



Bible Study Methods

Institute of Biblical Studies

Course Notes
Summer 2013

Bible Study Methods

*Oh how I love your law!
It is my meditation all the day.
Your commandment makes me
wiser than my enemies,
for it is ever with me.
I have more understanding than all my teachers,
for your testimonies are my meditation.
I understand more than the aged,
for I keep your precepts.
I hold back my feet from every evil way,
in order to keep your word.
I do not turn aside from your rules,
for you have taught me.
How sweet are your words to my taste,
sweeter than honey to my mouth!
Through your precepts I get understanding;
therefore I hate every false way
Psalm 119:97-104, ESV*

One cannot help but be struck with the Psalmist's love for the Scriptures that radiates from these verses. The Psalmist, of course, was not merely in love with the Bible (a kind of "bibliolatry") but he was in love with the God whose Bible he read. For the Psalmist seeking God and pursuing his Word were not two activities to be neatly separated. They were one and the same. Notice the parallelism between "seeking God" (line one) and "hiding the word in his heart" (line three) in an earlier portion of Psalm 119:

*With my whole heart I seek you;
let me not wander from your commandments!
I have stored up your word in my heart,
that I might not sin against you.
Ps. 119:10-11, ESV*

The Psalmist sought God through the Scriptures. The Word of God was not merely information to be amassed but the means through which the Psalmist sought and responded to God. The Psalmist reminds us how vital the Scriptures are to a growing and vibrant relationship with God.

The Scriptures are also vital to the ministry to which God has called us.

In both his letters to Timothy Paul urges this young leader to root his life and ministry in the Scriptures. In I Timothy 4:6-16 Paul outlines almost ten qualities that should characterize Timothy's life as a "good servant of Christ Jesus." The very first quality Paul mentions is being a leader who is "constantly nourished on the words of the faith" (v. 6). The fact that this phrase is in the present tense implies an ongoing activity of seeking nourishment.

Paul reminds Timothy that just as his body needs physical nourishment, so too his soul needs spiritual nourishment. In doing this he is calling Timothy to far more than a daily "quiet time." He is saying to Timothy, "If you want to be an effective leader you got to become a self-feeder." This is no less true for you and I. We too must become self-feeders.

Have you ever been in a conversation with a student who was deeply struggling over some issue and found yourself wishing that you knew the Bible better so you could more effectively help them through it? Have you ever listened to someone give a message from Scripture and thought, "I wish I could communicate the Bible's message more clearly"? Have you ever wished that you were able to better lead others from the Word?

The foundation of growth in each of these areas is becoming a self-feeder. Becoming a self-feeder is one of the most important habits you can cultivate. This course is designed to be the first step toward helping you become a person who feeds themselves from the Scriptures.

Course Description

Using an educationally sound, workshop-style approach, *Bible Study Methods* is designed to introduce you to a *process* for studying the Bible and give you a chance to improve your skills, all under the watchful eye of a skilled mentor. You will be exposed to the classic principles of interpretation, and then you will turn theory into practice by applying the principles as you study the book of Ephesians.

This course will cover the entire process of Bible study, from motivation, to interpretive principles, through skills and tools, all the way to communicating the text to others. After a lecture each day, your trained workshop coach will teach you skills and guide you through the use of tools to help you see and savor the glory of Christ in the Scriptures.

This course represents the first in a sequence of three courses you will complete in studying and communicating the Bible. Following *Bible Study Methods* you will complete *Biblical Interpretation* and *Biblical Communication*. In *Biblical Interpretation* you will learn how to interpret and apply the diverse literary forms in the Bible including narrative, prophesy, poetry, law, and gospel. In *Biblical Communication* you will learn how to communicate the Bible's message in a Christ-centered and life-changing way.

Course Objectives

- to be introduced to tools that can help you better understand Scripture and apply it to your life
- to discover why it is important to relate every passage to the redemptive story-line of the Bible
- to experience the gospel as you discover how Scripture exposes your brokenness/rebellion (fallen condition) and points you to find true life in Christ (redemptive solution)
- to learn how to discern the “fallen condition” and “redemptive solution” in a passage of Scripture
- to learn how to point people to Christ through small groups by asking good questions with the launch/explore/apply template
- to be better equipped for ministry by applying interpretive principles to your future reading, study and teaching from epistles
- to become aware of how our cultural perspectives might blinds us to aspects of the gospel
- to prepare you for Biblical Interpretation and Biblical Communication

Course Values

1. **Christ-centered Focus:** The deepest longing of the human heart is to know and enjoy the glory of God. As John Piper notes, “We were made to know and treasure the glory of God above all things; and when we trade that treasure for images, everything is disordered. The sun of God’s glory was made to shine at the center of the solar system of our soul. And when it does, all the planets of our life are held in their proper orbit. But when the sun is displaced, everything flies apart. The healing of the soul begins by restoring the glory of God to its flaming, all-attracting place at the center” (*Seeing and Savoring Christ*, p. 21). Our ultimate goal in this course is not that you would master all the skills we present but that you would cultivate a deeper hunger to “see and savor” the glory of Jesus Christ revealed in the Scriptures.
2. **Integrated Learning Environment:** This is not a traditional lecture course. You will learn not merely by “hearing” but also by “doing,” not merely by observing but also by experiencing. We are convinced that the best way to learn about studying the Scriptures is not by reading books about how to study the Bible but by studying the Bible under the watchful eye of a coach.
3. **Excellence** - We assume that you are here because you want to be here and we are hopeful that you will catch a love for the Scriptures and a desire to know truth that will motivate you from the inside to please the Lord with your work. Ultimately it is Him that you are serving (Col. 3:23).

A note on academic integrity and plagiarism: *Plagiarism is similar to stealing another’s ideas or thoughts and, therefore, unacceptable for Cru staff. Please refrain from copying or paraphrasing bible studies you read or find online. The penalty for plagiarism will be determined by*

IBS and may include automatic failure for the course. Ask your coach if you have questions concerning plagiarism.

4. **Collegiality** - This is not a competition. We encourage you to help each other, and our desire is to help you. NOTE: *Collegiality does not mean that you may work together with other students on your worksheets in such a way that two people turn in identical work.*
5. **Development** - We realize that everyone comes into class with a wide variety of experiences regarding formal training in Bible Study. Some of you may have graduated from a Bible college where you covered a number of these skills. Others may have had no previous experience in formal Bible study. Wherever you happen to be as you enter this class, our heart is that you would take a “next step” in your development.

Required Texts

Ultimate Road Trip. Orlando: Cru Press, 2008, updated.
Piper, John. *Seeing and Savoring Jesus Christ*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2001
Roberts, Vaughan. *God's Big Picture: Tracing the Story-line of the Bible*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity: 2002. (Minor updating done in 2012)
Snodgrass, Klyne. *The NIV Application Commentary: Ephesians*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996.

Recommended Texts

Arnold, Clinton. *Ephesians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010.
Bruce, F. F. *Ephesians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984.
Hoehner, Harold W. *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, Baker, 2003.
Lincoln, Andrew. *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 42. Dallas: Word, 1990.
O'Brien, Peter T. *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.
Thielman, Frank. *Ephesians*. Baker Exegetical Commentary. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010.

Course Requirements

1. **Thoughtful Reading:** You are expected to read the assigned texts/articles carefully and thoughtfully.
2. **Vital Participation:** Discussion is a vital part of the learning process for this class. You will be expected to contribute ideas and opinions based on your reading and comprehension of the course material.

3. **Textual Worksheets:** You will be expected to complete eight worksheets that will enable you to practice the core skills we will present in the class. These will be turned in to your coach for review and evaluation.
4. **Bible Study Project:** Your final assignment in the course will be to develop a small group Bible study, based on the passage you have studied, which you can use in your ministry setting. All the worksheets will contribute towards this project.

Class Schedule

Topic	Date	Assignments for that evening
Christ-Centered Bible Study	Thurs., June 13	Worksheet: #1 (Book Summary) “Hearing the Music of the Gospel”
Context	Fri., June 14	Worksheet: #2 (Context) <i>NIV Application Commentary</i> (NIVAC), 17-31. <i>Seeing and Savoring</i> , C1
Analyzing Structure (no lecture)	Mon, June 17	Worksheet: #3 (Structural Layout) <i>Seeing and Savoring</i> , C3
Observing Details	Tues., June 18	Worksheet: #4 (Observation) <i>Seeing and Savoring</i> , C5 Article: “Asking Good Questions”
Interpretive Skills	Wed, June 19	Worksheet: #5 (Interpretation) NIVAC, 123-139; <i>African Bible Commentary</i> , <i>The Ultimate Road Trip</i> , 99-111 (chapter 8) <i>Seeing and Savoring</i> , C10
Creating a Textual Outline (no lecture)	Thurs., June 20	Worksheet: #6: (Textual Outline) <i>Seeing and Savoring</i> , C9* <i>God’s Big Picture</i> , Introduction
Finding Our Place in God’s Story	Fri., June 21	Worksheet: #7: (Theological Analysis) <i>God’s Big Picture</i> , C7 NIVAC, 139-147. <i>The Ultimate Road Trip</i> , 36, 52-57 <i>Seeing and Savoring</i> , C12 Article: “Bridging the Gap between the World...”
Christ-centered Application	Mon., June 24	Worksheet: #8: (Application) NIVAC, 147-156. Article: “Understanding Scripture’s Fallen-Cond...” Article: “Asking Christ-Centered Questions that Target the Heart”
Leading Christ-centered Small Groups	Tues., June 25	Bible Study Project <i>Seeing and Savoring</i> , C13
Theological Development and Ministry	Wed., June 26	<i>Turn in Bible Study Project</i>

Course Grade

Your course grade will be based on the following:

8 Textual Worksheets	80% (80 points)
Bible Study Project	<u>20% (20 points)</u>
	100%

To determine your course grade complete the following:

1. Total the points from your 8 worksheets: _____ (80 points possible)
2. Write in the score from your project: _____ (20 points possible)
3. Add #1 and #2 together _____
4. Determine your grade _____

Grading Scale:

94-100	A	80-81	C+
92-93	A-	74-79	C
90-91	B+	72-73	C-
84-89	B	65-71	D
82-83	B-	0-65	F

Coaches

Bible Study Methods is not a class for passive learning. As in any “methods” class, the desired outcomes will not be accomplished by just taking an exam that demonstrates a knowledge of the theory of Bible study. We will talk about theory. We will teach sound exegesis and hermeneutics. But many of the skills and principles can only be learned by working in the text, trying out the different tools, and deliberately applying the principles taught. The coaching workshops are essential to the learning that takes place in this class. As you learn the principles of Bible Study, you will be able to work your way through the process under the helpful and watchful eye of a mentor. Your mentor will give you constructive feedback and be available to answer your questions. You will get personal attention that would be impossible in a lecture style format. This class is being taught by a team of qualified people rather than by one individual. The coaches have been chosen because of their knowledge of the Scriptures, their love for Christ, and their ability in a particular aspect of Bible study. They come from various ministries and responsibilities, but each of them shares a desire to blend academic integrity with passionate ministry.

Select Bibliography

Introduction

- Virkler, Henry A., and Karelynn Gerber Ayayo. *Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007).
- Hendricks, Howard. *Living By the Book* (Chicago: Moody, 1991).
- Kostenberber, Andreas and Richard Patterson. *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2011).

Authorship - Ephesians

- Arnold, C.E. "Ephesians, Letter to the" *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*. Downers Grove: IVP, 1993, pp. 238-249.
- Carson, D.A., Moo, D., Morris, L. *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 367-371. 480-486.
- Hoehner, Harold W. *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Baker, 2003), 1-61.
- Lincoln, Andrew. *Ephesians*. Word biblical Commentary, Vol. 42 (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), lix-lxxiii.
- Carson, D. A. "Pseudonymity and Pseudepigraphy," in *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Craig A. Evans. Downers Grove: IVP, 2000, 857-64.
- Meade, David. *Pseudonymity and Canon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 1-16.
- O'Brien, Peter T. *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 4-46.

Historical Context

- Carson, D. A., Moo, D., Morris, L. *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 305-316 486-490.
- Virkler, Henry A., and Karelynn Gerber Ayayo. "Historical-Cultural and Contextual Analysis" *Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 79-96.
- Osborne, Grant. *The Hermeneutical Spiral* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006) 158-80.
- Hawthorne, Gerald, et. al., eds., *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1993).

Observation

- Hendricks, Howard. *Living By the Book* (Chicago: Moody, 1991), 141-192.

Genre

- Ryken, Leland. *How to Read the Bible as Literature*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984
- Alter, Robert. *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. Basic Books: Harper Collins, 1981
- Fee, Gordon and Douglass Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981, 1993), 45-77.
- Goldsworthy, Graeme, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

The Importance of Structure

Arnold, Jeffrey. *Discovering the Bible for Yourself* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1993), 71-80.

Osborne, Grant. *The Hermeneutical Spiral* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006), 57-81.

Interpretation

Baker, David. "Interpreting Texts in the Context of the Whole Bible" *Themelios* 5.2 (1980) pp. 21-25

Hirsch, E.D. *Validity in Interpretation*. (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1967) .

Johnson, Elliott. "Author's Intention and Biblical Interpretation" *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy and the Bible*.

Radmacher, E., Preus, R., Eds. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984)

Kostenberger, Andreas and Richard Patterson. *Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature and Theology*. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011).

Osborne, Grant. *The Hermeneutical Spiral* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006).

Padilla, Rene. "The Interpreted Word: Reflections on Contextual Hermeneutics" *Themelios* 7.1 (1981) pp. 18-23

Ramm, Bernard. *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*. W. A. Wilde Company, 1950 pp. 78-96

Robert, Vaughan. *God's Big Picture: Tracing the Story-line of the Bible*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity: 2002

Schreiner, Thomas. *Interpreting Pauline Epistles*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011, 2nd ed.)

Application

Doriani, Daniel, *Putting the Truth to Work: The Theory and Practice of Biblical Application* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub., 2001).

Biblical Communication

The Ultimate Road Trip (Orlando: Cru Press, 2008, updated).

Chapel, Brian, *Christ-Centered Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005, 2nd ed.).

Richard, Ramesh. *Preparing Expository Sermons* (Grand Rapids: Baker 2001).

Robinson, Haddon. *Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker 1980).

Wilhoit, Jim and Leland Ryken,, *Effective Bible Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker 1988).

Recommended Tools for Personal Bible Study

One Study Bible and Several Other Translations

First, you will need to choose a translation (e.g. ESV, NASB, NIV, etc.) from which to study. This will determine which tools you purchase later. (If you study from the NIV you will want to purchase a NIV concordance.) Be sure you understand the objectives of the translation you chose. The NASB, for example, provides a word-for-word rendering of the original while the NIV provides a thought-for-thought translation (referred to as “dynamic equivalence”). There are benefits and drawbacks to both. Look for a Bible with large margins, extensive cross-references and (preferably) NO study notes. (Although study notes below the text can be very helpful they may also short-circuit the study process.) One study Bible that meets these criteria is Kay Arthur’s *International Inductive Study Bible*.

Second you will want to collect several other translations (ESV, KJV, RSV, NLT) and paraphrases (Living Bible, Phillips, or the Message) for comparison.

Concordance

Be sure to get a concordance that is exhaustive (i.e. containing every occurrence of every word in the Bible), keyed to Strong’s numbering system, and contains Greek & Hebrew dictionaries. This will allow you discover the Greek (N.T.) or Hebrew (O.T.) word that stand behind your English translation and research this word further. The following concordances meet these criteria:

- *NASB Exhaustive Concordance* (Holman)
- *The Crossway Comprehensive Concordance of the Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (Crossway)
- *NIV Exhaustive Concordance* (Zondervan)
- *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Abingdon) based on the KJV

If you chose to buy computer software, you will not need to buy a concordance.

Lexicons

A lexicon is a dictionary of words used in the Bible and is indispensable for determining the meanings of individual words. Perhaps some good tools to begin with are *Mounce’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* or the *Expanded Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*. (There is also an Old Testament counterpart to Vine’s). Both discuss the meaning of Greek words, are keyed to Strong’s numbering system and provides reference information to help you find the Greek word you are studying in two other helpful tools:

- (BDAG) *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* by Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker (Univ. of Chicago). This is the best Greek lexicon available but it can feel intimidating to use because all the words are listed in Greek and there is an abundance of reference material in each entry. (Note: Some computer programs will give you access to this tool as well).
- (NIDNTT) *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* - 4 vols. by C. Brown (Zondervan).

Atlas

A good atlas is critical for understanding the geographical context of Scripture. *The Moody Atlas of Bible Lands* by Beitzel (Moody) is probably the best. More recent is John Currid and David Barnett's *Crossway ESV Bible Atlas* (Crossway, 2010).

Dictionaries/Encyclopedias

Bible Dictionaries provide valuable information on persons, groups, cities, customs, and cultural practices. The best single volume dictionary is the *New Bible Dictionary* edited by Douglas, Bruce, et. al., 2nd edition (Inter-Varsity). The best multiple-volume set is *the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* - 4 vols. edited by Bromiley (Eerdmans); however, it is very expensive.

N.T./O.T. Introductions and Surveys

Introductions provide helpful background information (author, date, occasion, original recipients, historical circumstances surrounding a particular book) on each book of the Bible. Surveys provide a synthesized overview of the books of the Bible. I would recommend purchasing one New Testament and one Old Testament introduction from the following list:

- *A Survey of the Old Testament* by Hill/Walton (Zondervan)
- *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. by Longman/Dillard (Zondervan)
- *New Testament Introduction*, 4th ed. by Guthrie (Inter-Varsity)
- *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. by Carson/Moo (Zondervan)

Commentaries

Commentaries are an indispensable resource for personal Bible study. Commentaries provide access to the interpretative judgments of Bible scholars and frequently supply historical and cultural background that affects one's exegesis of a passage. In addition, the introductions to most commentaries discuss the author, occasion, date of writing, audience and authorial purpose.

The following two books function like Consumer Reports to commentaries. They will give you short descriptions of the particular commentary you may be considering to use. They will also identify commentaries that are technical or intended for a broader audience. These books are well worth their price, but look for the most recent editions.

- *Old Testament Commentary Survey*, 4th ed. by Tremper Longman (Baker)
- *New Testament Commentary Survey* by 6th ed. by D. A. Carson (Baker)

It is best to consult several commentaries when you are studying a passage. The problem is that owning even one commentary on every book of the Bible is very expensive. I would begin by purchasing a one or two volume commentary on the entire Bible such as . . .

- *New Bible Commentary* edited by Wenham/Motyer et. al. (IVP)
- *Bible Knowledge Commentary* (two volumes) edited by Walvoord and Zuck (Victor)
- *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (two volumes) edited by Frank Gaebelein (Zondervan)
- *African Bible Commentary* edited by Tokunboh Adeyemo (Zondervan)
- *Sonlight* (available for free online) [<http://sonlight.com> click on "study notes"]
- *ESV Study Bible* (available online) [www.ESVbible.org]

Next I would begin purchasing individual commentaries as you study individual books of the Bible. Fee and Stuart, in their book *How to Read the Bible For All Its Worth*, suggest several helpful criteria to keep in mind as you shop for commentaries.

- Look for a commentary that is exegetical (i.e. it focuses on the meaning of the text) and not devotional or homiletical (application-orientated).
- Look for a commentary that presents and discusses the interpretative options for a given passage. Examine how the author discusses the meaning of a text: Does he discuss and evaluate possible options or merely give you his judgment?
- Look for a commentary that discusses historical backgrounds of important items in the text (people, customs, cultural background, etc.)
- Look for a commentary that provides adequate historical background (in the introduction) to enable you to get a handle on the author, date, original readers and occasion.

Although you should purchase a commentary based on its individual merit, there are several commentary series you may find helpful to examine:

- (NICNT) *New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Eerdmans)
- (NICOT) *New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Eerdmans)
- (TOTC) *Tyndale Old Testament Commentary* (Inter-Varsity)
- (INTC) *Tyndale New Testament Commentary* (Eerdmans)
- (EBC) *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Zondervan)
- (NIBC) *New International Bible Commentary* (Hendrickson)
- (IVPNTC) *IVP New Testament Commentary* (Inter-Varsity)
- (PNTC) *Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Eerdmans)

Biblical Theologies

Biblical theology differs from systematic theology (below) in that it attempts to trace the progress of revelation related to particular themes through Scripture (eg, God's presence and temple). Some biblical theologies, however, focus on the particular contributions individual authors or books make to a given topic (eg, Paul's theology of suffering). I would recommend *The New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* edited by Desmond, Rosner, Carson and Goldsworthy (IVP). However, the following are also worth pursuing:

- *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible* by S. Dempster (IVP)
- *The Faith of Israel* by W. Dumbrell (Baker)
- *Magnifying God in Christ: A Summary of New Testament Theology* by T. Schreiner (Baker)
- *Theology of the New Testament* by F. Thielman (Zondervan)

Systematic Theologies

Systematic theology is an attempt to set forth the complete teaching of Scripture on a given topic the Bible discusses (e.g. doctrine of God, humanity, salvation, person and work of Christ, etc.). I would recommend one of the following:

- *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Bible Doctrine* by W. Grudem (Zondervan)
- *The Moody Bible Handbook of Theology* by P. Ennis (Moody)
- *Christian Theology* by M. Erickson (Baker)
- *Basic Theology* by C. Ryrie (Victor)

Bible Resources on Computer Software

During the last ten years there has been a tremendous growth in Bible resources available on computer. Computer resources offer several advantages. First, you often get several tools bundled together which, if you purchased them separately, would cost considerably more. (A good Bible program will frequently provide the equivalent of several English translations, a Greek New Testament, a Hebrew Old Testament, concordance and Bible encyclopedia. In some cases it may even provide lexical information from lexicons.) Second, many programs will give you user-friendly access to Bible tools for which you would normally need knowledge of Greek or Hebrew. Third, computer programs frequently make word studies and other kinds of searches very easy. If you want to know every place in the New Testament where the word “grace” occurs all you need to do is to make several keystrokes. As you consider purchasing software ask yourself the following questions:

- What do I *need* to be able to do (both now and in the future as I become more proficient)?
- Do I want to do searches from the original Greek/Hebrew texts or do I just want to work with the English text? (I would get software that provides access to the original Greek/Hebrew.)
- What other resources do I want along with the texts? (lexicons, encyclopedias, etc.)

The following are computer programs you may want to consider:

- *Bible Works for Windows* (Hermeneutika) [advanced]
- *Logos* (Logos Research Systems) [This is now available for Mac]
- *E-Sword 9.0* (Available for free online) [http://www.e-sword.net]
- Consider free online resources like
 - www.esvbible.org – free but if you have an ESV code you’ll have more access
 - www.biblegateway.com – for quick verse lookup
 - www.soniclight.com – a solid contemporary commentary on the whole Bible
 - www.blueletterbible.org – a great resource for Bible study
 - www.nextbible.com – a solid resource for more in depth study of Scripture

A Few Tips on Saving Money as you Develop Your Personal Library

- Develop a prioritized list of the tools you would like to purchase.
- Don’t buy books you will only read once. Borrow them from others and take notes.
- Never pay the retail price for any books you purchase. You can get up to 50% off retail by purchasing books through *Christian Book Distributors* (www.christianbook.com)
- Family Christian Stores has a program that gives significant discounts to full-time Christian workers.
- Consider online resources like www.soniclight.com and the others mentioned above.

Christ-Centered Bible Study

“The Bible obviously covers a great deal of ground. But there is one supreme subject that binds it all together: Jesus Christ and the salvation God offers through him. That is true not just of the New Testament but of the Old as well”
Vaughn Roberts, *God’s Big Picture*

Introduction: Hearing the music

I. An invitation to Christ-centered bible study

Luke 24:13-35 (ESV)

That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near...

“We ought to read the Scriptures with the express design of finding Christ in them. Whoever shall turn aside from this object, though he may weary himself throughout his whole life in learning, will never attain the knowledge of the truth; for what wisdom can we have without the wisdom of God.”
John Calvin

II. What happens if we don't study the Bible in a "Christ-centered" way?

III. What do we mean by Christ-centered Bible Study?

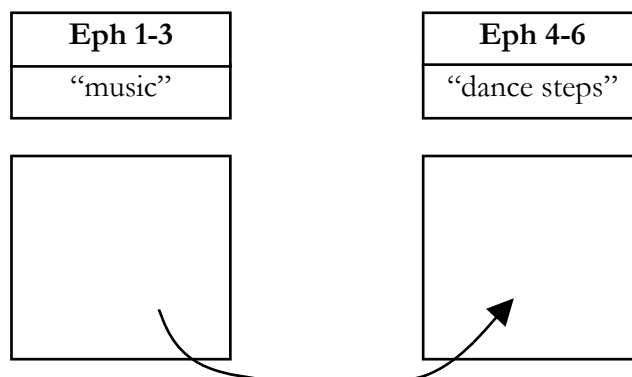
Example from Ephesians

Chapters 1-3

Chapters 4-6

¹⁴For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, ¹⁶that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Ephesians 3:14-19 (ESV)

Key link: Eph 4:1



IV. What is too easily overlooked?

²⁸ Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. (Eph 4:28 ESV)

V. What must I do to be Christ-centered?

Two key questions

Q1:

Q2:

Conclusion: *Learning to hear*

Surveying the Big Picture – Context

I. Introduction

II. Why is Context Important?

A. Frequently we pay little or no attention to _____.

Proverbs 29:18a. “Where there is no vision, the people perish.” (KJV)

B. Context is a _____ that helps unlock doors of _____ meaning.

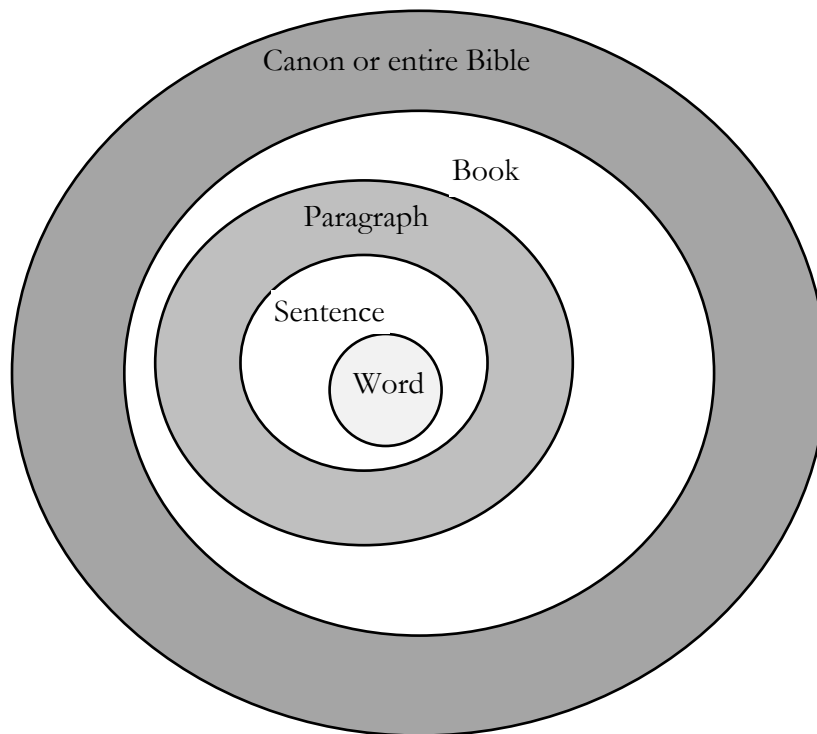
III. Three Types of Context

A. Historical / Cultural Context

1. Author
2. Recipient(s)
3. Historical circumstances or situation
4. Where do I find this information?

B. Literary Context

1. Literary context has to do with how the author has _____ the material
and how the material _____ .



2. One of the important adjustments we need to make is to think in terms of
paragraph as the basic unit of thought.

3. Discovering the literary context

- a. Look for an author's statement of intent
- b. Look for repeated words or phrases
- c. Create a book - summary

4. Example #1 –Ephesians

Example #2 –Hebrews 1:1-4

Example #3 – Mark 8-10

8:22-26	JESUS HEALS A BLIND MAN
8:31	JESUS PREDICTS HIS DEATH (#1)
8:32	Peter rebukes Jesus regarding his death
9:30-32	JESUS PREDICTS HIS DEATH (#2)
9:33-37	Disciples argue about who is greatest
10:32-34	JESUS PREDICTS HIS DEATH (#3)
10:35-45	James and John as to sit on his R and L
10:46-52	JESUS HEALS A BLIND MAN

C. Redemptive Context

1. The Bible tells one _____ that centers on the person of Christ.

"You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life." (John 5:39-40, ESV)

2. Three "Redemptive" Questions

- a. Where does this passage fit in the story of God (redemptive history)?
- b. What do I need to know about this chapter in God's story to rightly understand it?
- c. How does this passage relate to other chapters in God's story?

If you want to read a book that does a great job of connecting the individual stories of Scripture to the larger story of God, see ***The Jesus Storybook Bible: Every Story Whispers His Name*** by Sally Lloyd-Jones (Grand Rapids: ZonderKids, 2007).

Exploring the Passage: Analyzing Structure

Steps to unlocking the structure of a passage

1. Paste the ESV text into your Word processor (you may need to set the page to “landscape”).
2. Separate the sentences by hitting return twice after each period.
3. Start with the first sentence. Separate all the phrases for that sentence by hitting return after each phrase so they form a column. Look for commas or semi-colons or dashes.
4. Identify the *main* subject and main verb. Highlight the main **subject** and **verb** with bold. Put the clause that contains these two words on the left margin. If there is a direct object, include it with the clause on the same line. It’s possible to have a series of main verbs with the subject. Note: In many of the epistles the implied subject is “you” (e.g., 1 Thes. 5:17, Paul writes “Pray without ceasing”); the subject is an implied you: “[You] pray without ceasing.”
5. Using your tab/indent key, position each phrase, indenting under or over the words they modify. Each phrase will modify either a verb or a noun. To figure out what a phrase modifies, ask “*What question does this phrase answer?*” If the phrase answers the question “Why?” or “Where?” or “How?” or “When?”, then it probably modifies the verb. If it answers the question “Who?” or “Which?” or “What?”, then it modifies a noun.

Modifies a Noun	Modifies a Verb
Who?	Why?
Which?	Where?
What?	How?
	When?

6. Place lists of names, adjectives or actions in a vertical column.
7. Stick with the order of words in the passage. If the main clause is not the first clause, indent the first clause over the main clause. If the modifying words come after the main clause, put them underneath the word they modify.
8. Set out key connecting words like “but”, “therefore”, “finally”, and “for this reason” to emphasize the contrast or connection.
9. Occasionally a phrase will interrupt a main clause. If this happens, return the rest of the main clause to the left margin and insert the subject in brackets as in the example below.

The students
who studied
[the students] **passed** the test.

10. Go to the next sentence. Every new sentence or new main clause should begin at the left column.

EXAMPLE

1. **Paste the ESV text into your Word processor (you may need to set the page to “landscape”).**

Philippians 3:3-7 (ESV)

³For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh— ⁴though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. ⁷But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

2. **Separate the sentences by hitting return twice after each period.**

³For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh— ⁴though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also.

If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

⁷But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

3. **Start with the first sentence. Separate all the phrases for that sentence by hitting return after each phrase so they form a column. Look for commas or semi-colons or dashes.**

³For we are the circumcision,
who worship by the Spirit of God
and glory in Christ Jesus
and put no confidence in the flesh—
⁴though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also.

4. **Identify the main subject and main verb. Highlight the main subject and verb with bold. Put the clause that contains these two words on the left margin. If there is a direct object, include it with the clause on the same line. It's possible to have a series of main verbs with the subject. Note: In many of the epistles the implied subject is “you” (e.g., 1 Thes. 5:17, Paul writes “Pray without ceasing”); the subject is an implied you: “[You] pray without ceasing.”**

³For
we are the circumcision,
who worship by the Spirit of God
and glory in Christ Jesus
and put no confidence in the flesh—
⁴though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also.

5. Using your tab key, position each phrase, indenting under or over the words they modify. Each phrase will modify either a verb or a noun. To figure that out what a phrase modifies, ask “*What question does this phrase answer?*” If the phrase answers the question “Why?” or “Where?” or “How?” or “When?”, then it probably modifies the verb. If it answers the question “Who?” or “Which?” or “What?”, then it modifies a noun.

we are the circumcision,

(who) who worship by the Spirit of God

(who) and glory in Christ Jesus

(who) and put no confidence in the flesh—

(parenthetical) ⁴ though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also.

6. Place lists of names, adjectives or actions in a vertical column.

(who) who worship by the Spirit of God

(who) and glory in Christ Jesus

(who) and put no confidence in the flesh—

7. Stick with the order of words in the passage. If the main clause is not the first clause, indent the first clause over the main clause. If the modifying words come after the main clause, put them underneath the word they modify.

See the sentence #2

8. Set out key connecting words like “but”, “therefore”, “finally”, and “for this reason” to emphasize the contrast or connection.

³For

we are the circumcision,

who worship by the Spirit of God

and glory in Christ Jesus

and put no confidence in the flesh—

⁴ though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also.

9. Occasionally a phrase will interrupt a main clause. If this happens, return the rest of the main clause to the left margin and insert the subject in brackets as in example #3 below.

10. Go to the next sentence. Every new sentence or new main clause should begin at the left column.

If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh,
I have more:

⁵ circumcised on the eighth day,
of the people of Israel,
of the tribe of Benjamin,
a Hebrew of Hebrews;
as to the law, a Pharisee;
⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church;
as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

⁷ But

whatever gain I had,
I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

OTHER EXAMPLES

Example #1: Bob went to the store in order to get bread, milk, eggs and juice.

1. Identify the main subject and verb

Bob went

2. Identify all the phrases in your sentence. Pay attention to the punctuation in your Bible.

(1) to the store

(2) in order to get bread, milk, eggs and juice.

3. Add the other phrases, indenting under or over the words they modify.

Bob went

to the store

in order to get bread, milk, eggs and juice

4. Place lists of names, adjectives or actions in a vertical column.

Bob went

to the store

in order to get bread,

milk,

eggs

and juice

5. Stick with the order of words in the passage. If the main clause is not the first clause, indent the first clause over the main clause. If the modifying words come after the main clause, put them underneath the word they modify.
6. Set out key connecting words like “but”, “therefore”, “finally”, and “for this reason” to emphasize the contrast or connection. (Do not put every connective out the left—only key connectives at the beginning of the sentence.)
7. Occasionally a phrase will interrupt a main clause. If this happens, return the rest of the main clause to the left margin and insert the subject in brackets as in the example below.

The students
 who studied
[the students] passed the test.

8. Every new sentence or main clause should begin at the left column.

Example #2: Therefore, on Saturday morning Bob went to the store in order to get bread, milk, eggs and juice.

Therefore, (see rule #8)
 on Saturday morning (see rule #7)
Bob went
 to the store
 in order to get bread,
 milk,
 eggs
 and juice.

Example #3: Therefore, on Saturday morning during a thunderstorm, Bob, who was wearing his Chicago Cubs baseball cap, went to the store in his car in order to get bread, milk, eggs and juice.

Therefore,
 on Saturday morning
 during a thunderstorm,
Bob,
 who was wearing his Chicago Cubs baseball cap,
[Bob] went (see rule #9)
 to the store
 in his car
 in order to get bread,
 milk,
 eggs
 and juice.

New Testament Structural Examples

Sample #1 – Philippians 2:5-11 (ESV)

⁵ **Have**¹ this mind among yourselves,
which is yours in Christ Jesus,
⁶ who,
though he was in the form of God,
did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,
⁷ but made himself nothing,
taking the form of a servant,
being born in the likeness of men.
And being found in human form,
⁸ **he humbled** himself
by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.
⁹ Therefore
God has
highly exalted him
and **bestowed** on him the name
that is above every name,
¹⁰ so that
at the name of Jesus
every knee should bow,
in heaven
and on earth
and under the earth,
¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Sample #2 – Philippians 3:3-7 (ESV)

³ For
we are the real circumcision,
who worship by the Spirit of God
and glory in Christ Jesus
and put no confidence in the flesh—
⁴ though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also.
If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh,
I have more:
⁵ circumcised on the eighth day,
of the people of Israel,
of the tribe of Benjamin,
a Hebrew of Hebrews;
as to the law, a Pharisee;
⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church;
as to righteousness, under the law blameless.
⁷ But
whatever gain I had,
I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

¹ The pronoun “you” is implied. The main subject and verb is “you have.”

Sample #3 – Colossians 1:9-14 (ESV)

⁹ And so, from the day we heard,
we have not ceased to pray for you,
asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will
in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,
¹⁰ so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord,
fully pleasing to him,
bearing fruit in every good work
and increasing in the knowledge of God.
¹¹ **May you be strengthened** with all power,
according to his glorious might,
for all endurance and patience with joy,
¹² giving thanks to the Father,
who has qualified you to share in the inheritance
of the saints in light.
¹³ **He has delivered** us
from the domain of darkness
and [he has] **transferred** us
to the kingdom of his beloved Son,
¹⁴ in whom we have redemption,
the forgiveness of sins.

Sample #4: Romans 5:1-5 (ESV)

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith,
we have peace with God
through our Lord Jesus Christ.
² 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.
³ Not only that,
but **we rejoice** in our sufferings,
knowing that suffering produces endurance,
⁴ and endurance produces character,
and character produces hope,
⁵ 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.

Essential Grammar

- Clauses (have a subject and a verb)
 - Independent or Dependent?
 - Independent expresses a complete thought and can stand alone as a sentence.
 - Example: I do not like dragons who have nasty claws.
- If it is dependent, what does it do?
 - Modifies a noun: Answers WHICH? or WHO?
 - Gives a condition: IF
 - If it comes near me, I will scream and run.
 - Gives a purpose: IN ORDER THAT
 - It has claws in order that it can kill its prey.
 - Shows a cause: BECAUSE
 - I am hiding because I am afraid.
 - Gives time: Answers, WHEN?
 - I will come out when it is gone.
 - Shows comparison: AS, LIKE
 - My sister has claws like a dragon.
- Phrases (no subject and verb)
 - Does it modify a noun? What? Who? Where? Which?
 - The dragon on the housetop is breathing fire.
 - Does it modify a verb? When? Why? How?
 - The dragon burned me on my arm.
- Connectives (linking words)
 - Coordinating: AND, BUT, OR, FOR, NOR
 - Subordinating: IF, AFTER, AS BEFORE, ALTHOUGH, SINCE, IN ORDER THAT, SO THAT, BECAUSE, WHILE, WHENEVER, ETC. (These are clue to dependent clauses.)
- Verbs
 - Participles: -ING - Skiing on powder is a wonderful experience.
 - Infinitives - "To be or not to be; that is the question."
 - Tenses:
 - PRESENT - I go to church.
 - PAST - I went to church.
 - FUTURE - I will go to church.
 - Mood:
 - INDICATIVE - He hit the ball.
 - IMPERATIVE - Hit the ball!
 - SUBJUNCTIVE - He might hit the ball.

- A. “Open my eyes . . .”
- B. “that I may behold . . .”

III. Experiencing the Joy of Discovery

A. What keeps us from truly “seeing”?

B. Knowing what to look for

C. Cultivating our observation skills

D. Example

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. ⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

Ephesians 1:3-10 (ESV)

Observation Key: Knowing What to “Look For” in Epistles²	
Key Words/Phrases	Circle words and phrases that are central to the meaning of the passage. Repeated terms or concepts may provide a clue.
Connectives	Put a box around connectives. Connectives reveal important relationships. “For, because, or therefore...” often indicate a reason or cause. “But” often introduces a contrast. “So that, to, in order to...” often indicates purpose.
Contrasts Comparisons	How does the writer use contrasts, comparisons and illustrations to amplify concepts? Comparison is the association of similar things while contrast is the association of things that are different. “But,” “however,” “rather,” or “on the other hand...” indicate contrast. “Like” and “as” indicate a comparison.
Repetition	Are there repeated words or phrases? Are there repeated thoughts?
Advice, Commands, Warnings or Promises	Note the advice or admonitions the author gives. What does the author ask the readers to do?? Is there a warning or a promise? What role does it play?
Reasons Results Cause/Effect	When you observe admonitions, see if the writer gives you a reason for this advice. Is there a benefit that will result from following the writer’s instructions? Is there a danger to be avoided? Is there a cause/effect relationship (if . . . then . . .)?
Progression of Ideas	Take note of items that are listed. Does there seem to be any significance to the order?
Illustrations	Are there any illustrations? What images does the author employ?
Questions	What is the purpose behind the question? To challenge? To introduce an idea? To anticipate an objection? To raise a problem? Does the author answer the question (explicitly or implicitly)?
Grammar	It is worthwhile to note direct commands. And pay attention to the tense, mood, and number of verbs as well as the case and number of nouns and pronouns.
Tone	How would you describe the general tone of the passage? Is it characterized by anger, delight, sadness, joy, thanksgiving, earnestness, caution, etc.? Are there statements that reveal the author’s feelings?
Cultural Discontinuity	Aspects of culture that seem unique or very different from our contemporary culture (might be a tradition, custom, or an idiom requiring further explanation. (See <i>Bridging the Gap</i> article section1.)
Pivot Point	Is there a significant, sudden change in direction or flow?
Literary Structure	Are there indicators of the author’s intent, emphasized by structure (i.e., inclusio)?

² This chart is adapted from Oletta Wald, *The Joy of Discovery in Bible Study*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1975), 18-19.

Exploring the Passage: Interpretive Skills

*"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 Tim. 2:15)*

The Challenge of Interpretation

I. Prologue

- A. The goal of interpreting
- B. Interpretation is never *purely* objective
- C. Exercise care and humility

II. Principles for Interpretation

- A. Let Scripture interpret Scripture
- B. Identify literary genre
- C. Relate every passage to God's redemptive plan centered on Christ.

III. Process for Epistles

- A. Structural layout
- B. Observations
- C. Ask questions for understanding/interpretive options

Examining the Structure

To analyze the structure properly one must properly identify the literary unit.

1. What is the progression of thought? (Look at the main clauses)
2. How do comparisons, contrasts, repetition, etc. contribute to the big idea of the passage?
3. What clues does the structure give you about the “big idea” of your passage?

- D. Word studies (context)

Note on Word Studies

In order to not abuse words and their meaning, remember at least these two parts of a word study.

1. Try to determine the range of meaning in a word.
2. Determine the meaning that best fits the context of your passage.

- E. Compare translations

- F. Investigate what others have said

1. Present
2. Ancient
3. Different

Finding Good Commentaries

In their book *How to Read the Bible For All Its Worth*, Fee and Stuart offer some helpful advice in finding good Bible commentaries:

- Look for a commentary that is exegetical (i.e. it focuses on the meaning of the text) and not merely devotional or homiletical (application-orientated).
- Look for a commentary that presents and discusses the interpretative options for a given passage.
- Look for a commentary that discusses historical background of important items in the text (people, customs, cultural background, etc.)
- Look for a commentary that gives you enough information in the introduction to enable you to get a handle on the author, date, original readers and occasion.

As you develop your library, you might buy one or two commentaries on the whole Bible and buy commentaries on individual books as you study them. Also, make sure to check out www.bestcommentaries.com to help you choose the best commentary for any book of the Bible.

G. Compare/correlate with other biblical teaching.

Finding Parallel Passages

- Many Bibles contain cross-references in the margins. Cross-references can help you discover other passages in Scripture that address the same topic as a passage you are investigating.
- Another way to find passages addressing a similar topic is by using a concordance.
- *Nave's Topic Bible* can be a useful resource for finding parallel passages.

H. Consider how your passage relates to God's redemptive plan that centers on Christ.

Discover the Big Idea: Creating a Textual Outline

I. Introduction

- The purpose of a *textual outline* is to distill into outline form a summary of what an author communicated to his or her original audience.
- A *textual outline* should not be confused with a *message outline*. The latter represents an outline of a message that you would deliver to a *contemporary audience* (e.g., the outline of a talk to be delivered at a weekly meeting). In contrast, a textual outline expresses the original meaning of the passage. Thus, you might think of the distinction between a *textual outline* and a *message outline* in terms of the distinction between the original meaning of a passage (textual outline) and its contemporary application (message outline).

II. Sample Textual Outline

Phil. 1:27-30 (NASB)

²⁷ Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ; so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; ²⁸ in no way alarmed by *your* opponents—which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that *too*, from God. ²⁹ For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, ³⁰ experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear *to be* in me.

I. Paul exhorts them to live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ (1:27-28).

- A. by standing firm in one spirit
- B. by striving together for the faith of the gospel
- C. by not being frightened by their opponents

II. Paul reminds them that they have been called to suffer for Christ's sake (1:29-30).

- A. to believe *in* Christ also to suffer *for* Christ
- B. experiencing the same conflict as Paul

III. Steps to Creating a Textual Outline

In epistolary literature (e.g., Paul's letters), your textual outline will be derived from your *structural layout*. (The steps outlined below presume that you have already completed a structural layout of your passage.)

STEP 1. Draw a bracket to the right of each sentence. (Note: A sentence may include *more* than one verse; conversely, two or more sentences may be found in one verse. The point is that you are not dividing up the *verses* but the *sentences* in your passage.)

STEP 2. To the right of each bracket, in the margin, write a word or phrase that describes the topic or theme of each sentence. *You are not writing a paraphrase of the sentence—just a word or phrase.*

STEP 3. Once you have written a word or phrase in the margin, write a short sentence of your own using the language of the passage. Ask yourself two questions: What is the subject or theme? What is the author saying about this theme? *This is not a word for word paraphrase of the original sentence.* Rather it is a simple sentence that summarizes the content of author's sentence. (Note: Write each sentence from the third person standpoint: "Paul exhorts these believers to live holy." or "Paul reminds these believers that Christ will return.").

STEP 4. Once you have written sentences for your entire passage, look at your structural layout and ask yourself if any of the sentences you have written might naturally be grouped together.³ Draw a line between each of the sentence-groupings in your structural layout. (For example, if the first three sentences in your passage belong together, draw a line between the third and fourth sentence in your structural layout.) Then, to each sentence-group assign a Roman numeral (i.e., I, II, III) and put your sentences in outline form.

STEP 5. Fill in the important sub-points under each Roman numeral (i.e., A, B and C).⁴ The sub-points do not need to be written in a complete sentence. Put verse references at the end of each sentence with a Roman numeral. For example: "I. Paul exhorts them to present their bodies as a living sacrifice to God (Rom. 12:1)."

³ Although it is possible you will draw a line between each bracketed sentence in your passage, it is more likely that you will want to group some of the sentences together under a single Roman numeral.

⁴ If you grouped any sentences then the sentences you grouped will become the sub-points (i.e., A, B and C) under that Roman numeral.

IV. Example

STEP 1. Using brackets, divide your passage into sentences. (Notice that the first sentence encompasses two verses in this passage.)

Philippians 1:27-30 (NASB)

²⁷ Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ;
so that
whether I come and see you
or remain absent,
I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit,
with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;
²⁸ in no way alarmed by *your* opponents
—which is a sign of destruction for them,
but of salvation for you,
and that *too*, from God.

²⁹ For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake,
not only to believe in Him,
but also to suffer for His sake,
³⁰ experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me,
and now hear *to be* in me.

STEP 2. Write a word or phrase to the right of each sentence

- 1:27-28, “*live worthy of the gospel*”
- 1:29-30, “*suffering for Christ's sake*”

STEP 3. Write a short sentence of your own summarizing each author's sentence in the passage.

- Paul exhorts them to live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ
- Paul reminds them that they have been called to suffer for Christ's sake

STEP 4. Group your sentences drawing a line between each sentence group and label with Roman numerals. (Notice in this case that there are no sentences to be grouped together. Thus, you simply draw a line between the bracketed sentences.)

²⁷ Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ;
so that
whether I come and see you
or remain absent,
I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit,
with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;
²⁸ in no way alarmed by *your* opponents
—which is a sign of destruction for them,
but of salvation for you,
and that *too*, from God.

²⁹ For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake,
not only to believe in Him,
but also to suffer for His sake,
³⁰ experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me,
and now hear *to be* in me.

- I. Paul exhorts them to live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ
- II. Paul reminds them that they have been called to suffer for Christ's sake

STEP 5. Fill in the Sub-points, add verses references, and write ABI.

- I. **Paul exhorts them to live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. (1:27-28)**
 - A. standing firm in one spirit
 - B. striving together for the faith of the gospel
 - C. not being frightened by their opponents
- II. **Paul reminds them that they have been called to suffer for Christ's sake. (1:29-30)**
 - A. to believe *in* Christ also to suffer *for* Christ
 - B. experiencing the same conflict as Paul

Note: At this point, you can combine the main points into one summary statement, called the author's big idea (ABI):

Paul exhorts the Philippians to live worthy of the Gospel, knowing they have been called to suffer for Christ.

Seeing Christ in God's Story: Theological Analysis

I. Introduction

II. Understanding God's Story

A. Creation (Pattern Of The Kingdom)

B. Fall (Perished Kingdom)

C. Redemption (Present Kingdom)

Prophet

King

Priest

D. Mission (Proclaimed Kingdom)

E. New Creation (Perfected Kingdom)

III. Finding our Place in God's Story

A. Understanding from the Proclaimed Kingdom



B. Old Testament Examples

IV. Conclusion: Seeing Christ

Christ-Centered Application

“Scripture continually aims to restore aspects of our brokenness to spiritual wholeness so that we might reflect and rejoice in God's glory. Our condition as fallen creatures in a fallen world requires this redemptive work not merely for the initial work of salvation but also for our continuing sanctification and hope (Rom. 15:4).” Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 269-70.

I. Introduction

II. The Foundation for Christ-Centered Application (Hebrews 4:12-16)

A. The Word is designed to expose the _____ of your heart (4:12-13).

B. The Word is designed to direct your heart to _____ (4:14-16).

C. Pattern of Hebrews

1:1-14	Portrait of Christ as the exalted Son of God
2:1-4	Fallen Condition – danger of drifting from the message
2:5-3:6	Portrait of Christ in his human nature
3:7-19	Fallen Condition – danger of an unbelieving heart
4:1-13	<i>Invitation to enter the rest provided by Christ</i>
4:14-5:9	Portrait of Christ as the Great High Priest
5:10-6:12	Fallen Condition – danger of abandoning Christ
6:13-10:18	Portrait of Christ as priest of the order of Melchizedek, providing a “better” covenant
10:19-13:25	<i>Two primary applications: (1) faith (believing the gospel) and (2) perseverance (the fruit of faith)</i>

D. The Bible is not merely a collection of moral directives.

III. Scripture Exposes our Sinful Condition (Portraits of our Brokenness)

A. Crucial Question #1:

B. Examples: *What's the problem?*

1. Amos 7:10-17

2. Matthew 10:26-28

3. 1 Thessalonians 4:13

C. Understanding the Human Heart – Sin as Idolatry

1. Idolatry is an affair of the _____.

Ezekiel 14:1-8 (ESV)

¹Then certain of the elders of Israel came to me and sat before me. ²And the word of the Lord came to me: ³“Son of man, these men have taken their idols into their hearts, and set the stumbling block of their iniquity before their faces. Should I indeed let myself be consulted by them? ⁴Therefore speak to them and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: Any one of the house of Israel who takes his idols into his heart and sets the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and yet comes to the prophet, I the Lord will answer him as he comes with the multitude of his idols, ⁵that I may lay hold of the hearts of the house of Israel, who are all estranged from me through their idols.

2. Idolatry as the root of sin

3. A Powerful Example

Jeremiah 2:12-13 (ESV)

¹²Be appalled, O heavens, at this; be shocked, be utterly desolate, declares the LORD, ¹³for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

IV. Scripture Points us to Christ (Portraits of our Savior)

A. Scripture has a redemptive purpose.

B. Crucial Question #2:

C. Scripture points us to Christ in a complex variety of ways.

1. The _____ anticipates Christ by exposing our hearts and persuading us of our need for a savior.
2. The _____ anticipate him by kindling longings that only Jesus can ultimately fulfill
3. The _____ compels us to look to him for meaning and for the ability to live wisely.
4. The _____ and _____ often speak with the voice of Christ, anticipating his own anguish and exaltation.
5. OT _____ look forward to a prophet greater than Moses, a priest greater than Aaron and a king greater than David. Just read the book of Hebrews.

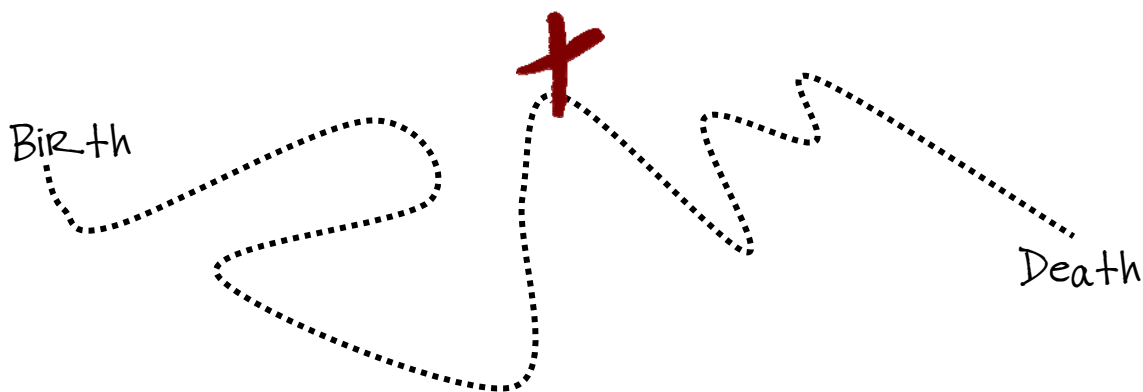
D. Examples: *Where's the grace?*

1. Amos 7:10-17
2. Matthew 10:26-28
3. 1 Thessalonians 4:13

E. Word on the Holy Spirit

V. Conclusion: Applying the Gospel to our Lives

"The gospel is not just the 'A-B-C' but the 'A-Z' of the Christian life. The gospel is not just the way to enter the kingdom, but it is the way to address every problem and is the way to grow at every step...It tells us that we are more wicked than we ever dared believe, but more loved and accepted than you ever dared hope—at the same time. In fact, if the gospel is true, the more you see your sin, the more certain you are that you were saved by sheer grace and more precious and electrifying that grace is to you..." Tim Keller, *Fellowship Group Handbook*, Redeemer Presbyterian Church (www.redeemer.com)



your greatest need =
God's grace

your greatest need =

VI. For Further Study

Gospel Transformation, Second Edition published by World Harvest Mission (www.whm.org)

Helping Others Hear the Music of the Gospel

I. What Keeps People from Hearing the Music?

II. Small Group Objectives: Helping People Hear the Music

A. We want to expose the _____ in our participants' lives.

Definition:

B. We want to point our participants to _____ and the _____.

4 ways believers and unbelievers both experience the gospel:

C. Through the Scriptures, we want to lead people into a deeper experience of the _____ and _____ of the gospel.

III. Understanding Your Role

A. Three images

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

C. One of the most important skills you can develop is learning to ask good questions.

1. Small Group Bible Lesson Template

Small Group Lesson Template

Determine the learning objectives	Launch	Explore	Apply
What do I want them to understand and believe? What is the fallen condition(s) I want them to identify with? What is the redemptive solution (i.e., the "good news" in the passage) I want them to embrace? How do I want them to respond to Christ?	Connect the study to where they live ELEMENTS Your Bible Study will be most effective when it is aligned with God's redemptive purposes. God intends "to restore aspects of our brokenness to spiritual wholeness," so that we might live for God and enjoy His glory (Bryan Chapell). Ask a question that will cultivate interest in your study by raising a problem or issue that your passage addresses. (At this stage, your link to the "fallen condition" your passage addresses may only be implicit.)	Lead them to investigate the Word ELEMENTS Survey the Big Picture Give them a brief overview of the context they need in order to understand your passage. Explore the passage Ask exploratory questions to help them discover what God has communicated in your passage. You can group your questions following the divisions of your textual outline (e.g., Eph 4:1-6, 7-16). You will use the following types of questions: "What does it say?" (observation) "What does it mean?" (interpretation) Discover the Big Idea Ask a question to help them catch the big idea of the passage.	Lead them to a heart-level response to Christ ELEMENTS Expose the Fallen Condition Ask a couple of questions that help them identify with the "fallen condition" this passage exposes. The "fallen condition" is some aspect of our brokenness or rebellion that requires the redemptive work of Christ. Help them consider the "sin beneath the sin." Point them to Christ Ask a couple of questions that point them to Christ and the gospel. What's the "good news" for them in this passage? What aspect of Christ's redemptive work do they need to embrace in order to live for God and enjoy His glory? Consider Life Application Ask a couple of questions that help them envision what it would look like practically to live out this passage (both personally and corporately).

DISCOVERY






Turning Lost Students into Christ-Centered Laborers

TO THE PRAISE OF HIS GLORY • Our Spiritual Blessings in Christ

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

Exposition 1.1-4

When someone dies his or her heir inherits all that belonged to them. When we place our faith in Christ, who died for our sin, we inherit all of the blessings that were the privileged possession of the Son. We are adopted as God's sons and daughters and made heirs. This passage reminds us of the great riches that are now ours because we belong to Christ.

Exposition 1.3

Paul begins this letter by giving praise to God for what He has done in saving us, and bestowing upon us "every spiritual blessing in Christ." Verse 3 functions as a sort of topic sentence for this passage as well as for the whole book.

What's the Big Idea?

The moment we trusted Christ we inherited a great deal of spiritual riches and blessings, all of which were purchased for us by Christ. This study surveys the great riches we now have because we are in Christ and the glory that is His due.

[illegible]

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ESCHATOLOGY



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Sample Small Group Lesson “Discovering a Treasure of Infinite Worth” Philippians 3:1-11

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- **Big idea:** I want them to understand that *there is no greater treasure than Christ*.
- **Problem:** I want them to see their default “prizing” is often in what will rot, disappoint, or be taken away; *we naturally treasure anything but Christ*.
- **Solution:** I want them to see *Christ as their all-sufficient treasure* in which they delight.
- **Response:** I want them to *identify* what they are tempted to prize more than Christ, *turn* from these idols and *embrace* Christ in a deeper way.

LAUNCH

- Imagine for one week if someone who knew little or nothing about Christianity was to follow us around and watch the ways we express our Christian faith. If, after a week, we were to ask this person, “What do you think the Christian life is all about?,” what might he (she) say? If his sentence began, “The Christian life is about _____,” how might he fill in the blank?

Tonight we are going to look at a passage in which the Apostle Paul reminds us what the Christian life is all about.

EXPLORE

Survey the Big Picture: Philippians is one of Paul’s most personal letters. He wrote this letter while imprisoned in Rome. The Christians in Philippi (whom he had not seen for many years) sent him a financial gift during his imprisonment (cf. 4:10-20). Paul wrote this letter back to express his appreciation and encourage them in their Christian faith. In 3:1-11 Paul describes how he found in Jesus Christ a treasure of infinite worth that made his past accomplishments seem like rubbish.

Explore the Passage [You might read the whole passage aloud before you investigate the individual sections]

Read 3:1-3

- How would you describe Paul’s tone in these verses (especially in light of v.2)? What concerns led Paul to use such strong language?
- In v. 2 Paul refers to certain Jews as “dogs.” It appears that these individuals wanted to put Christians back under the Law of Moses. What made these “dogs” so dangerous? [Be sure to encourage your participants to look at the end of v. 3 and the end of v.4 The “dogs” to whom Paul refers appear to be “Judaizers” (similar to the problem in Galatians) who were attempting to put believers back under the law. “Circumcision” was the defining mark for them of embracing the law. To learn more about the historical background of this problem, you may want to consult a commentary. In vv.3-4 it is clear that their central problem as “putting confidence in the flesh.”]
- The other group to which Paul refers is the “true circumcision”? How does he describe them? [Make them see the positive characteristics—“worshipping by the Spirit of God and glorying in Christ”—as well as the negative characteristic—“not putting confidence in the flesh.” These two

characteristics frame the rest of the passage. In vv. 4-6, Paul describes what it looks like to place confidence in the flesh. In vv. 7-11 he describes what it means for them to glory in Christ.]

Read 3:4-6

- What does Paul mean when he speaks of “putting confidence in the flesh”? How does “putting confidence in the flesh” relate to the “dogs” to whom Paul refers earlier? How can this problem be seen in Paul’s own life prior to Christ?
- Why is “placing confidence in the flesh” so problematic?

Read 3:7-11

- Why did Paul regard his previous religious accomplishments as “dung”? [*Make sure they see the strong language Paul uses.*]
- What did Paul discover in Christ that was infinitely more valuable than anything he previously possessed? [*This represents one of the keys to understanding this passage. You might want to spend some extra time on this question.*]
- In v.3 Paul claims that one of the distinguishing marks of a Christian “glorying in Christ Jesus.” In light of vv.7-11, what does it look like to “glory in Christ”?
- How would you summarize Paul’s understanding of the “gospel” in light of vv. 7-11?

Discover the Big Idea:

- What did Paul want to make sure these believers understood about the Christian life by telling his story?

Summary statement: Paul wants them to see that Christ is infinitely more valuable than any treasure they could possess. Compared to what we have in Him, everything else in the whole world is “dung.”

APPLY

- Think back to the opening question. If someone were to follow you around for a week, what might they conclude the Christian life was about from watching you? How does this passage challenge you to reorient your life? How are you tempted to center your life on something other than Christ? (FCF)
- Paul discovered that all the things he deeply treasured were rubbish compared to knowing Christ. What are you tempted to treasure more than Christ? (FCF)
- Is Christ most often an “end”—the object of your enthrallment and interest—or is Christ a “means”—someone who is pursued to get you something else? Why is this the case? (RS/FCF)
- What is it that is uniquely beautiful about Christ and his redemptive work for you which, if you fully embraced it, would lead you to treasure Christ in the way Paul describes? (RS/LA)

Theological Development and Ministry

I. Personal Evaluation

- A. What are the most helpful things you have learned during the last two weeks?

- B. How do you hope to approach the Bible differently as a result of this class?

- C. What are the next actions points to apply this class to your life and ministry?

- D. What are the potential obstacles to implementation? How will you overcome these obstacles?

II. Input from the Coaches

Theological Development Requirements

Cru - New Staff Training

Have you ever finished leading a small group Bible study and thought, “*I wish I knew the Scriptures better?*” Have you ever found yourself in an evangelistic conversation in which you thought, “*I wish I knew how to respond more effectively to this person’s questions?*” Have you ever been in a conversation with someone who is deeply struggling and thought, “*I wish I was better able to relate the truths of Scripture to my friend’s problems?*” I think we are all aware of our need to grow deeper. The nature of the mission to which we have been called requires kingdom-workers with a passion for God who are growing ever deeper in their ability to understand and apply His Word to their own lives and the lives of those to whom they minister.

As a foundation for a lifetime of ministry, we have developed a core curriculum of eleven biblical and theological courses. By the time you finish MPD, you will have completed first three courses (*Bible Study Methods*, *Doctrine Survey* and *New Testament Survey*). Beyond these three courses, there are eight additional courses you are required to complete (see below). These courses are offered *every summer* in at least one location. Normally it requires two summers to finish these courses.

Campus Ministry staff are required to spend *at least one summer during their first five years* completing their “second year” courses (*Biblical Interpretation*, *Biblical Communication*, *God/Bible/HS* and *OT Survey*). The final four courses (*Apologetics*, *Humanity/Christ/Salvation*, *Church History* and *Christian World View*) must be completed within the first eight years on staff. (Other ministries may establish different time-lines for the completion of these courses).

IBS Info: www.ibs.cru.org

Required Courses after New Staff Training

Course	Description
Biblical Interpretation**	Poetry. Letters. Stories. Laws. Prophecy. Faithfully interpreting God's Word requires understanding the various literary forms through which God has revealed himself, applying sound hermeneutical principles, and connecting every passage to God's redemptive message throughout the Scriptures. Building on the foundation of Bible Study Methods, this course will introduce you to an interpretive process that will enable you to understand God's Word and encounter the living God more profoundly. You will have the opportunity to learn this process working in small groups with the aid of a mentor who will guide you to handle the treasures of God's Word faithfully and meaningfully.
Biblical Communication**	Communicating biblical truth requires a profound understanding of God's Word and an ability to relate God's Word to your audience so they may be transformed by the Author. Building upon the Biblical Interpretation class, experienced communicators will help you become a worshipping communicator and develop audience-sensitive skills that guarantee your message finds relevant, true-to-life application. Through lecture and workshops this course will equip you lead the emerging generations to conviction and repentance of their sin and to growing belief and adoration of Christ.
Bible/God/Holy Spirit	This class introduces the doctrine of the Bible (Can we trust it? How do we view it? How does it function in our lives?), the doctrine of God (Who is God? How do we relate to him? How does he relate to us?), and the doctrine of the Holy Spirit (Who is the Spirit? What does he do? How does he relate to us?). Students will learn more about God but also find their hearts moved to worship this God.
Old Testament Survey	This course will explore the message of Old Testament books and how their messages work together to form a revelation that points to Christ. At the end of this course, you will have a number of tools to help you apply the Old Testament to Christian living today.
Apologetics	This course will equip you to respond to the basic objections to Christianity that are encountered in evangelism. Topics include postmodernism, the existence of God, religious pluralism, the fate of the unevangelized, the problem of evil, historical reliability of the Bible, the New Age movement, and the resurrection.
Humanity/Christ/ Salvation	This class covers the crucial topics of what it means to be human (What does it mean to be created in the image of God? Why is this important? What are the personal and ethical ramifications?), the person of Christ (Who is this beautiful Christ?) and what Christ has done (How does Christ save us? What does he save us from?).
Church History	This class traces the history of the Church from Pentecost to the present, emphasizes what God has done throughout the history of the Church, and explains the emergence of major theological positions and branches of Christianity.
Christian World View	This class introduces the construction and importance of a Christian world view, critiques major philosophical constructions of alternative world views; e.g., postmodernism, pantheism, naturalism, existentialism, secular humanism, Marxism, and helps students refine their own world views.

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Christ-Centered Bible Study: Hearing the Music of the Gospel

Keith E. Johnson

The Music and the Dance

Imagine yourself in a large house in which those who are deaf and those who can hear are living together.⁵ In one of the rooms, you see a man sitting in a chair listening to music on his iPod. Rhythmically, he is tapping his foot, snapping his fingers and swaying to the beat of the song. His entire body moves in response to what his ears are hearing. It is obvious that he is enjoying himself.

A few minutes later, one of the deaf persons opens the door and enters the room. He carefully watches the person listening to the music and thinks to himself, “He seems to be having fun, I think I’ll try that too.” So, he sits down next to the man with the iPod and begins to imitate him. Awkwardly and haltingly at first, he tries to snap his fingers, tap his toes and move like the man next to him. After a little practice, he slowly begins to sway in time with the first man by watching and trying—mirroring his actions. Although he eventually gets better at keeping time, he concludes that it is not as much fun or as easy as it initially seemed. Indeed, it takes an enormous amount of effort to mimic the dance.

Imagine that a third person enters the room and watches this scene. What does he see? Two people apparently doing the same thing. Is there a difference? Absolutely! The first man hears the music and his actions are but a natural response to the music’s rhythm and melody. The second man is merely imitating the outward actions.

An important parallel exists to our Christian life. The “dance” represents the Christian life while the “music” represents the gospel. Sadly, we are often like the person in my story who tries to perform the dance steps without hearing the music. God’s heart is not simply to get us to dance but to get us to hear the music of the gospel—dancing reflexively follows. What follows in this article is a brief reflection on how to tune into the music of the gospel, listening for its rhythm as you read the Scriptures.

Understanding the Redemptive Focus of Scripture

Often we look to the Bible seeing nothing more than a collection of ethical directives and moral imperatives instructing us in how to live. But to read Scripture this way is to reduce it to dance steps, the

⁵ This illustration was developed by Larry Kirk. I am indebted to Larry for helping me better understand and experience how the Scriptures point us to the music of the gospel.

do's and don'ts of the Christian life, and miss the melody entirely. To hear the music of the gospel, we need to understand how God intends his Word to function in our lives.

Toward this end, the writer of Hebrews gives us a push us in the right direction. In chapter four, he urges his readers not to be hard-hearted and miss the “rest” God has provided in Christ (Heb. 4:1-11). He closes with the following statement about God’s Word: “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account” (Heb. 4:12-13, ESV). Notice how he describes the role of Scripture in our lives—likening it to the sharpest sword imaginable, a sword that penetrates to the deepest recesses of our soul. As a result, we are “naked and exposed” before God. What the writer wants us to see is that Scripture, first, is designed to expose the sinful condition of our heart.

Several years ago I had a very stressful week prior to the start of major conference I was leading. A number of times, I found myself asking my wife’s forgiveness for being rude to her. However, in the back of my mind I really believed the problem was my circumstances: “If my life were not so stressful,” I told myself, “I would not be treating the people around me so poorly.” The following Sunday, our pastor spoke from Deuteronomy 8 about how God tests our hearts to reveal what is in them. It was as if God’s Spirit shined his spotlight in my heart saying, “Your problem is not these circumstances. These circumstances merely revealed what was in your heart.” This is precisely what Scripture is intended to do – to reveal our brokenness.

I realize that what I have said so far about the Scripture is not particularly upbeat and something you’d want to dance to. But that’s coming. The choreography of grace is indirect, by which I mean you cannot access it directly but must waltz first through brokenness and repentance. Those who seek to move directly to the upbeat and eliminate the downbeat, destroy the tune entirely.

Scripture, graciously, does not merely leave us naked, exposed in our sin. Notice how the writer of Hebrews continues: “Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:14-16, ESV). The writer of Hebrews does not point us toward a program of behavior modification but to a *person*: the remedy to our brokenness not in corrective dance steps but in the person Christ.

Most scholars believe that the readers of Hebrews were Jewish Christians. A number of them had experienced persecution for following Christ and some were tempted to walk away from Christ. In this context, the writer of Hebrews paints a portrait of one who fundamentally understands because, in his human nature, he has experienced the exact same temptations as they have. Through this (and other portraits of Christ), the writer of Hebrews is attempting to woo the hearts of his readers to the love and beauty of Christ.

This highlights a second role of Scripture—namely, pointing our hearts to our Savior. We tend to limit this dimension of Scripture merely to those who are outside the Christian faith (i.e., the primary role of Scripture for the unbeliever is pointing his or her heart toward Christ). We often fail to

recognize that *our* hearts constantly need to be pointed to Christ as well. As believers, we are still tempted to make our lives work apart from Christ and often seek life apart from him in control, influence, approval, performance, or any number of alternatives. We, therefore, constantly need to be pointed back to the one in whom alone life can be found. From Genesis to Revelation, Scripture does two things: (1) it exposes our brokenness and (2) points us to our savior. We will look at each of these in more detail.

Portraits of Our Brokenness

The primary question on most of our minds as we read and apply Scripture is “What does this passage teach about what I am supposed to *do*?” If we read the Bible merely looking for dance steps (“What does this passage tell me to do?”), we will fail to hear the music of the gospel. To hear the music of the gospel, we must first ask a different question: “What does this passage reveal about our spiritual brokenness that requires the redemptive work of Christ?”

Let’s look at a couple of examples. Imagine you are reading through the Gospel of Mark. In chapter ten, you read about an incident that took place as Jesus and his disciples were making their final journey to Jerusalem where he would be crucified. Immediately after Jesus tells his disciples that he will be spit upon, flogged and murdered in Jerusalem (Mark 10:32-33), James and John approach Jesus with a special request: “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory” (Mark 10:37). James and John were requesting special places of honor in his kingdom. They saw their association with Jesus as a means to future status, power and influence. As a result, they were blind to Jesus’ true purpose.

At this point, you may be thinking, “How can they have been so blind?” But if we each ask the question, “What does this passage reveal about my spiritual brokenness that requires the redemptive work of Christ?” we may very well see *ourselves* in the actions of Jesus’ disciples. Are we not also like James and John? On staff with Cru we may not make a lot of money; however, we certainly can look for life in power and influence and even use ministry (Jesus) as a means to that end.

Next, imagine you were reading through the book of Jeremiah. In the second chapter, you came across these words: “Be appalled, O heavens, at this; be shocked, be utterly desolate, declares the Lord, for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water” (Jeremiah 2:12-13, ESV). The people of Israel were dependent on rainfall for their survival. They frequently collected rain water underground in cisterns hewn of rock. For people who lived in a drought-filled land, this imagery would be startling. The prophet claims that God’s people exchanged a rich flowing, fresh fountain for leaky buckets that cannot even hold life-giving water. As we reflect on this passage, we want to ask ourselves the question, “What does this passage reveal about our spiritual brokenness that requires the redemptive work of Christ?” As we reflect on this question, we immediately recognize that this passage aptly describe our lives as well. When we look for life apart from Christ in relationships, success, control, influence, sexual fantasy, etc., we trade a fresh flowing spring for leaky buckets that cannot hold any water.⁶

⁶ To use a biblical term, we are “idolaters.” Idolatry is one of the major themes in Old Testament. What is the first commandment? “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exod. 20:3). Idolatry is not merely about

Portraits of a Beautiful Savior

Because Scripture has a redemptive purpose, it does not merely leave us exposed in our sin. It also points us to the music of the gospel (i.e., all that God is for us in Christ). Hence, there is a second question we need to ask as we seek to respond to God through his Word. After we have asked, “What does this reveal about my brokenness that requires the work of Christ?” we next must ask, “How does this passage point me to Christ and the ‘good news’ of the gospel?”

In a debate with Jewish leaders over his authority and identity, Jesus offers the following indictment: “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life” (John 5:39-40, ESV). Jesus was not talking with theological “liberals.” He was talking with the people who revered the Scriptures. Even though they carefully studied the Scriptures, Jesus claims that they completely missed the *meaning* of the Scriptures. They were looking for *life* in the wrong place. What was it that they missed? They had missed the redemptive purpose of Scripture: that they were designed to point us to Christ.⁷ They had come to believe that Scripture’s role in redemption was in detailing for us the commands and demands that God required while missing that Scripture’s role in redemption was in pointing us to the Christ.

Again, note the difference in the following examples, when we come to the text not simply looking for dance steps but asking “How does this passage point me to Christ and the ‘good news’ of the gospel?” Two short examples may help make this question (“How does this passage point me to Christ and the ‘good news’ of the gospel?”) more concrete.

Matthew 4 records the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. If we read this passage simply asking “What does this passage exhort me to do?” we will not hear the music of gospel. The temptation of Jesus in the wilderness will be reduced to a lesson about how to avoid temptation. While this story may have implications for how we handle temptation, it is crucial that we consider how this story points us to Christ. Matthew is drawing a parallel between the experience of the people of Israel and Jesus. Both were led into the wilderness. Both were tested. What happened when Israel was led into the wilderness? Israel failed. What happened when Jesus was led into the wilderness? He remained faithful. We must remember that the Gospels proclaim “good news.” In what sense does this passage offer “good news”? Like Israel, we too have been tempted and fail. If we were honest, we fail more often than we care to admit. We need someone who can live a perfect life in our place, on our behalf. And the great news of the Gospel is Jesus has done just that. Jesus, therefore, is not primarily our example in this passage. He is our hero. In a sermon on this passage, Jason Gibson sums this up well:

creating a wooden statue to which we bow down in worship (cf. Ezekiel 14:1-8). Idolatry takes place anytime the functional trust of our heart shifts to someone or something other than Christ.

⁷ In his book *Ancient Love Song*, Charles Drew rightly notes that Scripture points us to Christ in a complex variety of ways. The Law anticipates Christ by exposing our hearts and persuading us of our need for a savior. The promises anticipate him by kindling a longing at numerous levels that only Jesus can ultimately fulfill. Wisdom Literature compels us to look to Christ for meaning and for the ability to live wisely. The psalmists and prophets often speak with the voice of Christ, anticipating his own anguish and exaltation. Old Testament characters look forward to a prophet greater than Moses, a priest greater than Aaron and a king greater than David. Thus, the way Scripture points us to Christ in Genesis differs significantly from the way Scripture points us to Christ in the Gospel of John. See Charles D. Drew, *The Ancient Love Song: Finding Christ in the Old Testament* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Publishing, 2000).

If Jesus had failed in the desert we could not have been put right with God, for there would have been no perfect sacrifice to take away sin forever, and no perfect life to be credited to our account. In the Gospel God treats Jesus as if He had failed and treats us as if we had never failed. In the Gospel Jesus is punished as if He had disobeyed God, and we are declared to be perfect as if we had never disobeyed God! Matthew's Gospel is about just that - the Gospel! Which is about Jesus, God's final obedient Son. The wait for an obedient son is over. He has arrived. Jesus is the new and better Adam, the true Israel who has defeated the devil and won back for rebels the paradise lost. And this is the Gospel that is available to all of us who admit our weakness and inability to overcome Satan, and trust in what Jesus has done for us on our behalf.⁸

By asking how this passage points us to Christ, we begin to hear music we might easily have missed.

Consider again the following passage in Hebrews 4: "Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:14-16, ESV).

We live in a world marked by suffering and difficulty. Parents married twenty years file for a divorce. A friend's life is tragically ended by an auto accident. A parent contracts a debilitating illness. As believers we sometimes find ourselves despairing in response to these circumstances. It's easy to feel like no one understands. Notice how the writer of Hebrews points our hearts to one who truly does understand, calling us to reflect upon Jesus' final hours: He was betrayed by a friend, abandoned by his disciples, endured unimaginable physical and emotional abuse, and experienced an excruciating death. He understands abandonment, loneliness, rejection, shame and deep sadness because he experienced these things himself. He can identify with the entire gamut of our painful experiences. Not only can we find understanding in Christ, but when we draw near to him we also find "mercy and grace to help in time of need." Thus, as we ask the question, "How does this passage point me to Christ and the 'good news' of the gospel?" we see that the "good news" is that we have a savior who understands suffering and pain because he has experienced them himself.

Hearing the Music: An Example from Ephesians

What we've been saying, and hopefully you've been hearing, is that in order to hear the music of the gospel, we need to consider how a passage exposes our brokenness and how it points to Christ. Having considered both these elements separately, let's put them together by looking at one final example from Ephesians in more detail in order to envision what a gospel-centered / Christ-centered approach might look like.

Imagine that you are studying Ephesians 4:25-5:2.

²⁵ Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. ²⁶ Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and give no opportunity to the devil. ²⁸ Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. ²⁹ Let

⁸ Jason Gibson, "Finally . . . An Obedient Son."

www.beginningwithmoses.org/briefings/matthew4v1to11.htm, accessed December 21, 2007.

no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³² Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. ¹ Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ² And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

You might begin by reflecting on the context of this passage. This passage comes in the second half of Paul's letter. He has just finished describing God's provision for growth in and through the church: God has given them spiritual gifts in order to build up the church for the glory of Christ. In 4:1, Paul exhorts them to live in a manner worthy of their calling. In 4:17 we find this same exhortation stated negatively: "do not live as the Gentiles live." In 4:25-5:2, Paul begins to describe how their lives will look different as they live out their new identity.

Next, you might make observations about the passage. You might note that it is full of commands. In addition, there are numerous contrasts (falsehood vs. truth, stealing vs. sharing, corrupt talk vs. words of encouragement, etc.). These contrasts seem to play a central role in the passage. Along the way, you might explore the meaning of key terms in this passage using a Bible dictionary. You might also consult a commentary.

But the real difference comes as we think about how to "apply" this passage to our lives. If we read the Bible as a collection of ethical directives, we may simply read this passage looking for dance steps. This passage certainly does contain a lot of dance steps—both steps to avoid (lying, anger, stealing, etc.) and steps to follow (speaking truth, sharing, building up through our speech). In a small group Bible study, we might discuss in detail what these steps look like. For example, we might identify examples of corrupt speech in our lives and talk about what it would look like to build others up. We might conclude by reminding our participants that we must imitate Christ and pray for each other. The problem with this approach is that it bypasses the music that motivates the dance.

A "Christ-centered" approach to applying this passage differs not because it ignores the *dance steps*, but rather because it searches for the *music*. At this point we want to ask the first question I introduced earlier in this article: "What does this passage reveal about our spiritual brokenness that requires the redemptive work of Christ?"

On one level, the answer may seem quite obvious. We can find a whole list of sinful behaviors in this passage; however, to see how this describes our brokenness, we must dig deeper. We may find it helpful to ask, "What do all the sinful behaviors listed in 4:25-5:2 have in common?" As we look at them together, it becomes clear that Paul is speaking about various patterns of self-centeredness that destroy relationships. Moreover, it is clear that Paul is not merely interested in restraining outward expressions of sinful behavior but he is looking for inward transformation that expresses itself in forgiveness. Our self-centeredness stands all the more brightly in contrast to Christ's self-sacrifice (5:2). We need to see that our problem is deeper than the need for moral reformation. We need a savior.

In this passage we not only encounter portraits of our brokenness but also portraits of God's redemptive work. The "music" in this passage is found in Eph. 4:32-5:2. Paul reminds us of the

forgiveness we have experienced in Christ at the cost of his life. He is not merely giving us an example to follow but he is also pointing us to the music that motivates the dance. We are to forgive “as Christ forgive us” (4:32) We are to love “as God loved us” (5:1-2). But how do we do this? The answer? By richly experiencing God’s love and forgiveness.

Imagine, for example, you only have one hundred dollars to your name and someone steals it. This would feel like a knife in the heart. Imagine, in contrast, if you had a billion dollars in the bank and someone were to take one hundred dollars from you. This would be more like a prick in the finger. The same crime is experienced in two different ways.

Now imagine two people. They are both Christians and they are both in situations where they are being criticized. One of them is able to listen and sort through the criticism, admitting to what is true and patiently responding to what they feel to be unfair. By their response you can tell that the criticism they are receiving is like a prick in the finger. Why? Because that Christian, believing in the truth of God, knows and experiences the “richness” he possesses in the Father’s love because of his faith in Jesus Christ.

The other Christian, however, faces the same kind criticism and yet they are consumed with anger. They hate criticism and so they shift the blame or spiral into self-loathing. They are full of the rage and anger that Ephesians 4 tells us to get rid of. It is clear that what they are experiencing is not a prick in the finger but rather a knife in the heart. Why? Because they are not believing the truth about how incredibly rich they are in the love of God through Jesus Christ.

The “Christ-centered” point of Ephesians 4 is clear: if you know how richly you are loved by Christ then your criticism is just a prick in the finger and not a stab in the heart. It's like someone stealing a hundred dollars when you possess billion.

Paul ends the first half of Ephesians with a prayer in which he pray that, in the deepest recesses of our being, we would have power from the Holy Spirit to know how wide, how high, how deep, and how long is the love of God in Christ and be filled with the fullness of God (Eph. 3:14-21). In essence, Paul is praying that God’s Spirit would enable us to hear the music of the gospel. It is only as we hear *this music* that we can forgive as we have been forgiven (Eph 4:32) and love as God loves us (Eph. 5:1-2).

Conclusion

Our hearts were made to respond to the music—the music of the gospel. As we allow Scripture to expose our brokenness and point us to our savior, we will richly experience the gospel. As Tim Keller, Pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church, explains, “[The gospel] tells us that we are more wicked than we ever dared believe, but more loved and accepted than you ever dared hope—at the same time. In fact, if the gospel is true, the more you see your sin, the more certain you are that you were saved by sheer grace and more precious and electrifying that grace is to you”

Bridging the Gap between the World of Scripture and our World

God's Word speaks to two worlds—the world of its original readers (e.g., Christians living in first-century Philippi) as well as our own world. The following discussion aims at describing *how* Scripture speaks to our world.

(1) Understanding the Gap (Identifying Discontinuities)

It is important to recognize that significant gaps exist between *our* world and the world of the original recipients. These gaps are cultural, personal and redemptive-historical.

The **culture** of first-century Palestine differs significantly from twenty-first century North American culture. Scripture was not written in English but in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. Moreover, the customs of first-century Palestine are quite different from our own. For example, American marriage customs differ significantly from first-century Palestine. In addition to cultural differences, **personal** gaps also exist between us and the original recipients. Paul did not write Philippians to *me* but a specific group of Christians living in that ancient city. We also encounter **redemptive-historical** gaps as we read Scripture because there are important *developments* in God's story. Christians, for example, no longer follow the ceremonial law by offering animal sacrifices for sin because Christ's death did away with the need for such sacrifices (cf. Hebrews 8-10).

As we read Scripture, it is particularly important that we understand the chapter of God's story in which a particular passage or narrative is set. These cultural, personal and redemptive historical differences constitute gaps between the world of the Scripture and our world. We will use the term "discontinuities" to describe these gaps.

(2) Bridging the Gap (Identifying Continuities)

Although important cultural, personal and redemptive gaps (discontinuities) exist between the world of the original recipients of Scripture and our world, we share at least three things in common with these men and women. First, we worship the **same God** they did (Father, Son and Holy Spirit). God's character does not change (Mal. 3:6). The Psalmist, writing several millennia before us, celebrates God as a compassionate Father who cares tenderly for his children (Psalm 103:13) and this is the same God we worship.

Second, we share a **common human nature** (both fallen and redeemed) with the original recipients of Scripture. We are subject to the same failures, the same joys, the same sufferings and the same weaknesses. When James warns his original readers against a spirit of boasting that arises from the arrogant assumption that humans control their destiny (James 2:13-17), we can see our own pride. When Jeremiah chastises his people for abandoning God, "the fountain of living waters," in order to dig out "broken cisterns that can hold no waters" (Jeremiah 2:13), we can see how we too are idolaters who look for life apart from God in money, power, etc. When Paul enumerates the fruit

which the Spirit will produce in the lives of Christians in Galatia (Galatians 5:22-23), this is the very same fruit we see in our own lives as we walk with Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Finally, we are participants in the **same redemptive story**. Scripture tells one unfolding story of redemption. Although there are twists and turns in this story, God's ultimate purpose remains unchanged—to gather a community of redeemed people for his glory. When we recognize that Scripture tells one story, we will begin to see “redemptive” themes that run through the entire story. From Genesis to Revelation, Scripture exposes our fallen condition and points us to our need for a savior. (Of course the precise *way* that Scripture exposes our fallen condition and points us to a Savior in Genesis will differ from Galatians.) When we read Scripture as one story, we follow the example and teaching of Jesus: “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27).

(3) Discerning the Theological Big Idea (TBI)

After we have identified continuities and discontinuities, we are in a position to discern the **Theological Big Idea** of the passage. To arrive at the Theological Big Idea (TBI), we must restate the Author's Big Idea (ABI) in light of the continuous story of redemption through Jesus Christ. The TBI is a restatement of the ABI in a way that is (1) faithful to the passage, (2) God-centered (vs. man-centered or moralistic), (3) relates the big idea to the larger story of Scripture, (4) true for this present chapter in God's story and (5) for general application (this statement will not be bound to the time, people and events of the passage; it will have broader application and fuller theological development).

Example #1: Lev 5:14-6:7

- ABI: Moses commands the Israelites to offer animal sacrifices.
- TBI: God requires sacrifices for sin.

Example #2: Eph 2:1-10

- ABI: Paul proclaims that when they were dead in sin God made them alive with Christ by his grace so they are now God's workmanship created for good works.
- TBI: God brings dead sinners to life by his grace so that they become his workmanship created for good works

Example #3: Eph. 4:1-16

- ABI: Paul exhorts them to walk in a manner worthy of their calling by preserving the unity of the body and using their unique gifts to build up the body of Christ so that they will all move toward maturity in Christ.
- TBI: God enables believers to walk worthy of their calling and move toward maturity by providing gifted leaders to build up the body of Christ.

Example #4: 2 Timothy 2:1-13

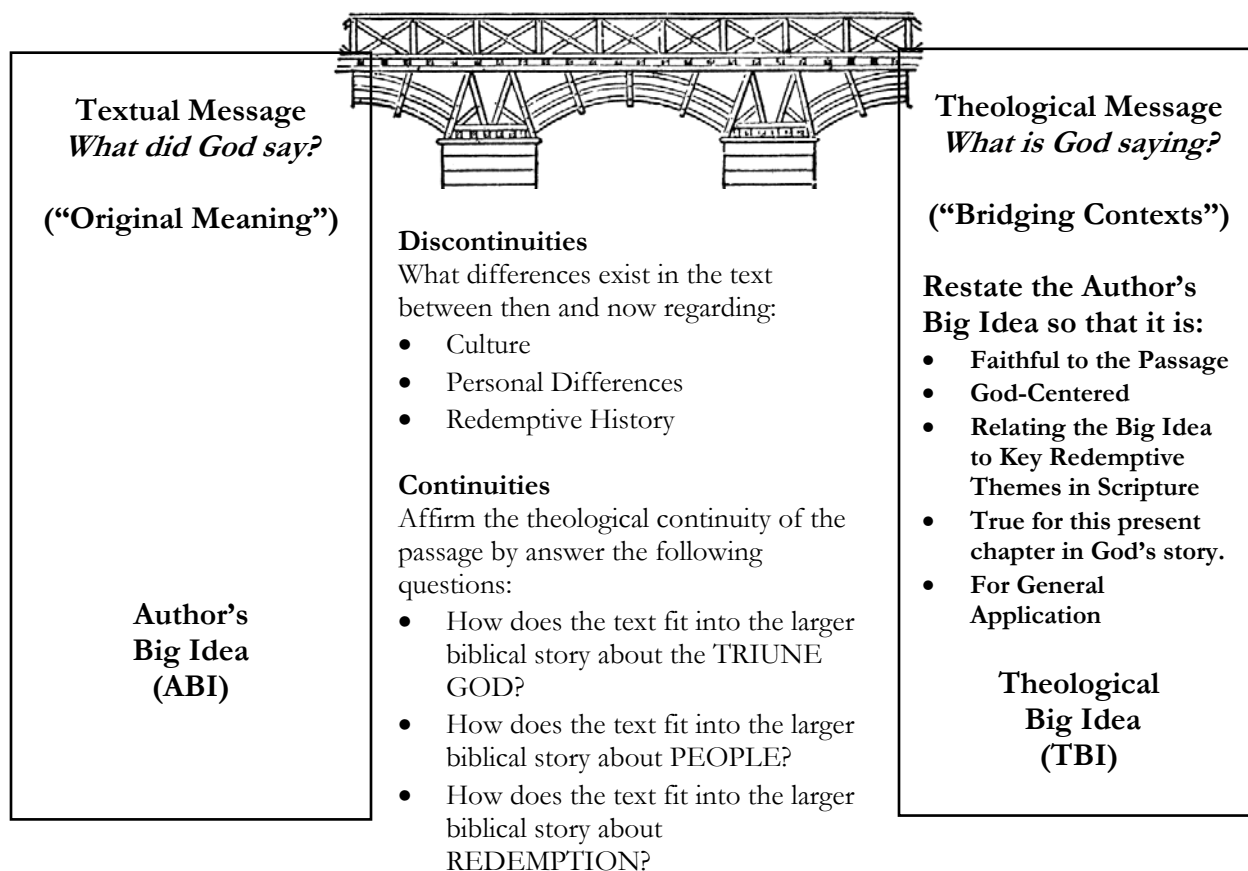
- ABI: Paul charges Timothy to join him in suffering for the gospel as he remembers the risen and rewarding Christ.
- TBI: The grace of the risen Christ enables believers to endure hardship for the gospel as they remember the risen and rewarding Christ.

Example #5: Mark 5

- ABI: Jesus sends out unclean spirits from a Gerasene man and heals a woman who hemorrhaged for twelve years on his way to raise a twelve year old girl from the dead to emphasize the need for faith rather than fear.
- TBI: Jesus, who has all authority over spiritual forces, physical bodies and even life itself, calls every man and woman to respond to him in faith, rather than fear.

Summary: Crossing the Theological Bridge

To apply Scripture properly, we must cross the “theological bridge” that spans the gap between the world of the text and our world. This process is summarized below.



Excerpt from the African Bible Commentary *Eph 2:11-22*

An African man from a rural village met an evangelist in the city and became a Christian. Going to church for the first time, he was amazed to see someone there from a tribe that his own people despised. He angrily demanded, 'What is this "dog" doing in the church? Don't you realize that this "pig" has polluted the church? If you knew where he comes from, you would never have admitted him!' His attitude to a fellow believer was similar to that of Jews towards Gentiles, and vice versa. That is why Paul finds it necessary to speak of the position of both Jews and Gentiles in the church and to remind them that although they had once been separated by religion, culture and race, Jesus Christ has now united them in a new community.

Most of the believers in Ephesus were Gentiles and not Jews. Paul reminds them that the Jews had dismissed them as the *uncircumcised* and had proudly called themselves *the circumcision (2:11a)*. Circumcision was the rite that God had instructed Abraham to perform on every male descendent to secure that child's place in the nation God had chosen. The Jewish pride in being God's chosen nation led them to be contemptuous of others, so that the adjective *uncircumcised* was an insult and not merely a reference to a physical state.

Paul knew the dangers posed by such pride and intolerance, so he reminds the Jews that circumcision is a human operation performed by other humans in contrast with the work that God himself does in believers (2:11b). At the same time, he reminds the Gentile believers that before they became believers, they were a) *separate from Christ*, that is, they knew nothing about the promise of the Messiah; b) *excluded from citizenship in Israel*, that is, they had no part in the nation of Israel or in the coming kingdom of God; c) *foreigners to the covenants of the promise*, that is, they had no legal standing in regard to the covenants that God had made with the Jews and his promises to the Jews; and consequently they were d) *without hope and without God (2:12)*. Paul emphasizes that the Gentiles had nothing to hope for in God as long as they were separated from Christ.

But whereas they had previously been 'separate' and 'foreigners', who were *far away* from God, now they have been brought *near (2:13)*. They had not gained this new position of privilege by birth or any human ritual, but through the grace of God, expressed in the blood of Christ. His blood had cleansed them of their transgressions and sins and had sealed a new covenant, far superior to the Jewish covenant because it was sealed by God himself, unlike the covenant that was sealed by circumcision done by men.

By bringing together the Jews and the Gentiles, Christ himself has reconciled them to each other, and at the same time has reconciled both of them to God (2:14). He has created a new harmony, just as Isaiah prophesied when he called the coming Messiah 'the Prince of Peace' (Isa 9:6).

The *dividing wall* that separated the Jews from the Gentiles was very real. It was a barrier that kept Gentiles from entering the inner parts of the temple in Jerusalem. This was what Jesus Christ destroyed on the cross. In him there is no barrier or dividing wall between the Jews and Gentiles. In fact, in him all human differences, hostility and barriers are resolved. Jesus Christ has a cure for the evils of racism, tribalism and divided humanity.

Just as Jesus Christ abolished the enmity between Jews and Gentiles, so he abolished the Jewish ceremonial law *with its commandments and regulations* that had also been a barrier between them (2:15a). The Mosaic law made strict demands that could not possibly be kept perfectly and emphasized the differences between Jews and Gentiles, but Jesus fulfilled it by establishing the new covenant by his death on the cross (see Heb 7-10).

In Christ, both Jews and Gentiles are one. He has made them into *one body* in himself (2:15b–16). They have become a new community, the church. What made this possible was the atoning work of Christ on the cross, which destroyed their enmity and brought reconciliation and peace.

Jesus Christ's gospel of peace and reconciliation was preached both to Gentiles *who were far away* and to Jews *who were near* (2:17). Both groups needed to hear the message. The Jews were privileged to have had Jesus preach to them directly, while the Gentiles had received his message through his apostles.

Once again, we have all three persons of the Trinity working together to reconcile Jews and Gentiles to each other and to God: the atoning work of Christ made reconciliation possible, and the Holy Spirit now gives us access to the Father (2:18).

Paul now returns to his starting point in 2:12, reminding the Gentiles that before they became believers they were *foreigners and aliens* and not full citizens of the kingdom of God. Now in Christ, they have not only full rights of citizenship but also the privilege of being *members of God's household* (2:19). They are now brothers and sisters with the older citizens and family members. They can have confidence in this household because it is built on a solid foundation of a) *the prophets* who foretold the coming of the Messiah, b) *the apostles* who proclaimed the gospel of Christ and founded churches, and c) *Christ*, who fulfilled the prophecies and promises of the prophets through his work of redemption and so became the *chief cornerstone* (2:20).

In ancient buildings, the 'cornerstone' was highly valued because it tied the whole building together. This is precisely what Jesus Christ does for his church, which Paul describes as a new temple (2:21). Jesus Christ is building his church so that it will become *a holy temple*, a dwelling place of God (2:22). In the OT, the temple represented the glory and presence of God; now it is the job of the church to do that. The church becomes God's symbol and testimony of salvation to the world. Individual believers, too, have this responsibility, for they are also referred to as the *temple of God*, because the Holy Spirit lives in them (1 Cor 6:19).⁹

Excursus: **WHAT IS THE CHURCH?**

In the African world view, unity is strength. The larger the unit, the better. This applies not only to the individual family (traditionally polygamous, so as to increase the number of people in the unit) but also to the clan and to the tribe. Each group traces its origins to a particular hero and is united around certain beliefs and practices. The same is true of the church.

The English word 'church' comes to us from the German *kirche* and the Scottish *kirk*, but the word has even older roots in the Aramaic word *kenishta* and the Greek word *kuriakon*, both of which mean 'belonging to the Lord'. The church is thus 'the tribe of Jesus'—called out of all tribes and nations but without renouncing those groups. However, it may at times call for practices and beliefs that override those of one's earthly tribe.

In the OT the term used for such a group was *qahal* ('a people called together by Yahweh') which was translated into Greek as *ekklesia* ('those called out') and used in the NT to refer to the church. The caller is God, the means of unity is faith in his son Jesus Christ, and the governing constitution is the Bible as read and obeyed under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The members are referred to as believers in Christ.

The church is both an organism and an organization. It is an organism in that it is united around the saving work of Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit no matter where each member is located. It is an organization in that it gathers around a common purpose and doctrine and acknowledges particular officers as leaders. The organism aspect is more important than the organizational one, but the organization is

⁹ Tokunboh Adeyemo, *Africa Bible Commentary* (Nairobi, Kenya; Grand Rapids, MI: WordAlive Publishers; Zondervan, 2006), 1456-57.

necessary if the church is to accomplish the Great Commission. The organism aspect was, however, the focus when Jesus said, 'I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not overcome it' (Matt 16:18).

Metaphors used to describe the nature of church include:

- *The body of Christ*. Jesus is the Head (the ultimate leader) who gives the church (as an organism) its life (Eph 1:22–23 and Col 1:18; 2:19).
- *A temple/building/house of God*. The focus of this metaphor is the unity of the church, for in the construction of a building each of the construction materials has a role to play. This metaphor also emphasizes the ownership of the church. It belongs to God, not to people. Jesus is both its foundation (1 Cor 3:9–17) and the chief cornerstone—the stone that controls the design of the whole building (Eph 2:20, 21). The prophets and apostles are also referred to as foundations in the sense that they were the church's first leaders and the people whom God used as the initial transmitters of its doctrine and practice (see 1 Tim 3:15; 1 Pet 2:4–8).
- *The bride of Christ* (Eph 5:31, 32; Rev 19:7; 21:9). Each individual believer is intimately related to Christ from the moment of justification until the marriage ceremony presented in Rev 19:5–9.
- *A flock* (John 10:16, 27). Through his servants (initially the apostles, but now pastors, priests, or any other title used to designate those dispensing his message), Jesus gathers the members together, gives them direction, and looks after the needs of each member.
- *A vine* (John 15). The focus of this metaphor is the believer's need to be 'connected' with Christ if there is to be any nourishment for growth.

Those who belong to the church have been placed on Earth for a mission. Jesus referred to this mission using the terms 'salt' and 'light' (Matt 5:13–16). Just as salt preserves food from rotting, so believers are called upon to stop the world's moral decay. Just as light helps us see our path, so also believers are called to point all people to the true light (John 1:9) who changes lives—creating love where there is hatred, reconciliation where there is hostility, and hope where there is desperation. This is what the church in Africa, and worldwide, is called to do.

Samuel Ngewa

Understanding Scripture's Fallen-Condition Focus

Byron Straughn, Jeff Lark, and Keith Johnson (SLK)

Why is it that sometimes we read the Bible and feel like it was just a bunch of words on a page and then we feel guilty or unspiritual?

Why is it that sometimes we come to our Creator and Redeemer in his word and feel like we've really encountered him and have been transformed?

The way we approach Scripture may have something to do with it.

God inspired His word to address the needs of fallen people living in a fallen world. This is what Bryan Chapell calls the fallen condition focus (FCF) of Scripture. Chapell defines a fallen condition as "the mutual human condition that contemporary believers share with those to or about whom the text was written that requires the grace of the passage for God's people to glorify and enjoy him." In other words, a fallen condition is an aspect of our brokenness and rebellion we share with the original audience that requires the redemptive work of Christ. Approaching this from a different direction, we might say that a fallen condition represents a particular way that Scripture describes our situation as both sinners and sufferers.

Sometimes the FCF of a passage is obvious. It might command us not to steal or to lust after what we don't have or, even closer to the problem, not to worship material possessions. But the FCF is not limited to our choices. It also addresses the fact that we live in a dark and broken world. We are not merely sinners. We also suffer. Our hearts are torn when a family member dies. Being part of this world means we are subject to disappointments, disease, tsunamis and tornados. Scripture addresses both who we are and the world in which we live.¹⁰

But we often overlook the FCF of Scripture and fail to notice the deeper issues addressed by God. We miss God's intent to lead his people to their Savior as he exposes their need for him. In small ways, we tend to forget that God gave us His word to redeem us. And the passage we're reading degenerates into a history lesson or a list of rules.

Imagine you're deathly ill and go to see your doctor. However, while at the appointment, you have a lengthy conversation only about whether you should ask for 'paper' or 'plastic' at the check-out line. Even though you leave more confident about your choice to protect the environment, you've still not dealt with your health condition. So it is with us when we fail to keep the FCF in mind. We miss what God is telling us about ourselves and our need for him.

Understanding the FCF not only helps us study scripture well, it also draws us closer to God. By coming face to face with fallenness, we begin to realize the glory of our redemption through Christ. God, through the gospel, not only calls us to repent but also to believe. He requires our hearts, not just our behavior. He fashioned our hearts for himself. Thus it is only in Jesus Christ that our desires are ultimately satisfied, our fears ultimately conquered, and our hopes ultimately met.

¹⁰ This means that the fallen condition in a passage is not necessary something for which we are guilty. Grief over the loss of a loved one is a fallen condition but it is not something for which we are guilty.

The FCF prepares and points us to the redemptive solution (RS)—that is, the grace of Christ which we need as fallen people. As Chapell explains, “The FCF exposes the necessity of a divine solution to the human dilemma and necessarily makes God the hero of the text as he displays his redemptive provision for his people. God rescues his people from their broken nature and world by his grace alone in order for them to experience his goodness and express his glory.” The FCF and the RS complement each other, reminding us that every page of Scripture God by his Spirit is revealing some aspect of our brokenness or rebellion and his grace.

How do we point ourselves and others to the RS? In other words, is the right answer always Jesus?

One of the ways to think about the RS is to think about applying the resources of the *gospel* to our brokenness. That’s right, we need the gospel. “Come on” you say, “that’s not any different than saying the answer is Jesus”. Maybe, but in order to understand what resources we have in the gospel, it would be good to think for a minute about how you first experienced the gospel when you came to know Christ initially.

You experienced the purifying forgiveness of Christ. Like the woman in Luke 7 who was “forgiven much”, you also had the bitterness of sin replaced by the first taste of the sweet forgiveness of Christ. When you first believed, you also experienced the purifying power of Christ. The Holy Spirit came and took up residence in your life and raised you to new life in Christ. Next, you experienced the purifying promises of Christ. You truly were banking on the fact that Christ died for you and that He was able to give you eternal life if you simply took Him at His word. And finally, you experienced the purifying beauty of Christ. It wasn’t that you were only drawn to truths about Jesus, eternal life, heaven and hell. But, you saw something in Jesus that caused you to be attracted to him – in a way that you never saw before.

Even though you have now progressed in the Christian life beyond the simple truths of the basic message of the gospel, your need to experience the gospel afresh is greater than ever. In other words, as you peer into the pages of Scripture and see your brokenness and need, the solution isn’t far removed from what you experienced when you recognized your need and the gospel solution for the very first time.

There will be times when the Scripture exposes your sinfulness and the solution is that in a fresh way you are drawn to the unconditional and life-changing **forgiveness of Christ**. There will be other times when you recognize that you need the **power of the Spirit** to overcome stubborn sin in your life. Other times you recognize that your doubt, discouragement, and even lust need to be battled by banking on the **promises of God** – that “He will never leave you nor forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5); that “he causes all things to work together for good for those that love God...” (Romans 8:28); and that “at his right hand are pleasures evermore” (Psalm 16:11). And finally, you may recognize that your heart just isn’t that inclined to Jesus and that the solution is to see the **beauty of Christ**. This is what Paul saw in 2 Corinthians 3:18 when he says, “and we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.”

Examples:

Sometimes the FCF is not real obvious and this is where the larger context of the passage or chapter really helps.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

¹³ But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. ¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁵ For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an

archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. ¹⁸Therefore encourage one another with these words.

- FCF: Our tendency to grieve as those without hope (v. 13).
- RS: The assurance that our Savior will return and that we will be joined to the ones we love. (Purifying Promise)

Philippians 3:2-11

²Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. ³For we are the real circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh— ⁴though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness, under the law blameless. ⁷But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— ¹⁰that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

- FCF: Our natural tendency to place confidence in fleshly achievements. Paul is quite concerned about this as v.2 demonstrates.
- RS: The righteousness that alone comes through faith in Christ (While this may be a little veiled, this solution is banking on the purifying promises of Christ in the gospel – that righteousness is ours in the gospel and that there is nothing we can do to earn or lose it).

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

⁴Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

- FCF: Habitual violations of love that rend the fabric of Christian community. (Paul's descriptions of what love is *not* serve to summarize what he has said elsewhere in the letter about what is wrong with their community.)
- RS: First, the solution may be to look to the purifying forgiveness of Christ – how we have come up short of this kind of love. Then, we can look to broader context. Look at what Paul says about the redemptive work of Christ elsewhere in the letter. As we do, we can see the purifying beauty of Christ in the gospel. We see in the broader context the kind of love Christ has for us – his church. Against this backdrop, love is not the result of self-effort. The agape love that Paul describes in C13 is the visible fruit of a life that has been (and is being!) redeemed by grace.

1 Corinthians 1:26-30

²⁶ For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, ²⁹ so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. ³⁰ He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption. ³¹ Therefore, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

- FCF: The Corinthians’ pride expressed in divisions and partisanship.
- RS: This solution may also start with the need to experience the purifying forgiveness of Christ – that, like the Corinthians, I tend to boast in my self-righteous pride. And then, the solution can turn to the purifying promises of Christ – that Jesus *is* our wisdom, He *is* our righteousness, and He *is* our sanctification and redemption. In other words, I can bank on these promises and as a result, I can cease from boasting in my wisdom, my self-righteousness, and my vain prideful attempts at sanctification and redemption.

1 Peter 4:13-16

¹³ But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. ¹⁵ But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. ¹⁶ Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.

- FCF: Christians are sufferings unjustly for their faith (not because of their poor choices or criminal actions).
- RS: As our last example, let’s look at how each of our gospel categories can each play a part in the solution in these verses:
 - First, do I need to be forgiven afresh for your grumblings in the face of suffering?
 - Next, can I turn to God to ask Him to fill me with His Spirit so that His “Spirit of glory” points me to a greater glory to come?
 - Next, what promises can I cling to: that there *will* be a greater glory to come. This isn’t all there is.
 - Finally, how can I see a beautiful Christ in this passage? He not only suffered, but He suffered for *me*. That kind of portrait can truly stir my affections for Him.

The Theology of the New Testament by Thomas Schreiner

Already but Not Yet¹¹

The message of the NT cannot be separated from that of the OT. The OT promised that God would save his people, beginning with the promise that the seed of the woman would triumph over the seed of the Serpent (Gen. 3:15). God's saving promises were developed especially in the covenants he made with his people: (1) the covenant with Abraham promised God's people land, seed, and universal blessing (Gen. 12:1–3); (2) the Mosaic covenant pledged blessing if Israel obeyed the Lord (Exodus 19–24); (3) the Davidic covenant promised a king in the Davidic line forever, and that through this king the promises originally made to Abraham would become a reality (2 Samuel 7; Psalm 89; 132); and (4) the new covenant promised that God would give his Spirit to his people and write his law on their hearts, so that they would obey his will (Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 36:26–27).

As John the Baptist and Jesus arrived on the scene, it was obvious that God's saving promises had not yet been realized. The Romans ruled over Israel, and a Davidic king did not reign in the land. The universal blessing promised to Abraham was scarcely a reality, for even in Israel it was sin, not righteousness, that reigned. John the Baptist therefore summoned the people of Israel to repent and to receive baptism for the forgiveness of their sins, so that they would be prepared for a coming One who would pour out the Spirit and judge the wicked.

Jesus of Nazareth represents the fulfillment of what John the Baptist prophesied. Jesus, like John, announced the imminent arrival of the kingdom of God (Mark 1:15), which is another way of saying that the saving promises found in the OT were about to be realized. The kingdom of God, however, came in a most unexpected way. The Jews had anticipated that when the kingdom arrived, the enemies of God would be immediately wiped out and a new creation would dawn (Isa. 65:17). Jesus taught, however, that the kingdom was present in his person and ministry (Luke 17:20–21)—and yet the foes of the kingdom were not instantly annihilated. The kingdom did not come with apocalyptic power but in a small and almost imperceptible form. It was as small as a mustard seed, and yet it would grow into a great tree that would tower over the entire earth. It was as undetectable as leaven mixed into flour, but the leaven would eventually transform the entire batch of dough (Matt. 13:31–33). In other words, the kingdom was *already* present in Jesus and his ministry, but it was *not yet* present in its entirety. It was “already—but not yet.” It was inaugurated but not consummated. Jesus fulfilled the role of the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah 53, taking upon himself the sins of his people and suffering death for the forgiveness of their sins. The day of judgment was still to come in the future, even though there would be an interval between God's beginning to fulfill his promises in Jesus (the kingdom inaugurated) and the final realization of his promises (the kingdom consummated). Jesus, who has been reigning since he rose from the dead, will return and sit on his glorious throne and judge between the sheep and the goats (Matt. 25:31–46). Hence, believers pray both for the progressive growth and for the final consummation of the kingdom in the words “your kingdom come” (Matt. 6:10).

¹¹ This article was adapted with permission from *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008) 1305–1308.

The Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) focus on the promise of the kingdom, and John expresses a similar truth with the phrase “eternal life.” Eternal life is the life of the age to come, which will be realized when the new creation dawns. Remarkable in John's Gospel is the claim that those who believe in the Son enjoy the life of the coming age *now*. Those who have put their faith in Jesus have *already* passed from death to life (John 5:24–25), for he is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25). Still, John also looks ahead to the day of the final resurrection, when every person will be judged for what he or she has done (John 5:28–29). While the focus in John is on the initial fulfillment of God's saving promises now, the future and final fulfillment is in view as well.

The already-not-yet theme dominates the entire NT and functions as a key to grasping the whole story (see chart). The resurrection of Jesus indicates that the age to come has arrived, that now is the day of salvation. In the same way the gift of the Holy Spirit represents one of God's end-time promises. NT writers joyously proclaim that the promise of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit has been fulfilled (e.g., Acts 2:16–21; Rom. 8:9–16; Eph. 1:13–14). The last days have come through Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:1–2), through whom we have received God's final and definitive word. Since the resurrection has penetrated history and the Spirit has been given, we might think that salvation history has been completed—but there is still the “not yet.” Jesus has been raised from the dead, but believers await the resurrection of their bodies and must battle against sin until the day of redemption (Rom. 8:10–13, 23; 1 Cor. 15:12–28; 1 Pet. 2:11). Jesus reigns on high at the right hand of God, but all things have not yet been subjected to him (Heb. 2:5–9).

The Already and Not Yet of the Last Days

The OT prophets, writing from the vantage point of their present age (the time of promise), spoke of “the last days” as being the time of fulfillment in the distant future (e.g., Jer. 23:20; 49:39; Ezek. 38:16; Hos. 3:5; Mic. 4:1).

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The Structure of the OT Expectation of the Last Days



The NT (the time of fulfillment), however, locates “the last days” in the present age. The “last days” *already* began with the death and resurrection of Jesus and the outpouring of the Spirit, but they are *not yet* fully realized, which will happen only after Christ returns.

The NT Restructuring of the OT Expectation of the Last Days



Fulfillment through Jesus Christ, the Son of God

The NT highlights the fulfillment of God's saving promises, but it particularly stresses that those promises and covenants are realized through his Son, Jesus the Christ.

Who is Jesus? According to the NT, he is the new and better Moses, declaring God's word as the sovereign interpreter of the Mosaic law (Matt. 5:17–48; Heb. 3:1–6). Indeed, the Law and the Prophets point to him and find their fulfillment in him. Jesus is the new Joshua who gives final rest to his people (Heb. 3:7–4:13). He is the true wisdom of God, fulfilling and transcending wisdom themes from the OT (Col. 2:1–3). In the Gospels, Jesus is often recognized as a prophet. Indeed, Jesus is the final prophet predicted by Moses (Deut. 18:15; Acts 3:22–23; 7:37). Jesus' miracles, healings, and authority over demons indicate that the promises of the kingdom are fulfilled in him (Matt. 12:28), but his miracles also indicate that he shares God's authority and is himself divine, for only the Creator-Lord can walk on water and calm the sea (Matt. 8:23–27; cf. Ps. 107:29). Jesus is the Messiah, who brings to realization the promise that One would sit on David's throne forever. Recognizing Jesus as the Messiah is fundamental to all the Gospels and the missionary preaching of Acts, and is an accepted truth in the Epistles and Revelation.

The stature of Jesus shines out in the NT narrative, for he authoritatively calls on others to be his disciples, summoning them to follow him (Matt. 4:18–22; Luke 9:57–62). Indeed, a person's response to Jesus determines his or her final destiny (Matt. 10:32–33; cf. 1 Cor. 16:22). Jesus is the Son of Man who will receive the kingdom from the Ancient of Days (Dan. 7:13–14) and will reign forever. The Gospels emphasize, however, that his reign has been realized through suffering, for he is also the Servant of the Lord who has atoned for the sins of his people (Isa. 52:13–53:12; Mark 14:24; Rom. 4:25; 1 Pet. 2:21–25).

This One who atones for sin is fully God and divine. (See *The Person of Christ*.) He has the authority to forgive sins (Mark 2:7). Various NT occurrences of the word “name” indicate Jesus' divine status: people prophesy in his name (Matt. 7:22) and are to hope in his name (Matt. 12:21), and salvation comes in his name alone (Acts 4:12). But the OT establishes that human beings are to prophesy only in God's name, hope only in the Lord, and find salvation only in him; thus, such use of Jesus' name indicates his divinity.

The Greek translation of the OT (the Septuagint) identifies Yahweh as “the Lord.” In quoting or alluding to OT texts that refer to Yahweh, the NT authors often apply the title “Lord” to Jesus and evidently use it in that strong OT sense (e.g., Acts 2:21; Phil. 2:10–11; Heb. 1:10–12). The title is therefore another clear piece of evidence supporting Christ's divinity. Jesus is the image of God (Col. 1:15; cf. Heb. 1:3), is in the very form of God, and is equal to God, though he temporarily surrendered some of the privileges of deity by being clothed with humanity so that human beings could be saved (Phil. 2:6–8). Jesus as the Son of God enjoys a unique and eternal relationship with God (cf. Matt. 28:18; John 20:31; Rom. 8:32), and he is worshiped just as the Father is (cf. Revelation 4–5). His majestic stature is memorialized by a meal celebrated in his memory (Mark 14:22–25) and by people being baptized in his name (Acts 2:38; 10:48). The Son of God is the eternal divine Word (Gk. *Logos*) who has become flesh and has been identified as the man who is God's Son (John 1:1, 14). Finally, in a number of texts Jesus is specifically called “God” (e.g., John

1:1, 18; 20:28; Rom. 9:5; Titus 2:13; Heb. 1:8; 2 Pet. 1:1). Such texts involve no trace of the heresy of either modalism or tritheism. Rather, such statements contain the raw materials from which the doctrine of the Trinity was rightly formulated. (See *The Trinity*.)

New Testament theology, then, is Christ-centered and God-focused, for what Christ does on earth brings glory to God (John 17:1; Phil. 2:11). The NT particularly focuses on Jesus' work on the cross, by which he redeemed and saved his people. The story line in each of the Gospels culminates in and focuses on Jesus' death and resurrection. Indeed, the narrative of Jesus' suffering and death consumes a significant amount of space in the Gospels, indicating that the cross and resurrection are the point of the story. In Acts we see the growth of the church and the expansion of the mission, as the apostles and others proclaim the crucified and resurrected Lord. The Epistles explain the significance of Jesus' work on the cross and his resurrection, so that believers are enabled to grasp the height, depth, breadth, and width of the love of God (Rom. 8:39). The significance of the cross is explained in relation to themes such as new creation, adoption, forgiveness of sins, justification, reconciliation, redemption, sanctification, and propitiation. Woven together, these themes teach that salvation comes from the Lord, and that Jesus as the Christ has redeemed his people from the guilt and bondage of sin.

The Promise of the Holy Spirit

Bound up with the work of Christ is the work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised to send the Spirit to those who are truly his disciples (John 14:16–17, 26; 15:26), and he poured out the Spirit on his people at Pentecost (Acts 2:1–4, 33) after he had been exalted to the right hand of the Father. The Spirit was given to bring glory to Jesus Christ (John 16:14), so that Christ would be magnified as the great Savior and Redeemer. Luke and Acts in particular emphasize that the Spirit is given for ministry, so that the church is empowered to bear witness to Jesus Christ. At the same time, having the Spirit within is the mark of a person belonging to the people of God (Acts 10:44–48; 15:7–9; Rom. 8:9; Gal. 3:1–5). The Spirit also strengthens believers, so that they are enabled to live in a way that is pleasing to God. Transformation into Christlikeness is the Spirit's work (Rom. 8:2, 4, 13–14; 2 Cor. 3:18; Gal. 5:16, 18).

The Human Response

Because of sin, all humanity stands in need of the salvation that Christ brings. The power of sin is reflected in the biblical story line, for even Israel as the chosen people of the Lord lived under the dominion of sin, showing that the written law of God by its own power cannot deliver human beings from bondage to sin. Paul emphasizes that sin and death are twin powers that rule over all people, so that they stand in need of the redemption Christ brings (see Rom. 1:18–3:20; 5:1–7:25). Sin does not merely constitute failure to keep the law of God, but represents personal rebellion against God's lordship (1 John 3:4). The essence of sin is idolatry, in which people refuse to give thanks and praise to the one and only God, and worship the creature rather than the Creator (Rom. 1:18–25).

But sin is not the last word, since Jesus Christ came to save sinners, thereby highlighting the mercy and grace of God. The fundamental response demanded by God is faith and repentance (see note on Acts 2:38). The call to faith and repentance is evident in the ministry of John the Baptist, in Jesus' announcement of the kingdom (Mark 1:15), in the speeches in Acts, in the Pauline letters, and

throughout the NT. Those who desire to be part of Jesus' new community (the church) and part of the kingdom of God (God's rule in people's hearts and lives) must forsake false gods, renounce self-worship and evil, and turn to Jesus as Lord and Master. The call to repentance is nothing less than a summons to abandonment of sin and to personal faith, whereby people are called to trust in the saving work of the Lord on their behalf instead of thinking that they can save themselves. All people everywhere have violated God's will and must look outside of themselves to the saving work of Christ for deliverance from God's wrath. Indeed, the whole of the NT can be understood as a call to repentance and faith (cf. Hebrews 11). Even those who are already believers are to exert themselves in faith and repentance as long as life lasts, for this is the mark of Christ's true disciples. The NT writers constantly encourage their readers to persevere in faith until the end, and warn of the dangers of rejecting Jesus as Lord at any stage. True believers testify that salvation is of the Lord, and that Jesus Christ is the One who has delivered them from the coming wrath.

The People of God

The saving promises of God, then, have begun to be fulfilled in a new community, the church of Jesus Christ. The church is composed of believers in Jesus Christ, both Jews and Gentiles, for the laws in the OT that separated Jews from Gentiles (e.g., circumcision, purity laws, and special festivals and holidays) are no longer in force. The church is God's new temple, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and is called to live out the beauty of the gospel by showing the supreme mark of Christ's disciples: love for one another (John 13:34–35).

The church recognizes, however, that she exists in an interim state. She eagerly awaits the return of Jesus Christ, and the consummation of all of God's purposes. In the interim, the church is to live out her life in holiness and godliness as the radiant bride of Christ, and to herald the good news of salvation to the ends of the earth, so that others who live in the darkness of sin may be transferred from Satan's kingdom to the kingdom of the Lord. The church longs for the day when she will behold God face-to-face and worship Jesus Christ forever. The new creation will be a full reality, all things will be new, and the Lord will be praised forever for his love and mercy and grace—for NT theology is ultimately about glorifying and praising God.

Guidelines for Application

Daniel Doriani

I. Seven Biblical Sources for Application:¹²

- **Rules** - Obedience to specific commands.
- **Ideals** - or principles, like "love your neighbor as yourself". Not necessarily in the form of a command.
- **Doctrine** - Cardinal truths of the faith, fundamentals of a Christian belief system. Doctrine lets us see the world God's way (e.g., the depravity of man).
- **Redemptive acts in narrative** - Central character of every Bible story is God and some aspect of His redemptive purpose attaches to the main theme of every narrative. David and Goliath is a battle as a contrast between their Gods. Wicked acts of rebellion against God. The whole story of the Bible is God redeeming a people to Himself.
- **Exemplary acts in narrative** - They show moral lessons rather than spelling them out. The Bible rarely spells out its lessons; instead it shows us (e.g., idolatry and the golden calf).
- **Biblical images or symbols** Hosea marrying a prostitute, Ezekiel cutting his hair and burning it. God would smash Judah like a jar (Jer. 19).
- **Songs and Prayers** - Psalms teach us how to praise God but also how to lament, give thanks, express anger.

II. Four Types of Application:

- **Action:** What should I do? According to the Bible.
- **Character:** What should I be? What must I change if I am to be holy? How can I become more like Christ?
- **Goals:** To what causes should I devote my life energy? What we do in a situation, depends on where we're going and what we want to accomplish. Where I get a sense of direction? What can I do to change the world so it conforms to God's plans?
- **Discernment:** How can we distinguish truth from error? How can I gain discernment? How can I gain wisdom from God and the church? What options do you see?

III. General Guidelines

- **Actions**
 - **Do:**
 - Give concrete direction based on biblical directives. A message on Matthew 18 should say what to do when a brother sins against us. A message on spiritual gifts should tell people how to find and use theirs.
 - Give concrete guidance based on your best wisdom (e.g., how to lead family devotions, or how to be faithful stewards of wealth).
 - Tell people what may go wrong when they seek God's way. Know that an attempt to correct a sin may be rebuffed.
 - Find actions in all seven types of Biblical sources for application, not just moral passages. Remember the moral trust of doctrine, narrative, and imagery.
 - Distinguish between biblical mandates and wise counsel.

¹² These guidelines are adapted from Daniel M. Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work: The Theory and Practice of Biblical Application* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub., 2001), 81-157.

- Relate all actions to our life in Christ and the internal work of the Spirit.
- **Don't:**
 - Stress action to the neglect of character, goals, and vision.
 - Convey a "just do it" attitude. Admit that the fulfillment actions can be complicated.
 - Give the impression that you have the answer for every situation.
 - List strings of actions, especially if they stand alone, without motives or reasons.
 - Letting action decline into legalism.
- **Character**
 - **Do:**
 - Remind people that they are new creations in Christ.
 - Show that the concepts of God, redemption, and regeneration capture who the Christian is, and that Christian living grows out of our union with Christ.
 - Urge people to examine their character and motives. Induce them to probe the reasons behind their actions. Ask why right living sometimes seems easy sometimes impossible.
 - Help people see discipleship first as the spontaneous manifestation of a renewed heart, and secondly as the result of moral striving.
 - **Don't:**
 - Reduce character to noble traits we acquire by our own effort.
 - Reduce character to a new law, "go be more merciful, just, faithful etc."
 - Imply people can change by resolve and determination.
 - Allow character to become vague principles.
- **Goals**
 - **Do:**
 - Become attuned to the Bible's statements about goals.
 - Help others find their unique gifts and callings.
 - Help others find goals larger than themselves - family, church, and society.
 - Help others fashion concrete goals in all areas of life.
 - Urge perseverance. Every great project meets obstacles.
 - Analyze and critique the goals our culture values.
 - Help people separate the good from the best. From God's general will for all people to His particular will for them.
 - **Don't:**
 - Imply that we may ignore God's revealed will to achieve worthy goals.
 - Allow thinking about goals to foster individualism and narcissism.
 - Let goals decline into lawlessness.
- **Discernment**
 - **Proper Use**
 - What is the unique nature of humanity? (Who am I?)
 - What is the nature of the world and all reality? (Where am I?)
 - What is wrong with the world? (How can we account for brokenness?)
 - How can it be fixed? (Is there a hope for redemption?)
 - What is the basis of morality?
 - What is the meaning of human history?
 - **Other Thoughts**
 - Discernment can become arrogant; proud in their insight, aloof~ despising people who cannot transcend their culture.
 - Discernment can become content to see what is right and each themselves from the world of action.

Learning to Ask Good Questions

Keith E. Johnson

When I led my first freshmen Bible study in my dorm, I assumed that the key to leading an effective Bible study was possessing the “right answers.” Consequently I studied hard so that I knew all the “answers” to the passage we were going to discuss. Over time I began to realize just having the “right answers” was not enough. I began to see that fruitful conversations about the Scriptures were often related to asking the right *questions*.

I also began to see this principle played out in evangelistic conversations with college students. When objections to the Christian faith would arise, I always assumed that the key to addressing them was possessing the “right answers.” Over time I began to see that effective “apologetics” was not primarily about offering compelling answers but asking captivating questions.

Today I am convinced that the key to leading fruitful Bible Studies rests not in our ability to articulate good answers but in our capacity to ask good questions. This does not mean we do no homework to prepare. On the contrary, it means that we have not finished our homework until we have thought carefully about how to engage our audience with carefully crafted questions.

One of the things that is striking about Jesus’ interaction with people is the way he continually asks questions—questions that zero in on heart underlying issues. Notice how Jesus responds to a question about his authority with a question of his own that cuts to the heart of the issue:

Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. “By what authority are you doing these things?” they asked. “And who gave you this authority?” Jesus replied, “I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John’s baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?” They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will ask, ‘Then why didn’t you believe him?’ But if we say, ‘From men’—we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet.” So they answered Jesus, “We don’t know.” Then he said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things. (Matt. 21:23-27, NIV)

Learning to ask good questions is one of the most important skills you can develop. The ability to ask good questions applies not only to leading Bible studies but evangelism and discipleship as well. Like other skills, it can grow over time through practice and evaluation.

We want to encourage you to cultivate the skill of asking good questions as you lead small groups. *The Ultimate Road Trip* (especially chapter 8) contains some helpful advice to point you in the right direction.

Five Types of Questions

In the process of leading a small group, you will employ a wide variety of questions. You will ask questions that help participants see important details in the text. You will ask questions that encourage participants to wrestle with the meaning of the text. You will ask questions that encourage participants to consider the

significance of what they have read. You will ask questions that help participants discover the big idea. Ideally all of these questions should prepare people for the application that is the goal of your study. The table below describes and illustrates the kinds of questions you will employ in your study.

Question Types	Description	Example(s)
Launching	Launching questions help introduce your study by connecting the topic discussed in the passage to their world.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Imagine for one week if someone who knew little or nothing about Christianity was to follow us around and watch the ways we express our Christian faith. If, after a week, we were to ask this person, “What do you think the Christian life is all about?” what might he (she) say?
Observation	<p>Observation questions help participants observe important details in the passage. (Note: An observation can be answered directly from the text.)</p> <p><i>“What does it say?”</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If you were to ask Paul what the characteristics of true Christian are according to Phil 3:3, what would he say? How would you describe Paul’s tone in Phil 3:1-10? In Phil. 3, how does Paul describe his life prior to knowing Christ? In Phil. 3, how does Paul contrast his life prior to Christ with his present life in Christ?
Interpretation	<p>Interpretive questions help participants wrestle with the meaning of the passage.</p> <p><i>“What does it mean?”</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What does Paul mean when he speaks of “putting confidence in the flesh” in Phil 3? Why did Paul regard his previous religious accomplishments as “dung”?
Summary	<p>Summary questions help participants capture the main points of the passage.</p> <p><i>“What’s the big idea?”</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What did Paul want to make sure these believers understood about the Christian life by telling his story in Phil 3? How would you summarize Paul’s understanding of the “gospel” in light of Phil. 3:7-11?
Application	<p>Application questions lead participants to respond to God through his Word. Keep in mind that your goal in teaching the Bible is not merely to communicate principles but to lead others to respond to a person (Jesus Christ). In the context of leading people to respond we want to ask questions that surface their sin condition and point them to Christ.</p> <p><i>“How should I respond?”</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How does Phil. 3 challenge you to think differently about the Christian life? Paul discovered that all the things he deeply treasured were rubbish compared to knowing Christ. How are you tempted to center your life on something other than Christ? Is Christ most often an “end”—the object of your enthrallment and interest—or is Christ a “means”—someone who is pursued to get you something else? Why is this the case?

Asking Christ-Centered Questions That Target the Heart

Rick Hove

In the process of leading a small group, you will employ a wide variety of questions. You will ask questions that help participants see important details in the text. You will ask questions that encourage participants to wrestle with the meaning of the text. You will ask questions that encourage participants to consider the significance of what they have read. You will ask questions that help participants discover the big idea. Ideally all of these questions should prepare people for the application that is the goal of your study. As you lead people respond to God through his Word, ask Christ-centered questions that target their hearts.

Why ask questions that target the heart?

First, life-change rarely occurs from simple knowledge. Think of all the things you know you should do. You know you should exercise. Does knowing this insure you will do it? You know you should control your eating. Does knowing this insure you will do it? You know you should guard your thoughts. Does knowing this insure you will do it? You know you should share your faith. Does knowing this insure you will do it?

Life-change rarely occurs simply from “knowing” we should do something.

Instead, life-change is more often like this: knowledge \Rightarrow “want to” \Rightarrow action. Someone can know, for example, that he should end a particular dating relationship but he will not do it until, at some level, he *wants to*. In other words, the *heart* is central to life-change. Thus, we need to ask questions that target the heart both to expose the ugly parts of our hearts and also to point our hearts to Christ so that we will *want* to change in response to who He is. If all the questions we ask in our study are merely “knowledge” or “how to” questions, we will not help people become who God wants them to be.

Second, one of the central motifs of the Scriptures is that God wants our hearts. Much of Christianity today fails to touch the heart. Furthermore, the root of sin lies at the heart level – cursing God, resisting God, ignoring God, making ourselves God, etc. When questions target the heart they expose sin and point the way to the glorious Savior and the awesome gospel.

Why ask questions that are “Christ-centered”?

From this point in salvation-history believers view the entire Bible through the lens of Christ. This isn’t to say that Christ is hiding in some obscure verse in Lamentations. Rather, it is saying that we read Lamentations, Psalms, Matthew and all Scripture from a post-Christ perspective, aware of who Christ is and what he has done. Christ, then, should be at the center of the Christian life. It only makes sense that our “sub-text” should be “Isn’t Christ great?”

One of the major themes of the New Testament is our resistance to Christ. We may, for example, judge others but at the root of this sin is some sort of resistance to Christ. Making questions “Christ-centered” gets to both the root of the problem and the solution to the problem.

What do “Christ-Centered questions that target the heart” look like?

Here are some examples of Christ-centered questions that target the heart:

- Think of some of the darkest thoughts that have ever crossed your mind – thoughts which deeply haunt you. Christ knows these thoughts. How does this make you feel?
- What are you turning to for love in your life right now? If you turned to Christ for love, how would it affect your relationships with others?
- Think of your relationship with Christ. Is Christ most often an “end” – the object of your enthrallment and interest? Or is Christ a “means” – someone who is pursued to get you something else? Why is this the case?
- Why is a slain Lamb who conquered so beautiful and worthy of adoration?
- What are things apart from God on which you build your identity? If your identity was in Christ how would you be different?
- What’s the most soul-gripping thing you’ve ever anticipated . . . some thing, some person, or some event that you LONGED for? Tell us about it. Do you LONG for the appearing of Christ with the same soul-gripping intensity that you long for other things? If not, why not?
- The greatest insult to Christ was the cross. It was the place of greatest shame. He was naked. He was hung as a criminal though he was innocent. He was suspended on a tree he made. He was taunted by jeers to save himself (like he couldn’t). Isaiah puts it so powerfully: *“He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.”* Is53:7 What is uniquely beautiful about Christ at this moment? Or, put another way, how is his beauty different at this moment than, say, when he raised Lazarus from the dead? What is beautiful about a God like this?

Although you might use “Christ-centered” questions at various points in your study, they will be most helpful as you move to “application.” As you help your group members respond to God through his Word, ask questions that target the heart (especially heart-resistance toward God) and point them to beauty of Christ and sufficiency of the gospel.

Hearing the Music of the Gospel in Ephesians

Keith E. Johnson

Before you begin this study, be sure to read the article entitled, “Christ-Centered Bible Study.” The study gives you the opportunity to study the rest of Ephesians using a simplified version of the four step process we taught you in class.

In the *Bible Study Methods* course we introduced you to a simple process for studying the Bible using the book of Ephesians. Since we only had the opportunity to study one passage in the class, you will have the opportunity to study the rest of Ephesians following a simplified version of the process we outlined in the class (see below).

NOTE: Copies of the course materials for Bible Study Methods including notes and worksheets can be found at www.ibs.cru.org under the “About” tab for “Resources”.

Preparation

Ephesians can be divided into 12 sections. For this study, we would like you to select a total of six passages to study—three from the first half of Ephesians (column one) and three from the second half of Ephesians (column two).

- | | |
|-----------|-----------|
| • 1:1-14 | • 4:1-16 |
| • 1:15-21 | • 4:17-32 |
| • 2:1-10 | • 5:1-21 |
| • 2:11-22 | • 5:22-33 |
| • 3:1-14 | • 6:1-10 |
| • 3:14-21 | • 6:11-24 |

Scripture not only contains “dance steps.” It also contains “music”—the music of the gospel. The steps that follow are designed to help you hear the music of God’s grace as you read Ephesians. (Feel free to include other elements in your study that you find helpful.)

Step One: Survey the Big Picture

Begin by creating a “working copy” of the passage you are going to study. For example, if you are studying Ephesians 1:1-14, print a copy of the text on which you can make notes. (If you don’t have Bible software, type “ESV text” into a Google search, you can pull up an electronic the ESV translation of Ephesians to print off for your passage.)

In the *Bible Study Methods* course we discussed three types of context: historical, literary and redemptive. You may find it helpful to review Lecture #2 in your course notes. (These notes are also available on-line at www.ibs.cru.org under the “Resources” link.)

Begin by briefly summarizing the context for your passage. (NOTE: *Each of the Ephesians studies in the collection we gave you has a brief summary of the context you may find helpful. These studies are also available on the IBS website.*) Answer some of the following questions for your passage:

- What are some of the major themes or topics?
- Look at the sections that precede and follow. What comes before and after? What clues does this give you for understanding this text?
- If your passage is in the first half of the letter, how does it relate to what Paul is trying to say about what God has done for us in the gospel?
- If it is in the second half of the letter, how does it relate to Paul's exhortation to "walk worthy of our calling" in 4:1?
- How does this passage fit into God's story? (You may find it helpful to consult *God's Big Picture* by Vaughn Roberts)

Step Two: Explore the Passage

In this step, you are going to explore the passage in more detail. Begin by making observations in the working copy of your passage using the observation key from the BSM course. You may also find it helpful to consult worksheet #4 ("Observation") in your Bible Study Methods notebook or online (see info above). If you feel really ambitious, create a structural layout of your passage and make observations on it like we did in class.

As you begin, pray through the passage you're working on. In Psalm 119:18, the Psalmist prays, "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law." Pray that God would open your eyes to "wondrous things" in his Word. As you work through the passage, you may find the following helpful:

- Summarize your observations.
- Consult the Ephesians small group lesson for your passage from the collection of Ephesians studies we gave you (available online www.ibs.cru.org).
- Compare several translations of your passage for better understanding. You can find other translations on-line (see www.bible.org or www.crosswalk.com).
- Look up the meaning of important words (see worksheet #5 for help).
- Read Snodgrass' discussion of your passage in the *NIV Application Commentary*.
- Write a paraphrase of the passage in your own words.

Step Three: Discover the Big Idea

This is where you draw everything together. First, try to capture the big idea of the passage in a single sentence. (If you feel really ambitious, create a textual outline of your passage.) Then, summarize the primary theological truths in this passage (see worksheet #7, "Theological Analysis").

- In your own words summarize what this passage teaches about the nature and attributes of the triune God.
- In your own words, summarize what this passage teaches about humanity (both in our fallen and redeemed states)

- In your own words, summarize what this passage teaches about the gospel and the nature of God's saving work.

Step Four: Respond to Christ

Most of us approach Scripture as compilation of ethical directives telling us how to live. If we read the Bible this way, our application of Scripture will amount to little more than looking for “dance steps.” In order to “dance” the Christian life, we need music—the music of God's grace in Christ. In the Bible Study Methods course we suggested that, from Genesis to Revelation, Scripture does two things: (1) it paints portraits of our brokenness and (2) points us to a beautiful savior. (NOTE: On these points, be sure to review the notes from the lecture entitled “Christ-Centered Application” as well as the article entitled “Christ-Centered Bible Study.”) Hence, there are two important questions you want to ask you as you consider how God wants you to respond to him:

- What does this passage reveal about your spiritual brokenness that requires the redemptive work of Christ?
- How does this passage point you to Christ and the ‘good news’ of the gospel?

The “Apply” section of the Ephesians studies we gave you will help you ask these questions. Reflect on these questions as you study each passage of Ephesians.

Go back and look at what you have discovered so far. How is God leading you to respond to Him in and through this passage? Take some time to read the passage slowly and pray through the passage as you consider your response. (*You might read through your passage one verse at a time and turn each verse into a prayer. For example in 4:1, “Lord, enable me to understand the riches of my calling so that I might walk in a manner worthy of you. Help me envision what it looks like to live in a way that pleases you. Open my eyes to see those areas of my life where I resist embracing your calling. . . .”*)

Sharing What You Have Discovered

In Ephesians 3, Paul explains to his Gentile readers that the grace of God was given to him for their benefit (Eph. 3:2). It is clear that Paul viewed himself as a “steward” of God's grace. This is a very interesting way of talking about “grace.” We often think about “grace” exclusively in relation to our personal salvation. Have you ever thought of the grace of God as something that was given to you *for the sake of others*? One of the key themes in God's story is that God blesses us to be a blessing to others. Consider Abraham. God did not bless Abraham merely for his own benefit; God blessed Abraham so that he might be a blessing to others (see Genesis 12:1-3). The same thing is true for us. God pours his grace *in us* so that it can flow *through us* into the lives of others.

Over the last few weeks you have had the opportunity to hear the music of the gospel as you have reflected on Ephesians. Remember that God enables you to experience his grace so that it can flow into the lives others. To this end, I would encourage you to take the following steps:

1. Form a habit of sharing what you are learning. When you meet with people during the week, share with them what you have been learning in the Scriptures.
2. Teach the 12 Ephesians studies to a small group you are leading. These studies are excellent for young believers, because they address many of the foundational truths of Christian growth. (These studies are available online at www.ibs.cru.org at the “Resources” link

under the “About” tab.) NOTE: If your campus has set materials for small groups, you should talk with your trainer and local leader(s) about how you might use these studies.

