.**”* Matthew 28:18-20

Matthew is driving home the point that *the God-Man, Jesus Christ, is the presence of God with His people*.

Careful Observations Lead to Good interpretation:¹⁶ This list contains a lot of information, so refer back to this when making observations to help in the process. We are trying to **carefully understand what the Word of God says so we can come to know what it means**. Since at this point we are just observing the text, we don't want to yet ask the question, “what does it mean” as that is a matter of interpretation. For now we are just starting by asking, “what does the passage say” not “what does the passage mean.” As Dr. Kyomya recommends, “that you make your observations first and then move on to interpretation. However, you can note down interpretation questions like, ‘what is the meaning or significance of this term?’ if they come to mind at the observation stage. They can be picked up again at the interpretation stage.”¹⁷ So as we observe the following passages we want to have these types of questions in mind: **Who? What? Why? When? Where? How?**

Matthew 4:1-4

¹Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ And the tempter came and said to him, “*If You are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.*” ⁴ But he answered, “***It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every Word that comes from the mouth of God.’***”

Some observation questions:

- **Who are the main characters in this story?** Jesus, the Spirit, and the devil.
- **What happens in the story?**
 - v. 1 “*Jesus was led up by the Spirit... to be tempted by the devil*”
 - v. 2 Jesus fasted and “*he was hungry*”
 - v. 3 The devil “*came and said... ‘If You are the Son of God, command these stones to become ... bread.’*”
 - v. 4 But Jesus answered, “*it is written*” then quotes scripture.
- **Why?** He was led up into the wilderness “*to be tempted by the devil.*”
- **When did this take place?** Right after Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River and the Father said, “*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased*” (Matthew 3:13-17). “*Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness*” (4.1). “*after... forty days and forty night*” (v.2).
- **Where did this take place?** In “*the wilderness*” (v.1).
- **How was Jesus led up?** “*by the Spirit*” (v.1) **How was He tempted?** “*by the devil*” (v.1). **How did the devil tempt Him?** He tempted Jesus by saying “*If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become bread*”. **How did Jesus answer the devil?** By quoting Scripture “*It is written*” (v.4). **How shall man live?** “*not... by bread alone, but by every Word that comes from the mouth of God.*”

- **What words are repeated?** “*Tempted*” and “*tempter*” referring to what the devil does and who he is.
- **What did the devil tempt Him with?** He tempted Jesus to use His authority as “*the Son of God*” to “*command these stones to become loaves of bread*” (v.3). This temptation correlates to the desire Jesus had for food, as “*he was hungry*” (v.2).
- **What is the devil's intention in asking, “*If you are the Son of God*”?** This is an interpretive question and is not explained explicitly in the passage. We will set this aside for now.
- **Where is the contrast in the story?** The conjunction “*But*” (v. 4) shows the difference between how the devil tempts Jesus and how Jesus responds to the temptation. “*But Jesus answered, ‘It is written’*” **What is the contrasted in the Scripture Jesus quotes?** The second “*but*” in v. 4 shows how man is not to live “*by bread alone*” compared to how man is to live “*by every Word that comes from the mouth of God*”
- **What is the contrast between the devil and Jesus?** The devil comes questioning Jesus authority as “*the Son of God,*” but Jesus comes standing on the authority of God’s Word.

Next, let’s use these observations to do some interpretation of the passage.

First Jesus had to be “*led up by the Spirit,*” meaning He did not simply live an obedient life in His own strength, rather He obeyed this leading from the Spirit as an example for believers to follow after. It was the Spirit who brought Him and guided Him both to the wilderness and “*to be tempted by the devil.*” Jesus obediently followed even this difficult leading from the Holy Spirit.

Second, it says that the reason “*the Spirit*” led him “*into the wilderness*” was “*to be tempted by the Devil*” (v.1). This means that being led by the Spirit was not easy, as He was led (1) into a place of desolation “*into the wilderness*” (2) for a time of trial “*to be tempted by the devil.*” The phrase “*to be tempted by the devil*” explains the purpose of the leading “*by the Spirit.*” Although the devil was the one tempting Him, the Spirit led Jesus to this moment, showing that God was still sovereign (in control) in this time of trial by satan. The primary person acting is the Spirit (“*led by the Spirit*”) and the minor person acting is the devil (“*to be tempted by the devil*”).

Third, it says that Jesus was “*fasting*” which meant that he was posturing his life toward God. He knew that He was facing a time of trial but even still he trusted deeply in God through fasting. Despite His hunger in fasting He desired the Word of God more desperately than the desire to eat. Although “*He was hungry*” he continued to resist the temptation of the devil, and he quoted Deuteronomy 8:3 “***man shall not live by bread alone, but by every Word that comes from the mouth of God.***”

Forth, this passage shows us a typical way that the devil tries to tempt people. He tempted Jesus with a real need as “*he was hungry*” and the devil said, “*command these stones to become bread.*” Although Jesus had a need for food the devil was trying to have him fulfill this need in a sinful way.

Fifth, Jesus quoted Scripture to combat the lie of the devil “*as it is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’*” Notice how this verse Jesus quotes tells the way a person is to live “*not... by bread alone but by every Word that comes from the mouth of God.*” Jesus is reminding Himself of His deeper need for God’s Word rather than food, to combat the temptation to turn “*these stones*” into “*bread.*” Jesus quotes a verse in His trial that speaks to His intense need for food, but points Him to His deeper need for “*every word that comes from the mouth of God.*” (v.4). This verse quoted from Deuteronomy 8:3 also remind us that God’s Word will ultimately feed His soul and help guide His life, for this verse is about how man “*shall... live*”(v. 4). Jesus here serves as an example of how to live, since He depended wholly on God, by “*fasting*” and by quoting Scripture in temptation.

Sixth, notice how the devil questions Jesus identity. What is the devil's intention in asking, “*If you are the Son of God*”? He is ultimately questioning Jesus rightful authority as the true “*Son of God.*” However, in context right before Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness, when He was baptised, His identity was clearly made known as the Father said, “*This is My beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.*” Despite this testimony from Heaven, satan attacks his identity and goes in direct opposition to the voice of God. When satan says, “*If you are the Son of God,*” he then tries to get Jesus to do something to prove His authority as the Son of God and to sinfully fulfill His need for food.

Even Jesus had to obey and be guided by the Spirit in difficult times. Satan tempted Jesus by trying to get him

to sinfully fulfil a real need that He had, in a forbidden way of obeying the command of the devil. Jesus used Scripture to combat the lies and temptation of the devil.

See how a careful observation of the passage helped us to interpret the passage? All of our interpretation of the text should ultimately be based in the text of Scripture not from our own ideas. Notice how the interpretation, or the meaning, of the passage was all based in the Scripture itself. The more carefully we observe a passage the more meaning we can gain from the interpretation of the passage. Sometimes small details will be very significant just as the simple phrase *“by the Spirit”* carried with it a lot of meaning in this passage showing the sovereignty of God in the trial of Jesus.

CONSIDERING THE DIFFERENCES IN CONTEXT

At this point on our journey we must now consider the differences between the original audience and our own. Each of us reads Scripture differently because of our different stories and backgrounds. For example, a Chinese believer who is facing persecution and the threat of being thrown in prison is going to read the Scripture through a different lens than an American believer, who has little opposition to face for being a Christian. Also the Chinese believer has specific cultural customs that he has been raised with that are different from the American's. We want the Bible to speak into our culture and change us, not for our culture to change the Bible.¹⁸ So at this step we want to consider how the Biblical audiences situation differs from our own. Things we want to take into account are:

- Are we under a different Covenant? Are they from the Old Testament (covenant) and did they come before the time of Christ?
- How is their situation different from ours?
- How is their situation similar to ours?

Let's take the story of Jesus facing His temptation in the wilderness to measure the differences and similarities in situation.

Differences:

- Jesus is the divine Son of God.
- Jesus never sinned.
- He was in a desert fasting.
- This story takes place before His death on the Cross. So He was under the Old Covenant.
- Jesus had to face his battle against the devil without the help of other believers praying for him.

Similarities:

- Jesus was facing attack by the devil as believers do today.
- Jesus had to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit.
- Jesus faced great hardship trusting in God as many African believers do today.

Although the differences are numerous between Jesus and our situation we see that there are some similarities. These differences are what we have to cross over in order to grasp the Scripture for us today.

Let us look at Jeremiah 1:5 and take note of the differences and similarities in context:

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”

Differences:

- This is written to Jeremiah who was a Prophet and we are not prophets.
- Jeremiah was called by God to speak judgment on a nation, we have not been.
- Jeremiah was almost entirely alone in his ministry but we have other believers to help us.
- He never really saw any fruit in his ministry before he died.
- He lived before the time of Christ in the Old Covenant.
- He lived in a time when his country was being carried into Exile as a judgement of God, but our countries are not necessarily in the same situation.

Similarities

- God has given us the responsibility to call people to repentance just like Jeremiah was.
- Jeremiah faced severe opposition to his ministry just like many African believers today.

- Jeremiah was often beaten and severely persecuted for speaking the truth, depending on what your story is you too may have faced severe persecution for proclaiming the truth.

Taking account of these differences between our cultures helps us see how hard or how easy it will be to transition from the Scripture to our situations today. Some verse will be fairly easy to cross over from their context to ours today. However, others may prove to be quite challenging.

THE THEOLOGICAL PRINCIPLE

The next step is to build a bridge that helps us get from the village of the original audience to our own village today. We will be using the interpretation of our passage to come up with what **the main idea** is in the text. This idea should be **timeless** (applying to all believers throughout history), it should be found in the passage we are studying, and it should not be specific to any culture.¹⁹ Let us look again at Matthew 4:1-4 to see if we can find what the principles are in the text. Since Jesus is our example (1 Pet. 2:21), we should look to the actions of Christ to see what the theological idea is in our passage.

“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² And after fasting forty days and forty nights, He was hungry. ³ And the tempter came and said to Him, ‘If You are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.’ ⁴ But he answered, ‘It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every Word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

Here are the key ideas that I drew from the text:

- 1) God is sovereign and at times leads believers into difficult situations (v. 1).
- 2) Christians need to trust in God in the midst of their trials and temptations (v.2, 4).
- 3) The devil often attacks believers’ identities and attempts to get them to fulfil their needs sinfully (v. 3).
- 4) Believers need to use Scripture to combat the lies of Satan (v. 4).

Having a clear theological principle helps us answer the question “what does this verse mean to me today?” It is important that the idea is clear and not specific to our background because applying our verse to our cultures comes after the Theological principle is formed.

When we are trying to figure out the Theological principle in a passage we want to be sure that this idea does not contradict other passages of Scripture. At this point we want to look at the context of the whole Bible and look for other passages that discuss this topic. If we have a study Bible there will be footnotes or cross references in the margins that will help you find other passages that discuss similar topics. Also we may want to look up a key word from our passage in a concordance to find similar verse in the Bible (see section on study resources at the end of the chapter).

An important rule of interpretation is “**Scripture interprets Scripture.**” Suppose we are studying John 1:1, “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*” After looking at literary context, historical context, observation, and interpretation we wrongly come up with this theological idea:

- 1) There were two gods that existed in the beginning: the Word (the Son) and the God (the Father).

Hopefully you recognize right away that this is false teaching! There is only One God. But how would we correct this misinterpreted theological idea? Remember the rule **Scripture interprets Scriptures.** Another important rule that will help us here is **Clear passages interpret less clear passages.**

At this time we will want look to other clearer passages of Scripture that discuss the doctrine of God such as Deuteronomy 6:4, “**Hear, O Israel the Lord our God, the Lord is One.**” Also, Isaiah 44:6, “*Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of Hosts: I am the first and I am the last; besides Me there is no god.*” These passages from the context of the whole Bible clearly tell us that the Lord is One, therefore there cannot be two separate gods. Also, when we look at the context surrounding our verse (John 1:1-18), we see that it does not say that there are two gods; rather, it speaks of two persons “*the Son*” and “*the Father*” (John 1:1-2, 14, 18). So we will have to go back and look more intently at John 1:1. What does it actually say? It says, “*the Word was with God*” and “*the Word was God.*” It does not say there are two gods! This says that there are two persons who are One God in community with each other. Now lets revisit our theological principle and correct its error:

- 2) The Son and the Father are both One God and were in fellowship with each other in the beginning. We had to look in context to make sure we were not missing anything and cross-reference other Scriptures to correct our misinterpreted theological principle.

APPLICATION

We have reached the final stage of our journey: the application of Scripture. This is the point where we answer the question: **“What does this verse mean to me today?”** Our study of God’s Word is meant to change our lives and sanctify us. **“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work”** (2 Timothy 3:16-17). As Paul says to Timothy here, God’s Word is meant to train us to live righteously so that as Pastors and leaders we may be mature and *“equipped for every good work.”* This is the exciting part of our journey where we get to see all the pieces of our study come together and transform us to become more Christ-like.

So let’s look again at Matthew 4:1-4 and see how a couple of these Theological principles we discovered can help us apply these verses to our situations today.

1) God is sovereign and at times leads believers into difficult situations (v. 1).

This principle can now be used to apply the text to our situations today. Since *“God is sovereign and at times leads believers into difficult situations,”* then I can trust Him today as I face my hardships. As I seek to live for the sake of the Gospel and am facing opposition from the World, complacent believers, and my flesh, I should continue to trust in God’s sovereignty.

You may be facing a corrupt government, tribal conflict, or even wars, in your country. Yet we know that God is still in control and we can trust in Him. I should trust in Him and seek to be even more dependent on Him as I face these horrible situations. Since Jesus trusted in God and followed the leading of the Spirit even into a time of trial, then I too can face these difficult trials today by relying on the Spirit and knowing that God is still the King and is in control.

4) Believers need to use Scripture to combat the lies of satan (v. 4).

When satan came and attacked Jesus he used His need for food to try and entice Him to sin. Yet Jesus used the Word of God to fight this lie. Likewise today when we face temptations sinfully to fulfill our needs, we should use the Scripture to combat these lies. So say we are living in times where we do not have enough food or enough money to provide for our families and satan is tempting you by saying *“maybe you should steal some money from that person in your village that has a lot more money than you do. Besides God said he would provide for our needs and doesn’t God want you to be happy?”*

This would be a blatant lie of the devil that we need to combat with the Truth. God has commanded us **“You shall not steal”** (Exodus 20:15). We must say **“No”** to the temptation of Satan and remember the truth of God. Again Psalm 62:7,10 says, **“On God rests my salvation and my glory; my mighty Rock, my Refuge is God... Put no trust in extortion; set no hopes on robbery; if riches increase, set not your heart on them.”** This reminds us that God is our hope and our salvation not stealing. We need to set our hope fully on God. Maybe what we should be doing instead of stealing is to ask your friends if they would be willing to give your family some food to help you in your time of need.

This is why we need to have God’s Word treasured in our hearts, because God will use it to help us fight against the devil in times of temptation. Having Scripture memorized will also be a great encouragement to us of God’s faithfulness and love to us in our times of spiritual, physical, emotional, and relational need.

From this Theological principle *“Believers need to use Scripture to combat the lies of Satan”* we can think of almost countless temptations that satan may attack believers with that we can fight by using the Bible. As Hebrews says, **“For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”** God has given us a tremendous resource of Scripture to encourage, strengthen, and correct us in times of need.

Having a Theological principle helped us to better understand what this verse means to us today. This is the goal of Biblical interpretation to understand the Word of God in its proper context and see how it rightly is meant to change our lives today! May God give you great joy and bless you abundantly as you seek to better know Him through studying His Word!

EXAMPLE:

1 PETER 2:9-10

Lets look at 1 Peter 2:9-10 to see how the whole journey works:

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”

Literary Context

First we want to look how this passage fits in the whole context of 1 Peter. Throughout this letter, Peter is calling Christians to trust in God even amidst suffering and persecution (1:6-7; 2:19-23; 3:13-16; 4:1-2, 12-14, 19; 5:1, 6-9). He calls believers to cast their cares upon God (5:6-9), to set their hope “fully on the grace” that God has prepared for them “at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:4, 13; 5:1), and to imitate Christ in facing suffering (4:1-2; 2:19-25).

The ESV study Bible notes the theme: “Those who persevere in faith while suffering persecution should be full of hope, for they will certainly enjoy end-time salvation since they are already enjoying God’s saving promises here and now through the death and resurrection of Christ.”²⁰

Up to this point in the letter Peter has encouraged the believers by reminding them that God caused them to be saved “to a living hope” by “the resurrection of Jesus from the dead” (1:3-4). God has an eternal inheritance for believers (v. 4), he protects their salvation (v. 5), and He affirms their faith trails (v. 6-7). God has now called His people to live holy lives before the world (1:13-15). Our verse affirms that believers are indeed being built up in Christ to serve God (2:4-5, 9). Therefore, they are to live righteously before the gentiles in order to glorify God (2:12).

Historical Context

There are a number of things we want to know when studying a New Testament letter:

Who wrote this?

Who is it written to?

Why did he write it?

What terms are unclear in our passage?

Who? Peter, the Apostle of Jesus wrote this to “those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (1:1). We will want to know what “elect exiles of the Dispersion” means. Also if we wanted to go deeper we could look up each place named and research all of these locations to get a better feel of where all these believers are exiles at. We should at least we can look these places up on map in the back of a study Bible. When we do so we will see that these people were dispersed throughout much of the known world at that time.

Next we will look up “elect exiles of the Dispersion.” The nations of Israel in the Old Testament was always seen as God’s “elect” or chosen people. When God sent judgement on Israel through the Assyrian and Babylonian captivity, Israel became exiles or refugees in a land not their own. They were part of the “Dispersion” in Assyria and Babylon. They awaited their return to Israel, which was God’s promised land to them.²¹ However, here Peter is writing not to Israelites but to a non-Jewish audience of Christians. He is equating them to Israel who in the Old Testament were God’s chosen people. He now says that all believers not just Hebrews are God’s chosen people and are exiles on earth, because they have not yet reached the promised land of Heaven (1:4).²²

Why did he write it? We have already said that He is writing to encourage believers to trust in God amidst great suffering. The letter expresses that “God as Creator, Father, and Judge, as the One whose will determines all that comes to pass, who shapes the destiny and determines the actions of those whom He has chosen for His own, who sustain them through the sufferings which He will send to test them, and who at the last will vindicate them and reward them eternally.”²³

What is unclear in our passage?

Look again at 1 Peter 2:9-10, what are some terms that seems unclear when we first read our passage are? “Chosen race,” and “royal priesthood.” Let us take these terms one by one looking them up either in a good Study Bible or in a Bible Dictionary or Encyclopedia.

Let us look up the note on “**Chosen race**” in the ESV Study Bible:

“God’s grace rather than human choice is the ultimate explanation why some people come to faith and others do not. God has elected (‘chosen’) some to be His people, therefore no one can boast of being included. Peter views the Church as a new Israel, for he picks up what is said of Israel in Ex. 19:5-6 and applies it to the Church.”²⁴

Let us look up “**Priest**” or “**Priesthood**” in *The International Bible Encyclopedia* to see what we find. In the Old Testament Israel was under the Law as they came before the death of Christ, which atoned for the sins of His people. Therefore, Israel’s priests were to offer sacrifices to God to atone for the sins of the people. “The Words of God to Israel in Ex. 19:6, ‘*You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation,*’ are applied to the Church in the NT.”²⁵ Now, the Church as the true Israel is a “*royal priesthood.*”

The church now has two roles as priests “*to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ*” and to “*proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness and into His glorious light.*” They are to worship God and to proclaim who He is to the world.²⁶

Observations on 1 Peter 2:9-10

Who? Believers are specifically called “*a chosen race,*” a “*priesthood,*” a “*holy nation,*” and a “*people for His own possession*” (v.9). **Who chose them?** It does not explicitly say that “*God chose them*” but it is implied in v. 9. In verse 9 “*Him*” is referring to God “*who called you out of darkness and into His marvellous light.*” Verse 10 also says “*now you are God’s people.*” Furthermore, at the beginning of the letter Peter said that “*God... caused us to be born again to a living hope*” implying that God is the One who sovereignly saves His people. Therefore, if He sovereignly saves, He must also have sovereignly chosen them.

Whose “excellencies” are the believers to proclaim? “*Him who called you out of darkness and into His marvellous light.*” This is a clear allusion to God who chose His people. Therefore believers are to tell of the wonders of the God.

What is the immediate context? Our passage starts with a “*But*” showing contrast to the idea that comes before. The context of our verse is 2:4-10. Peter has just said how believers are being built as a house with Christ being the cornerstone of the building (v.1-5). He says that whoever trust in Christ will be honoured (v.6-7), but those who do not believe stumble over Christ (v. 7). Then right before our passage it says of non-believers “*They stumble because they disobey as they were destined to do.*”(V.8) Then Peter continues “*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession that you may proclaim the excellences of Him who called you out of darkness and into His marvellous light*” (v. 9).

What “race”? A “*chosen race*”

What type of “priesthood” is it? It is a “*royal*” priesthood.

What type of “nation” are they? They are a “*holy*” nation

What “people” are they? They are said to be a people “*for his own possession*”

What type of “light” were they called into? “*Marvellous*” light

When? “*Once [they] were not a people, but now [they] are God’s people.*” Also, “*Once [they] had not received mercy, but now [they] have received mercy.*”

Where did God “call” them from and to? He called them “*out of darkness*” and He called them into “*marvellous light.*”

Why are they “a people”? The reason God has chosen believers is “*for His own possession.*”

Why are they “a chosen race, royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession”? The reason is so that they “*may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called [them]*”

How? This passage does not answer any “how” questions. Usually how questions will be answered by key words such as *through, by, or with*

Interpretation:

Peter begins by contrasting those who reject Christ (vs. 7-8) with those whom God has chosen (v. 9). In verse 9 he affirms four things about God's people: 1) they are chosen by God, 2) they are royal priests, who worship God and proclaim His glory to the world, 3) they are a "holy nation" and 4) a "people for His own possession." These promises are reminiscent of what the LORD told Israel when they were still wandering in the wilderness waiting to enter the Promised Land: "For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set His love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that He swore to your fathers..." Deuteronomy 7:6-8

God by His own sovereign choice and because of His promise to their "fathers," called Israel to be a holy people "for His treasured possession." Peter is now applying this promise to the nation of Israel to believers in Christ. Just as Israel in the Old Testament was a special people chosen by God, now all Christians are part of this special people of God called to be a "royal priesthood" before God and the world.

He continues by explaining that the purpose God set apart His people is "that they may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness and into His marvellous light." Their purpose is to stand before the world and proclaim the "excellencies" or wonders of God to those who are not yet saved. Peter specifically highlights how God has delivered His people out of a life of "darkness" and brought them into a life in "His marvellous light." This is a reminder that the God transforms lives from wickedness to righteousness. God is the one who saves His people as He "chose" them and He "called" them and now it is this Gospel that changed their lives. Indeed God saves His people from punishment for their sins, but He also saves them from the bondage to sin in their lives (1:17-18). He has also given them a new hope as now they live in "marvellous light." This light is said to be "marvellous" (ESV) or "wonderful" (NIV) that God has called His people into. The Christian life brings with it great joy of the life to come in heaven (1:4) but it also come with great joy here and now in our God (1:20-21). Since, God is the source of all their hope in this "wonderful light" (NIV), they are called to proclaim and preach this news to the world.

Peter lastly affirms the glory of the Gospel by saying, "Once you were not My people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." This highlights the fact that these believers were not a part of Israel and the Old Covenant promises of God before the time of Christ. Yet now through Christ they have become a part of these promises of God. Peter here is drawing this idea from Hosea, who said to Israel, "And I will have mercy on No Mercy, and I will say to Not My People, You are My people; and he shall say, 'You are my God'" (Hosea 2:23). Hosea was commanded to name one of His sons No Mercy and another Not My People to symbolize Israel and the fact that God was going to punish His people for their Covenant unfaithfulness. God had made a marriage covenant with Israel (Hosea 6:7; 20:1-17), yet the people had broken this Covenant over and over again. Thus after hundreds of years of Israel committing adultery with God, by going after false gods, the LORD tells Israel He is putting them away from His sight. No longer will they be His people as they are punished for their sins. Yet He affirms them by saying that a day is coming when He will make a new Covenant with them (2:18). And He will say to Israel "And I will have mercy on No Mercy, and I will say to Not My People, You are My people; and he shall say, 'You are my God'" (Hosea 2:23).

Peter now applies this verse of Israel's unfaithfulness to believers who in the past were never part of the Covenant promises of God. Before these Christians turned to Jesus, they were walking in continual unfaithfulness to the Gospel, but now they are "God's people." "Once [they] had not received mercy" as they were in rebellion to God in their wickedness, "but now [they] have received mercy" (1 Peter 2:10).

What is the core of what Peter is saying to the "elect exiles" in this letter?

God has chosen these Christians for Himself and now He calls them to preach the Good News of His salvation to the world.

Considering the differences in Context

How is our context similar and different to the Biblical audiences?

Differences:

- Depending on our situation we may not be facing persecution as these Christian were.

Similarities:

- We are both under the New Covenant (we live after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ)
- We too face suffering as these believers were.
- Depending on what country you are from you too may be an exile from your home country.

Theological principle

1) God has chosen believers for Himself and now calls them to preach the Good News of His salvation to the world.

Application:

We all live in a world overrun by hopelessness. People are living without hope of the Gospel and the “marvellous light” of God. As the “royal priesthood” that God has called us to be we need to represent our God to this dark and lost world. There may be people in your life that do not know Christ and need the chance of hearing the Gospel and seeing it lived out in your life. There may be a whole group of people in your community that are known for being godless and evil. These are the people God may be putting on your heart to reach with the Good News of salvation found in Jesus Christ. There may be a people who are persecuting you for your faith in Christ and these may be the very ones again God is calling you to go to be a missionary to.

When we go to preach the Gospel we can have confidence in our God knowing that he has “chosen” us. Therefore, this is where our boldness comes from. Our confidence comes from the fact that we now have a true and lasting hope in the God who calls us to Himself. So when you go to preach the truth to those who do not know Christ, do so with great strength in your God!

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(Endnotes)

- 1 J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible.*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2012), 40.
- 2 Ibid., 42.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid. 46.
- 5 “Context,” *New Oxford American Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 2010).
- 6 Duvall and Hays, *Grasping God's Word*, 150.
- 7 This currency conversion was taken from the footnotes of *The ESV study Bible* from Acts 19:19; John B. Polhill, “Acts,” ed. Wayne Grudem, Lane T. Dennis, and J. I. Packer, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2008), 2127.
- 8 E. M. B. Green and C. J. Hemer, “Ephesus,” *New Bible Dictionary* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 328.
- 9 J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible.*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2012), 124–25.
- 10 The process followed in this chapter is modeled after: Michael Kyomya, *A Guide to Interpreting Scripture: Context, Harmony, and Application* (Nairobi, Kenya: Hippo Books, 2010), 31–34.
- 11 The process of interpretation is often called exegesis which is a Greek word meaning to explain something in great detail; BDAG 349. We want to understand in great detail the Words of God.
- 12 Kyomya, *Interpreting Scripture*, 28.
- 13 The main headings of this list come from: Duvall and Hays, *Grasping God's Word*, 103–104.
- 14 Ibid., 59.
- 15 This basic illustration came from: John DelHousaye, “Class 6: Perfect and Pluperfect” (Phoenix Seminary, Arizona, Fall 2013).
- 16 Kyomya, *Interpreting Scripture*, 28.
- 17 Michael Kyomya, *A Guide to Interpreting Scripture: Context, Harmony, and Application* (Nairobi, Kenya: Hippo Books, 2010), 31.
- 18 J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible.*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2012), 143.
- 19 Ibid., 200.
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PRACTICAL PREACHING PREPARATION

Please note that this article will only give you a summary of the process of preparing for a sermon. Please study the article on Biblical Interpretation for a full explanation of Hermeneutical principles.

1. Determine What You Will Preach On

Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to guide you and help you to select the right passage to prepare for the sermon. Then consider the following:

- i. Which portion of Scripture have you studied and which the Lord has used to challenge your Christian walk?
- ii. Which issues need to be addressed in people's personal lives, in families, in your church, or in your society?
- iii. If you are preaching a series, what is the next logical portion that follows in your series?

Identify the extent of the passage

If you are preaching a series:

Define the next set of verses to preach that forms a logical unit.

If you are preaching a topical message:

- Find passages that relate to the topic. (Look at the Topical Index in the back of your Study Bible.)
- Identify the one main passage that clearly explains the topic.
- Identify other texts that deal with the same topic.

If you are preaching a "one time" message:

- Find the beginning and end of the passage. Make sure the passage is a complete "unit". Do not only use the paragraph headings of your Bible, remember it is not part of the original text.
- Identify the main point of the passage
- Get to know the context of the passage; what happened before and what will happen after your text.

2. Study the background of the book.

- Who is the author?
 - Who are the receivers?
 - What was the reason for writing this book? / What were the issues that the author addressed?
 - Where were the receivers of the book, letter or prophecy? E.g. Judah in Babylon during the exile or new Christians in Ephesus, etc.
- You will receive this information in *The Old Testament Survey* by Dr Hammond, or in your Study Bible.

3. Read the Bible:

Prepare yourself and be energetic to read the Bible, the passage and the surrounding text (the complete chapter, and the whole Book) repetitively. I once listened to a sermon and I thought: "*this pastor really knows the passage*". Later I hear him say that he read the complete book from which he took the passage hundreds of times!

To understand the context of your passage clearly, start at the biggest picture possible and "zoom" in on your passage in the following way:

- Read the Book of the Bible which contains your passage at least twice to make sure you know the message of the Book and how your text fit into the Book.
- If your passage is in a section that forms a larger part of the Book, read this entire portion twice again.
- Read the section of the Book that contains the passage at least three times more. What is happening in the section? What happened before and after?
- Read the chapter that contains the section three times.
- Read your text five times more. Are you sure it is a complete unit?

This example will make the above clear:

If you want to preach from Acts 17:16-33, you will have to ask: “why was Paul waiting for ‘them’, who were ‘they’?”. To find the answer, you will have to read Acts 17:1-15. This will be the close context to your passage. However, when you start reading chapter 17, you will ask: “Why was Paul travelling to Thessalonica?” To find the answer, you will have to read from chapter 15:36 where Paul embarked on his second missionary journey (chapters 15:36 – 18:22). Now you will ask: “What happened on Paul’s first missionary journey?”. You will find the answer in chapters 12:25 – 14:28. When you start reading chapter 12:25, you will immediately wonder: “who exactly was ‘Saul’ (who later became Paul)?” For the answer, you will have to start reading at chapter 7:58.

Maybe now you understand why you will need to read the entire Book of Acts. From the Book you will learn how Jesus’ Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) looks like in practice. You will understand the reason for the first Christians’ zeal, why Stephen was stoned, the salvation and calling of Saul and his commission as a missionary (chapter 13:2) and at the end of the Book, you will have been encouraged that God has worked, but is also still busy working through missionaries to get glory for His Name.

Your reading for the preparation of your sermon might be something like this:

1. The entire Book of Acts, chapters 1 – 28, twice
2. Paul’s life as described in Acts 7:25 – 28:31, twice again
3. Paul’s three mission journeys, Acts 12:25 – 21:16 three times more
4. Paul’s second mission journey, Acts 15:36 - 18:22, three times more
5. Paul’s visit to Athens and his sermon to the pagans, Acts 17:16 – 33, five times more.

After doing the reading in this way, you will have read your passage 15 times. While this is only a suggestion, you need to make sure that you know the passage very well, and therefore you may need to read it many more times.

4. What is the ‘Biblical style’ or genre?

The Biblical style will influence the way that you understand your text. Different styles

- Law
- Narrative

When you do observations in a narrative, remember the SPADE method:

- **Setting** – **Where** and **when** did this happen? Are there any town, city, place, name, historical event or future event that feature here that could be significant to the story? E.g. Nineveh is the focus of Jonah and Nahum.
 - **People** – **Who** are involved here? Where do they come from or where are they going?
 - **Actions** – **What** happened before -, during-, and after this story? **How** did people respond? **Why** do they respond in this way? Are there cultural customs or traditions that are significant?
 - **Doctrines** – **Which** doctrines are dealt with?
 - The **Essential** truth – **Which** lesson should we learn? What point is made?
- Poetry
 - Parable
 - Jesus often gives the reason and the explanation of the parable
 - Most of the time a parable is fiction (not literal)
 - Understand who the characters of the parable represent – God, Jesus, spiritual leaders, believers, sinners.
 - “*The Kingdom of God is like... a sower, farmer, mustard seed...*”
 - Wisdom
 - Gospels
 - Prophecy
 - Epistle
 - Apocalyptic

5. While you read, make observations.

- Do not make any interpretations, conclusions or applications yet.
- Only try to understand **what the text says**.

- In order to observe you need to:
 - Read it repetitively
 - Think carefully about what you read. Pay attention to all the detail. Be like a good investigator who asks many questions, continuously looking for the answers. E.g. when you read John 14:1, you should ask: “why did Jesus tell His disciples to not be troubled (worried)?” Did Jesus refer to His Words in John 13:33? While you read think about the circumstances surrounding the text: Jesus said that He was leaving the disciples and they could not follow Him. They really were concerned.
 - Read the Bible patiently. You have to understand the Bible in order to explain the principles.
 - Read Prayerfully; ask the Holy Spirit to show you what the Bible says.
- Are there any words or phrases that are repeated? E.g. the repetitive use of “*in the Lord Jesus*”; “*in Christ*”; “*In Him*” in Ephesians 1.
- Take special note of connecting words: “*and*”, “*but*”, “*therefore*”, “*for*”, etc. In the Book of Romans, Paul is using strong arguments to explain Theology and he uses the word “*therefore*” often.

“Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”

Romans 6:3-4

- Consider cross references, eg: “*My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?*” cross reference Psalm 22.

6. Interpretation

- Find the main idea of your passage. This will be the main idea of your sermon
- Which ideas supports or develops the main idea? These will be sub-points in your sermon

Much can be said about David’s battle with Goliath, but the power (main idea) of the story is found in these words: “***This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand ... that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel***” 1 Samuel 17:46

Two ideas that support the main idea is:

- “***You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the Name of the LORD of Hosts...***” 1 Samuel 17:45
- “***Then all this assembly shall know that the LORD does not save with sword and spear; for the battle is the LORD’S, and He will give you into our hands***” 1 Samuel 17:47.

Both Israel and the Philistines needed to learn that God, Who controls victory and defeat, is with His elect people.

When the main idea is not correctly identified and interpreted, other ideas might be forced out of context. I have heard messages which used the “meaning” of the five stones, or the “information” about Goliath’s armour and weapons, or David’s inexperience compared to Goliath’s might as preached as the main ideas. Those sermons were not correctly applied, because the main message of the Scripture was not identified by the preacher.

7. “Develop” these ideas

This might mean that you go back to the overview of Book, the message of the passage and revisit much of the research that you have already done: how does this idea fit into the message of the book?

8. The application

From the text we need to formulate the timeless principle that applies to us today or to any. This is where the Scripture, Theology and our Faith meet to guide our future.

“Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction.” Philippians 4:11-14

9. Write a manuscript for your sermon

Your introduction will be clear

You will be forced to give much thought to study and edit your message

It will help to guide you logically through your sermon

Key passages will be well placed

Your vocabulary will be expanded and repetition will be limited as you have the opportunity to choose synonyms

The conclusion will be powerful and a call to faith and action.

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EVALUATING ANY SERMON

1. Choice of text(s)?
2. Did I explain and expound the text accurately?
3. Was the theme appropriate?
4. Was the message well structured?
5. Was the message well illustrated?
6. Was the message Bible based and sound?
7. Was the message Christ centered?
8. Did it glorify Christ?
9. Was the message clear, logical and understandable?
10. Did the message bring conviction of sin?
11. Did I connect with the congregation?
12. Was the length of the sermon appropriate? Time management? Punctuality?
13. Were real issues honestly dealt with?
14. Was the message relevant to the congregation?
15. Did the message give clear direction and practical application? (Now what? To do's)
16. Was the message uplifting? Motivating? Inspiring? Devotional? Rebuking? Instructional? Positive? Creative?
17. Was there a balance between doctrine and devotion? Head and heart?
18. Was my vocabulary suitable? Were there any inappropriate colloquialisms (or use of slang)?
19. How would others describe my physical appearance and clothing?
20. Were my facial expressions and hand movements appropriate?
21. Were there any nervous or distracting mannerisms?
22. How was the style, pace and delivery of the sermon?
23. Was I Sincere? Natural? Enthusiastic? Wholehearted?
24. Did I make good use of quotes and illustrations from history, Scripture and/or contemporary and personal experience?
25. What was the impact of the message?
26. Was the message effective?
27. How could the message be improved?

EFFECTIVE PUBLIC SPEAKING

“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defence to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.” 1 Peter 3:15

Excuses

When Moses gave the excuse: *“O My Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before, nor since You have spoken to Your servant, but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.”* The Lord said to him: *“Who has made man’s mouth? Who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the Lord? Now, therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say.”* Exodus 4:10-12.

The Anger of God

When Moses still tried to get out of the call of the Lord and requested *“O My Lord, please send by the hand of someone else...”* We read that *“The anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses...”* Exodus 4:13-14.

The All Sufficiency of God

God’s servant is God’s responsibility. The will of God will never lead you where the grace of God cannot keep you. Where God guides, He provides. ***“Unless the Lord builds the house, they labour in vain who build it...”*** Psalm 127:1

Scripture Alone is our Authority

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for Doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. I charge you therefore, before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will Judge the living and the dead at His Appearing and His Kingdom: Preach the Word! Be ready, in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.” 2 Timothy 3:16-4:2.

Every Thought Captive

“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.”

2 Corinthians 10:3-5

Know Your Audience

Who are you going to be speaking to?

What particular concerns do they have?

What would your host like you to speak on?

What results are they looking for?

Where does your audience stand on these issues?

Will you be speaking to - a hostile audience?

- an undecided group?

- to people who already share your convictions?

How will this meeting be advertised?

How many people are expected?

How much time have you been allotted?

What can you say and what can you not say?

Why have you been selected to speak to this particular group?

In what way are you going to **benefit your audience**?

What information do you have to give that they are unlikely to receive from another source?

What **actions** do you want them to respond with?

What do you want to happen as a result of this meeting, or series of meetings?

Appearance is Important

Your appearance is important. Dress appropriately. Before you have even said one word, your audience will have formed a first impression of you by your clothing, grooming and body language.

Posture and Movement

Maintain good posture. Stand up straight. Never slouch. Do not lean on the lectern. Do not rock back and forth. Beware of any nervous movements which can distract from your message and irritate the audience. Do not fidget with jewellery, your hair or anything else. Do not put your hands in your pockets and jangle your keys! Do not clasp your hands or cross your arms. (This is interpreted as being closed to your audience.)

Question Time

Leave time for questions and answers. A productive discussion will reinforce your message the best. This helps people to think through the topic, particularly a controversial, or frustrating, topic.

Stimulating Questions

Ask questions that are meaningful, such as: “Do you have any questions or concerns?”

Do not give the rhetorical question: “are you with me?” That is unhelpful and meaningless.

Questions and Answers

Encourage questions, maintain a sense of humour and do not be touchy and take offence. Sometimes, to give your audience the time to think you could have two questions of your own ready to prompt them. If no one responds to your initial: “Questions? Any questions?” You may say: “Some people have concerns about...” and then give the answer. Then you can walk to the other side of the platform and offer to answer questions again. If there are still no questions, you can give your second prepared question, which should be very different from the last. “Often people ask...” answer that and then offer to answer questions again. If there are still no questions, close with your original conclusion, offer to be at the back afterward if people would like to chat and thank the audience for their time.

Speak to Their Needs

Avoid clichés, stock phrases and meaningless repetition. Try to put yourself in the position of those you are speaking to.

What are their **concerns**?

What are their **needs**?

What **issues** are they facing?

Dealing with Volatile Subjects

When you are dealing with a volatile issue, acknowledge that by saying something like: “*this discussion revolves around a very emotional issue. However, let us try to set aside the emotional aspects and examine the facts from a balanced and objective perspective.*”

Without compromising the Biblical position, you can say something like: “*I do understand what you are saying*”, “*A lot of other people hold to that position as well.*” Deal with the issue. Do not attack the person.

Paul in Athens

On Mars Hill, at Athens, the Apostle Paul was disturbed to see that the city was full of idols (Acts 17:16). Yet he did not communicate the anger he felt against the blatant idolatry. We read that: “*he reasoned*” with the Jews and Gentiles in Athens.

The Unknown God

Taking his cue from the altar to the unknown God, he said: “*Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: ‘To the unknown God.’ Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you. God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of Heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with human hands. Nor is He worshipped with man’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath and all things. He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth and has determined the pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us. For in Him we live and move and have our being... God... now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness...*” Acts 17:22-31

Evangelising in a Hostile Environment

Paul on Mars Hill gives us an example of evangelism in a hostile environment, by finding something in their culture to use as a stepping stone to capture their attention and to awaken their curiosity. He starts with God and Creation, with our spiritual longings and the need for Repentance.

Brainstorm

When you receive an invitation to speak on a certain subject you should first brainstorm, write down briefly with words and symbols everything you can think about on that subject, including sources, Scriptures, principles, examples, illustrations, action items, etc. Then you should review your ideas and organise them, starting with the problem, the Scriptural principles, and illustrations, first in the Bible, then from history and contemporary and personal experience. Then you should prioritise the most important ideas starting from the least important to the most important group of ideas, or illustrations. This could be summarized as **brainstorm, organise and prioritise** (BOP).

Be Selective

Avoid the temptation to overwhelm your audience with too much information. Recognising the limitations of time and peoples' capacities, you need to select the most appropriate and effective Scriptures, illustrations and action items to focus on.

Aim For Results

Consider what **attitude** you want your audience to develop concerning the chosen subject. Determine what **actions** you want your audience to do as a result of this presentation. Then consider what **advantage** you are offering them through the material you will be presenting.

Energise Your Audience

Make your presentation come alive by relating a Bible story, or an historical illustration, or a personal anecdote, which will help the audience understand and relate to the principle you are communicating.

Getting Started

You could also start with a current topic of debate, or a pressing need, crisis, or problem which this presentation deals with. Or you could start with a question which demands resolution.

Do's and Don'ts!

Do not kill the clock by giving long drawn out answers.

Do not look at your watch, or notes, while someone is talking to you.

Do not cross your arms as if you are challenging your audience.

Do not get side tracked into peripheral issues, or tricked into going way off your topic into some volatile issue.

Try to keep focused on what the meeting has been advertised to deal with.

Respect the time of your audience and keep the question time on what interests the majority of them.

Do not allow anybody to dominate, or to hijack, the meeting.

As the presenter, you are responsible to maintain control and ensure that the meeting stays on track, and finishes on time.

Dealing with Disruptions

If someone erupts with great hostility and emotion, try to use a soft answer to turn away wrath. *"I am sorry, you seem so upset, are you alright?"* or *"You seem so angry, are you angry with me? I am not angry with you."*

If the individual continues to want to hijack the meeting in an unconstructive direction, you could say: *"For the sake of time, and others who may have questions, I am going to have to move on and give someone else a chance, but I would be happy to meet with you afterwards. Next question?"* By the time you say *"next question"*, walk towards the other side of the platform, breaking eye contact and moving away from the hostile person.

If the person continues to try to hijack the meeting, you can calmly and firmly respond: *"I am sorry, we need to respect the whole group of people here. This meeting was advertised for ... and we must stay focused on that subject."* Or *"I am conscious of the time and want to respect the concerns of the audience. You can talk to me about that matter after the meeting."*

With a person who rambles on and on, you can say in a kind voice: *"I am sorry, I am afraid I am lost, what was your question?"* You could also say: *"For the sake of time could you please phrase that as a question?"*

If a questioner is very disruptive you should request the organisers to remove the offending individual.

Radio Programmes and Debates

On Radio programmes you may only have time for a couple of short sound byte statements. Make sure you have powerful, hard hitting statements, such as:

Pornography is the theory – rape is the practice!

Pornography and prostitution are two sides of the same coin.

Pornography infringes on the human rights of women and children – their right to privacy, dignity and protection. Life begins at conception. Abortion is murder.

Have Complete Notes

Have your facts at your fingertips. Take your handbook, notes and relevant articles. Plan what you want to say. Write down your key points. No matter what the question, ensure that you present the most important points that you want to say. Learn how to bridge from any question to deal with the most important material that you have on hand.

Keep Calm

No matter what the provocation, remain confident, calm and reasonable. Focus on the facts. Be logical and rational. Refuse to be provoked into an emotional or irritable response. No matter how hostile the interviewer, ensure that you respond in a measured and objective manner. (For radio interviews on Abortion, Pornography or Homosexuality, print out Frequently Asked Questions from the www.christianaction.org.za website.)

Be Positive

Be sure to use **positive words**: We are not anti-abortion, we are pro-life! We are not anti-pornography, we are pro-family! We are not anti-homosexual, we are pro-moral. Refer to the baby, not the fetus. The mother, not the pregnant woman. Control of pornography, not censorship.

Keep Your Focus

Keep focused on your main points. Do not allow yourself to be tricked onto rabbit trails and red herrings. Your time is limited. Use it wisely, carefully and strategically. Ensure that you have well-worded statements and sound bytes, to present; such as:

What we see influences what we think, and therefore what we do. Ideas have consequences. Pornography is addictive.

The United States Attorney Generals Commission on Pornography declared that hard core pornography is a manual for rape.

Give Contact Details

Try to give an address, website or phone number for documentation and more information on the subject. “Those who want documentation and statistics on this should visit www.christianaction.org.za or phone: 021-689-4480.”

Concluding Statement

Ensure that you have a strong closing statement such as: “Women need protection and respect. Not meaningless public holidays and pious platitudes from hypocritical politicians. We need to ban pornography and execute rapists!”

Make the best preparations you can, do everything you can, and trust God to do what you cannot.

“Do not worry beforehand, or premeditate what you will speak. But whatever is given you in that hour, speak that: For it is not you who will speak, but the Holy Spirit.” Mark 13:10

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OTHER RESOURCES AVAILABLE

Books

A Christian History of Africa
Answering Skeptics *
Biblical Faith and Modern Conterfeits *
Biblical Principles for Africa (Also in Afrikaans and French) *
Biblical Worldview Manual
Chaplains' Handbook
Chaplain's Prayerbook
Character Assassins - Dealing with Ecclesiastical Tyrants & Terrorists *
Church History Manual *
Discipleship Handbook *
Discipleship Training Manual
Faith Under Fire in Sudan (in both hard cover and soft cover) *
God Among the Zulus
Going On ... with a nod from God *
Going Through - Even if the Door is Closed *
Great Commission Manual
Greatest Century of Missions
Greatest Century of Reformation (In both hard cover and soft cover)
Holocaust in Rwanda (also available in French)
In the Killing Fields of Mozambique
Make a Difference - A Christian Action Handbook for Southern Africa
Old Testament Survey - Exploring the Central Messages of every Book of the Bible
Pink Agenda - Sexual Revolution and the Ruin of the Family *
Porndemic - How the Pornography Plague Affects You *
Practical Discipleship *
Putting Feet to Your Faith *
Reforming our Families *
Slavery, Terrorism and Islam - The Historical Roots and Contemporary Threat *
The Apostles Creed - Firm Foundations for your Faith *
The Authority of Christ and the First Day Sabbath *
The Christian at War (also in Afrikaans, German and Spanish)
The Ten Commandments – God's Perfect Law of Liberty *
Victorious Christians Who Changed the World *

DVDs

Herman Who? (75 min)
Hell's Best Kept Secret (35 min)
Sudan the Hidden Holocaust (55 min)
Terrorism and Persecution - Understanding Islamic Jihad (55 min)
What if Jesus Had Never Been Born? (55 min)

AUDIO MP3s

Answering Skeptics
Biblical Worldview Summit
Church History Overview
Great Commission Course
Heroes of the Faith
Muslim Evangelism Workshop
Old Testament Survey
Reformation
Revival
Understanding History
War Against God

* Also available as an E-book



Christian Liberty Books

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