

# Training Preachers

2 Timothy 4:2

“I give you this charge;  
preach the Word; be  
prepared in season and out  
of season”

**Grace**  
**Generation**  
**CHURCH**  
p i e t e r m a r i t z b u r g

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# Introduction: The glory of preaching

## Jesus and the Apostles

Certainly the evangelists present **Jesus** as having been first and foremost an itinerant preacher. “Jesus came ... preaching,” Mark announces, as he introduces the public ministry (Mark 1:14, cf. Matt 4:17). The synoptic evangelists summarise his Galilean ministry in these terms, “Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and *preaching* the gospel of the kingdom” (Matt 9:35, cf. 4:23 and Mark 1:39).

That the **apostles** after Pentecost gave priority to the ministry of preaching is specifically stated in Acts 6. They resisted the temptation to get involved in other forms of service, in order to devote themselves “to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (v4). For it was to this that Jesus had primarily called them.

During his lifetime he had sent them out to preach (Mark 3:14), although temporarily restricting their ministry to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt 10:5-7). After his resurrection, however, he had solemnly commissioned them to take the gospel to the nations (e.g. Matt 28:19; Luke 24:47). They proclaimed in the power of the Holy Spirit the good news of the death and resurrection, or the sufferings and glory, of the Christ (1 Peter 1:12). In the Acts Peter and the other Jerusalem apostles “spoke the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:31). Luke’s hero the Apostle Paul preaches and plants churches, until finally Luke locates him in Rome under house arrest, yet “preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ quite openly and unhindered” (Acts 28:31).

Luke faithfully reflects Paul’s own perception of his ministry, that Christ had sent him to preach the gospel and he felt a certain ‘necessity’ or compulsion to do so. Besides, preaching was God’s appointed way by which sinners would hear of the Saviour and so call on him for salvation, for “how are they to hear without a preacher?” (1 Cor 1:17; 9:16; Rom 10:14-15). Then at the end of his life, knowing that he had fought his fight and finished his race, he passed the commission on to his young lieutenant Timothy. In the presence of God, and in anticipation of the return of Christ to judge and to reign, he solemnly charged him, “Preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching” (2 Tim 4:1-2).

# 1. What is preaching?

1. Preaching is one of the most effective ways of seeing people saved and built up in God's Word.
2. To preach means to evangelise, to be God's messenger with the authority of king behind it. To be herald.
3. There is no substitute for good bible preaching to move God's work on.
4. It is there to conquer – to call for a decision.
5. Will feed the mind, stir the emotions and awake the will.
6. Teaching will help people to understand. Preaching is to bring convictions and decision – need to have both.
7. All preaching should be biblical and expository (expounding the passage) – telling what the scripture says, not what you would like it to say. This forces a preacher into a biblical mould. Nothing speaks to people as powerfully as scripture. It results in all of God's Word being preached – not just the parts we like the most.
8. There are different styles of preaching e.g. parable, life of Paul, preaching on subject (e.g. unity)

## **APPENDIX A: GEORGE WHITFIELD: THE GOLDEN PREACHER - BREATHTAKING SERVICE FOR GOD.**

Before we get into the details of Whitefield's incredible life let me outline a few facts:

- he was a tireless preacher – estimates are that he preached/taught 30,000 times during his relatively short life (he died aged 56)
- during the summer of 1739 in England the outdoor crowds are estimated to have been up to 1 million – all without amplification, obviously
- he invested much of his time in America
- something like 80% of the American population heard him preach
- Whitefield became the prototype Evangelist
- he continually emphasised the need for the new birth
- he passionately appealed for people to come to Christ immediately
- it wasn't unusual for him to stop in the middle of a sermon and join the crowd in weeping at the revelation of Christ's love
- he often coughed up blood after preaching

- he became the first transatlantic 'celebrity' – and therefore was widely ridiculed in the papers!
- he was genuinely non-denominational, choosing to be buried in the crypt of the Presbyterian Church he had planted!
- he was able to effectively reach both poor and rich
- he was, by all accounts, a happy Calvinist!
- It is difficult to read about Whitefield without becoming increasingly passionate for God, and passionate to see the gospel breaking into the lives of those around us.

## 2. The preacher

1. Maintain an open walk with God – get God's heart and allow Him to speak to you and deal with things in your life. What we are as Christians is as important as what we say.
2. Be baptized in the Holy Spirit and allow God's Spirit to fill you again and again for preaching. A lot of books on expository preaching are really books on expository lecturing. What makes preaching to be preaching is the power of the Holy Spirit.
3. We want to be people of God's Word (Reformed) and Spirit (Charismatic). We mustn't confuse the Bible with the law. The Spirit replaced the law on the day of Pentecost, but we still need the scriptures. Notice Matthew 22:29, Isaiah 59:21, Acts 1:16, 2:15-17, Acts 20:18-23. In the New Testament you have this wonderful interplay between the Spirit leading them into new things and the word being used to explain what God was doing.
4. All word and no Spirit: dry up. All Spirit and no word: blow up. Spirit and word: grow up. We are also meant to encounter God-communion with God! We are not just people of the book. Christianity is not just set of teaching/doctrine - it is a life!
5. Make sure you are often reading God's Word and spending time in prayer. Allow the Holy Spirit to speak to you – keep a few notes.
6. Not everyone is called to preach – there must be a calling to preach, a sense of pressure to preach and a gifting to communicate.
7. Be aware of your congregation and where they are at.
8. Use illustrations, humour and personal testimony.
9. Don't manipulate people – let the Holy Spirit bring conviction.
10. Lloyd Jones: Just as the Charismatic movement has often been an experience without a theology; it is just as bad to have a theology without an experience. We see in the book of Acts a wonderful balance between Word and Spirit. It is how the Church makes progress and how when the Church lost its way and power - God poured out his Spirit again.

## 3. How to know what to preach on

1. Listen to the Holy Spirit and feed on God's Word.
2. Be aware of current events and the needs of your Church.
3. Ask God to speak to you through the passage first.
4. Jot down notes and thoughts as God speaks to you.
5. Find out what the passage means – what was Paul trying to say to the Corinthians – before you bring application for today.

### **APPENDIX B: Handling the Word in proclamation by P-J Smyth**

Is there a biblical (and therefore best) method of preaching? Judging from the diversity of sermons recorded in the scriptures, we would be hard pushed to say so. A few years ago, I was asked to teach a group of pastors 'how to preach'. I was utterly daunted and rather than spout the latest methods recorded in preaching manuals, I asked God for a passage of scripture that I could use to actually 'teach' preaching from in a confident and authoritative manner. He took me to Ecclesiastes 12:9-12 and Hebrews 12:26-28.

#### **In Hebrews 12:26-28 there is a 3-point principle for preaching:**

v26 = Read the scripture (Hag 2:6).

v27 = Explain the meaning of the scripture (using testimony, illustration or explanation).

v28 = Apply the scripture to everyday life (Therefore, let us ...).

If we do this simply, then you will not go wrong!

#### **The 'Nugget' theory**

In line with this Hebrews 12 principle, we have developed something that we call a 'nugget'. This is a 3-minute mini-sermon. One minute to read, one minute to explain, and one minute to apply. All our preachers-in-training start off doing nuggets. They may do one on the theme of giving, just before the offering is taken up, or, I may ask several of them to do nuggets back to back for the Sunday sermon. The benefits of starting with nuggets are:

- It teaches a preacher to be faithful with the little.
- It forces the preacher to be well-prepared ("I am sorry this sermon was so long but I didn't have time to make it shorter").
- It leaves the church wanting to hear you again.
- If you can do a nugget, you can do a sermon, because a sermon is simply a series of nuggets all put one after the other!

## **TWO MAIN TYPES OF SERMON**

### **1. Topical or Thematic**

For example 'Overcoming Temptation', 'God & Politics' or 'Homosexuality'. In our commitment to preach directly out of scripture, we are sometimes still unable to find one big, solid passage that does justice to certain thematic topics. Some topics are simply served best by having headings or titles illustrated by verses (you have got your headings from the verses during preparation, but for purposes of delivery you can better serve the people by making a statement and then showing it in the scriptures).

### **An example of a thematic sermon: Title: Overcoming Temptation**

#### **Be prepared**

- Read 1 Peter 5:8-9. You know that the devil will attack in your weak areas in your weak times.

#### **Learn how to run**

- Read Genesis 39:10-12. When Joseph was tempted to be sexually immoral he "ran" away right at the start of the temptation before it got a hold of him. Learn how to run when you are in situations of temptation. Don't try to be a hero, just run!

#### **Avoid places of temptation**

- Read Proverbs 7:6-9. This young man was foolish because he even walked past the prostitute's house! The best drivers are not the ones who show off how clever they are by driving fast near the edge of the cliff, but rather those who avoid the cliff by many metres!

#### **Be ruthless with little sins**

- Read James 1:13-15. Little lions become big lions and big lions eat people! Ruthlessly put to death small sins in your life because they quickly grow to become habits that entangle you.

#### **When you fail run to God immediately**

- Read 1 John 1:8-10. When you fall into sin don't feel condemned, but rather run to God and say "Father, I am so sorry to have sinned. I ask now that you would forgive me and wash me of this sin. Thank you, Father, that you never stop loving me even when I mess up. Amen."



## 2. Expository

Expository means explaining, opening up, expounding the scriptures. This means choose a text and build out of that. We should always expound the Word, rather than use it to illustrate our ideas. Here you are clearly working through a passage of scripture. These tend to be more well-rounded sermons and visually teach people how to feed on the Word.

### **An example of an expository sermon:**

Title: ***Preaching truths from Ecclesiastes 12:9-12***

#### **“Not only was the preacher wise”**

- Wisdom begins with fearing God. This is a sacred calling! Fear God.

#### **“...but also he imparted knowledge to the people”**

- Preaching is not for us; it is for the people. Our motivation is love for the people, to help them understand the Word (Neh 8:8). A preacher preaching in order to ‘impart to the people’ will find illustrations and words to impart knowledge to the people. He will not be puffed up with his own knowledge, because it is not about how much you know, but how much you can impart to the people!
- “What is the chief end of preaching? It is to give men and women a sense of God and His presence... I can forgive a preacher almost anything if he gives me a sense of God” (M Lloyd-Jones).

#### **“He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs”**

- Here is a 3-point format for preparation:
- Ponder: This means to dwell on, think on, meditate on and assess. Use only the Bible and prayer.
- Search out: Now that you have allowed the Holy Spirit ‘first go’ as you pondered, it is now time to research books, commentaries, listen to tapes and bounce ideas off people.
- Set in order: Now you need to combine what you have pondered and sought out, and set it out in an order that will serve your listeners well.

#### **“The teacher searched to find just the right words”**

- We are to be careful and accurate with our words. Respect the people and their time. Redeem the time. May your speech be seasoned with salt! – with a soundness of speech that cannot be condemned (Titus 2:8).

#### **“The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails, given by one shepherd”**

- Jesus gave us His Word. We must stick to the Word if we are to represent the shepherd.

- Firmly embedded nails speaks of ‘power preaching’ that embeds truth in our listeners. This can best be done by having one main point that you drive home. God’s Word is like a nail that will hold their lives together in a tough and hostile world. Drive it home well. Part of driving truth home is to be appropriately repetitious.
- *“Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you” (Phil 3:1). “So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body” (2 Peter 1:12-13).*

**“Be warned my son of anything in addition to them”**

- ‘Them’ of course refers to the Word of God. While out-and-out heresy is a possibility, a more likely trap that many have fallen into is actually using the Bible to illustrate their message, rather than the other way around.

## 4. Knocking a sermon into shape

1. What is the main thrust of the passage?
2. Develop a simple 2 or 3 points outline of the passage. Be as clear and simple as possible. (If there's a mist in the pulpit, there will be a fog in the pews.)
3. Get any problem areas in the passage out of the way first.
4. Headings are very important.
5. Have a good introduction that introduces your theme. Have a strong conclusion to your message to bring decision, encouragement or direction.
6. Work hard at illustrations to bring out God's truth.
7. Deal properly with the passage and then bring application to your congregation.
8. Be aware of good eye contact, bodily actions and voice.
9. Pray! Pray! Pray!

## APPENDIX C:

### Reading the Bible for all its worth by David Adams

While many people read the Bible and get something out of it, God calls us to be workmen who correctly handle the Word of Truth (2 Tim 2:15). Since the Bible is our final authority in all matters of faith and conduct, and since we want God to speak into our lives through His Word and transform our lives, we need to be diligent in seeking to read, interpret and apply the Bible correctly. Not doing this may mean that we remain unaware of some of the amazing treasures that are in God's Word – awareness of which could dramatically impact our lives for the good – and increases our chances of emerging with wrong meaning, wrong emphasis, and therefore wrong application.

Reading the Bible diligently and interpreting it accurately can require hard work because our modern world and the world of the writers and the initial readers of Scripture differ so greatly. We need to bridge the gap between our world and theirs, attempting as best as possible to get into the shoes of the writers and initial readers.

In studying the Bible we embark on a process involving:

1. **Observation** answering the question *What do I see?* as I read the Bible.
2. **Interpretation** answering the question *What does it mean?* as I read the Bible
3. **Application** answering the question *How does it work?* or *How does it apply today?* as I read the Bible.

When reading the Bible, many are tempted to jump straight to “application” asking *What does this passage mean to me?* This holds the danger of relativising biblical truth.

Rather, before I ask ‘What significance does this passage of Scripture have for me?’ I need to establish what the passage originally meant. Only once one has established the original meaning of a passage, does one look for its significance or application to us today. This is the vital third step of the observation-interpretation-application process where we open our lives to being impacted by God through His Word. It is important that we read the Bible as a community of faith, since we need an openness to God and to each other if we are to guard against approaching Scripture with cultural “blind spots”. Although a passage can never mean now what it did not mean when first written, there are times when a biblical teaching needs to be culturally transposed.

NOTE: The science of interpretation is called hermeneutics, and when we explain the meaning of a Bible passage the process is called exegesis.

Let's now look in more detail at the process of reading, interpreting and applying the Bible to our lives and circumstances.

## Step 1: OBSERVATION

The first of the three crucial steps in studying God's Word for the purpose of life change is observation. Too many 'readers' of the Bible are nothing but browsers. They turn pages the way they flip through TV channels, looking for something to catch their interest. The Word doesn't lend itself to that sort of approach. It requires conscious, concentrated effort.

So read portions of the Bible over and over. Record what you see in the text, jotting down your insights and questions. Then take time to reflect on what you've seen and to hear God speaking in the Word.

In seeking to answer the question "What do I see?" we need essentially to:

1. Be on the look-out for **key words** or **terms**. For example, the word *believe* appears 79 times in John and unlocks the meaning of the book.
2. Investigate the **structure** of the passage. This includes:
  - *grammatical* structure:
    - e.g. verbs
    - subject & object
    - modifiers (adjectives & adverbs)
    - prepositional phrases
    - connectives (words like *and*, *but*, *therefore*)
  - *literary* structure:
    - e.g. climax & resolution
    - cause & effect
    - type of writing (e.g. biographical, historical, ideological, etc).
1. Be aware of the **literary form** or **genre** (the type of writing) since each genre must be read according to its own 'rules'.
2. Identify the **atmosphere**, picking up the setting and feelings from the text, and putting oneself in the author's shoes (e.g. Paul writes Phil 4:4 "Rejoice in the Lord always" while in prison). Use imagination – to see the sunsets, smell the fragrances, hear the cries of anguish.
3. Read as for the first time (e.g. try a fresh translation – reading an unfamiliar version jars our attention so that we see the Bible with a new set of eyes).

4. Bombard the text with questions:
  - Who?
  - What?
  - Where?
  - When?
  - Why?
  - So what? What is the impact on me?
5. Read the Bible as a love letter.

**Five things to look for:**

1. Things that are emphasised. The Bible uses several ways to emphasise material, e.g.:
  - the amount of space allocated
  - stated purpose
  - order
  - progression from lesser to greater, or vice versa.
2. Things that are repeated
  - Terms and phrases may be repeated
  - characters may reappear
  - incidents and circumstances may be repeated
  - patterns may be repeated
  - New Testament use of Old Testament passages.
3. Things that are related
  - Movement from the general to the specific
  - questions and answers
  - cause and effect.
4. Things that are alike & unlike. Look out for:
  - similes (often introduced by the word 'like')
  - metaphors (a direct comparison without 'like' prefacing it)
  - use of "but", signalling contrast or change of direction.
5. Things that are true to life
  - Such things help one to identify with the Bible characters and
  - authenticate what one is reading.

## How to study a section of Scripture

The following is a checklist taken from *Living by the Book* by H. Hendricks & W. Hendricks (Moody Press, 1991, p178):

1. Read the entire section completely. In fact, try reading it two or three times, perhaps in different translations.
2. Identify the paragraphs, and put a label or title on each paragraph. The paragraph is the basic unit of study. So it's important to grasp the main idea or theme of each paragraph, and then state that in a word or two.
3. Evaluate each paragraph in the light of the other paragraphs. Use the "Five things to look for" in the previous section to look for relationships.
4. Evaluate how the section as a whole relates to the rest of the book, using the same principles (things emphasised, repeated, etc).
5. Try to state the main point of the section. See if you can boil it down to one word or a short phrase that summarises the content.
6. Keep a list of observations on the section.
7. Study the people and places mentioned. See what you can learn about them that throws light on the section as a whole.
8. Summarise your observations, and try to illustrate them on a chart. (Keep a list of your unanswered questions and unresolved problems. Those become avenues for further investigation.)
9. Ask yourself: What have I seen in this section that challenges the way I live? What practical issues does this passage address? What change do I need to consider in the light of this study? What should I pray as a result of what I've seen?
10. Share the results of your study with someone else.

## YOU TRY IT

1. Read Philemon in the New Testament. Only twenty-five verses long, Philemon is Paul's letter to an old friend whose slave, Onesimus, had run away. Paul is sending Onesimus back to his master with the letter in hand.

Read the letter through a few times, and then barrage the text with questions. What can you find out about the relationships between Paul, Philemon, and Onesimus? Reconstruct the situation. What feelings might be involved? What practical considerations? What questions remain unanswered as you read this letter? What problems does it create? What issues does it speak to? Why do you think it is significant enough to be included in the Bible? What issues

do we face today that this book might speak to? How would you communicate this book and the insights you gain from it to someone else?

2. Psalm 23 paints a beautiful picture of the tender relationship between God and one of His children, although we may be so familiar with this psalm that it no longer makes any impact on us. Read it in different translations, make a thorough study of it, and open your heart for God to speak to you through it. Jot down your observations.
3. Most people just skip over the genealogies as monotonous repetitions of “So-and-so begat So-and-so”. But genealogies are actually important ways in which the biblical writers communicate their meaning.
4. Test your observational skills by reading through the list of names mentioned in Matthew 1:1-18. What relationship do these people have to Jesus? To each other? What four individuals stand out conspicuously? Why? What can you find out about the people mentioned here? What do you think Matthew’s list has to do with the purpose of his book? What is the main point of this passage? How does it challenge you?

## **Step 2: INTERPRETATION**

The second of the three crucial steps in studying God’s Word for the purpose of life change is interpretation. Acting on what God has said assumes that I understand what He has said. This second major step therefore focuses on answering the question What does it mean? as I read the Bible.

When we speak of meaning, this is not our subjective thoughts read into the text, but God’s objective truth read out of the text.

In studying the Bible we need to realise that we are separated from the text by barriers that time and distance have thrown up between us and the biblical writers. For example:

- language barriers
- cultural barriers
- literary barriers
- communication barriers and faulty interpretation.

Three things will help us establish the meaning of a passage of Scripture:

1. Questions: Bombard the text with questions – even though the text may not be able to answer all of them.



2. Answers: Look for the answers. The answers to your questions will come directly from the observation process.
3. Integration: Put the answers together in a meaningful whole, reconstructing the meaning of a passage after having taken it apart to inspect the details.

NOTE: Make sure you have an accurate translation of the Bible, which attempts to give us what the writer actually wrote (e.g. NIV, NASB, RSV, etc). While paraphrase versions of the Bible (e.g. The Living Bible, The Message, J B Phillips) are useful, they attempt to give us what the writer meant rather than what he actually wrote – the thoughts rather than the words.

### **Keys for interpretation**

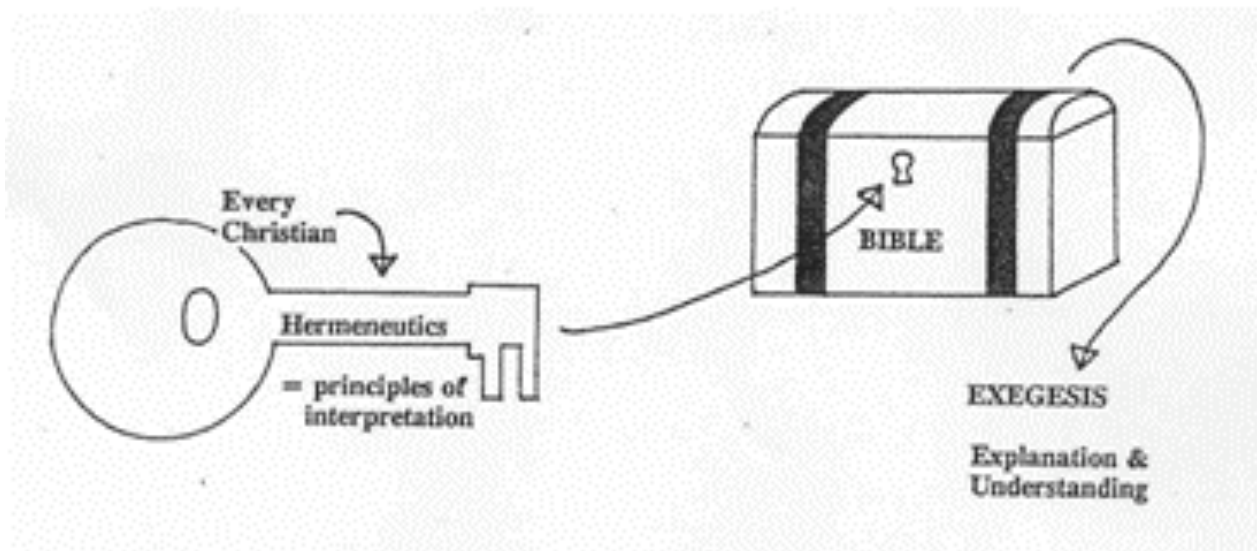
At this stage we have been reading a passage of Scripture employing various techniques of ‘observation’, namely:

- looking for terms, structure, literary form, and atmosphere
- asking a series of penetrating questions (*who, what, where, when, why, so what?*)
- looking for things that are emphasised, repeated, related, alike and unlike, and true to life.

Now, as we embark on the ‘interpretation’ phase, we need to have the following five key questions in the back of our minds to help us correctly interpret the passage:

- What kind of passage is this?
- What is the context of this passage?
- What do the key words mean?
- Is the writer using a figure of speech?
- What’s the plain meaning of this passage?

Let’s look at each of these key questions in some detail.



## 1. WHAT KIND OF PASSAGE IS THIS?

- a) Is it **history**, describing things that actually happened? In the many narrative and biographical sections we need to ask:
  - What is the plot?
  - Who are the characters and what roles do they play?
  - In what ways is the story true to life? (What questions does this story raise? What lessons are learnt? What do they discover about God?)
- b) Is it **poetry**, communicating a mood or an idea, rather than detailed matters of fact?
- c) Is it **prophetic**, declaring God's word for a particular generation? If it is prophetic, we then need to ask:
  - Who is the prophet?
  - To whom is he speaking, and why?
  - Is there a future fulfilment of the prophecy?
  - Is the language poetry or should it be taken literally?
  - How does the New Testament interpret Old Testament prophecy?
- d) Is it **exposition**, presenting a straightforward argument or explanation of a body of objective truth?

## 2. WHAT IS THE CONTEXT OF THIS PASSAGE?

- a) The **biblical** context - read the surrounding verses in the Bible, and ask:
  - To whom is the writer speaking?
  - What is the main train of thought?
  - Do the verses around help explain this passage?

- If there is a promise with conditions, the conditions must be stressed as much as the promise.
- b) The **theological** context – be aware of God’s progressive revelation in the Bible, and ask questions such as:
    - What did the writer know about God?
    - What was the relationship of his readers to God?
    - How did people worship God at that point?
  - c) The **historical** context - what was happening in the world at the time?
  - d) The **cultural** context - what were the local conditions and customs of the day?
  - e) The **geographical** context of writer, readers and events described.

### 3. WHAT DO THE KEY WORDS MEAN?

We need to establish the meaning or nuance of a word or passage in the language in which it was originally written, asking questions such as:

- What do the key words really mean? (A concordance or Bible dictionary can help you here.)
- How are the words used in this passage?
- How are the words used elsewhere by the same writer?
- How are the words used elsewhere in the Bible? (A concordance can help here.)
- How are the words used outside the Bible? - since most words began with secular use. (Commentaries can help with this.)
- What does the rest of the Bible say on this subject? Always interpret the obscure in the light of the clear.
- What do the commentaries say?

### 4. IS THE WRITER USING A FIGURE OF SPEECH?

It is the plain, obvious meaning of a phrase or passage that we are looking for, but this does not mean that everything is taken literally since language may often be used idiomatically.

It is therefore important to identify stylistic features which need careful interpretation, for example:

- Simile: making a comparison (the devil prowls about like a roaring lion 1 Peter 5:8)
- Metaphor: using words that do not literally apply (that fox Herod Luke 13:32)

- Allegory: a long metaphor (e.g. The Good Shepherd John 10:1-16)
- Anthropomorphism: ascribing human characteristics (the Lord's hand is not so short that it cannot save Isaiah 59:1)
- Hyperbole: great exaggeration to make a point (the camels of the armies of the Midianites could no more be counted than the sand on the seashore Judges 7:12)
- Litotes: strongly affirming the truth by denying its opposite (I will not erase his name from the book of life Revelation 3:5)
- Illustrations, symbols, & types
- Parables: an earthly story with a heavenly meaning, aiming to teach one main truth.

## **5. WHAT'S THE PLAIN MEANING OF THIS PASSAGE?**

God wants to communicate clearly with us, therefore when we read the Bible we need to look for the plain meaning of a passage, and not treat it like a riddle. This plain meaning should always be in harmony with the overall message of the Bible.

Accepting the inspired unity of the Bible, and recognising the reality of God's 'progressive revelation', the following will help us get at the plain meaning:

- The New Testament interprets the Old Testament.
- The Epistles (or Letters) interpret the Gospels.
- Theological passages interpret historical and narrative passages.
- Didactic passages (presenting instruction, e.g. Romans, Galatians, Hebrews, etc) interpret narrative ones (e.g. Acts).
- The universal interprets the local or incidental.
- The clear interprets the obscure.

Having a good grasp of the glorious themes of the Bible will help us in this task – themes such as God being relational, and the priority of relationship; Christ's incarnation, death and resurrection; the grace and love of God; the kingdom of God.

### **Useful helps**

The following types of reference books are useful to help you establish the meaning of a Bible passage – but always begin with the Bible itself!

- Concordance
- Bible handbooks & atlases
- Bible dictionaries
- Bible commentaries

### **Step 3: APPLICATION**

“Apply your whole self to the text. Apply the whole text to yourself.”

(Michael Cassidy)

Understanding the Word is simply a means to a greater goal – practising biblical truth in our day-to-day lives and growing in our relationship with God. **God’s Word was given to us in order to transform our lives.**

God’s Word must not only be studied, but also applied. Application is a vital stage in the process. Our task, then, is two-sided:

1. We must get into the Word of God for ourselves.
2. We must allow the Word to get into us, to make a permanent difference.

*“Many Christians are like poor photographs – overexposed and underdeveloped!”* They have had plenty of input from the Word of God, but in some areas it may not have made much difference in their lives. Spiritual growth is a commitment to change and a commitment to apply the Word of God to our lives and do what God says!

*“Why do you call me Lord, Lord and do not do what I say?”* (Luke 6:46)

*“But be doers of the Word, and not merely listeners of it.”* (James 1:22)

## **When God's Word comes into our lives it brings change:**

### **God's Word is...**

- our source of faith (Romans 10:17)
- food and spiritual nourishment (Matthew 4:4; Jeremiah 15:16)
- spirit and life (John 6:63)
- liberating truth (John 17:17)
- a weapon of warfare (Hebrews 4:12; Ephesians 6:17; Matthew 4:4,7,10 – Jesus' response to Satan's temptation)
- light (Psalm 119:105,130; Proverbs 6:23)
- our foundation (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
- power (Isaiah 55:11; Romans 1:16)
- a source of stability (Psalm 37:31)
- a well of blessing (Luke 11:28)
- a fountain of joy (John 17:13)

“The Bible is complete, there is nothing left out. It is comprehensive. It does everything that we need it to do. There is no part of your life, no problem that you will ever face in your life, no question with which you will be troubled, that the word of God does not speak to and illuminate and meet.” (Ray Stedman)

### **The Bible is comprehensive, but it is not exhaustive:**

- **Comprehensive:** It gives us principles and precepts that incorporate everything we need to know about thinking, behaving and dealing with life's problems. It tells us who man is, where man came from, the nature of man and the purpose of man. In other words, it reveals our origin, value, knowledge and destiny, and it puts everything in proper perspective.
- **Not exhaustive:** It does not cover every possible situation, but the principles apply to every possible situation. We must have a relationship with God that fosters this individual application. The gap between the general principles of Scripture and the particulars of application is filled by the direction of the Holy Spirit. “The Bible without the Holy Spirit is a sun-dial by moonlight” (Dwight L. Moody).
- As Charles Spurgeon said: “Nobody ever outgrows Scripture; the book widens and deepens with your years.” In fact, as it was with Jeremiah, God's Word needs to be in our hearts like a burning fire (Jeremiah 20:9) or firewords.

## **The working Word**

In the steps of *observation* and *interpretation*, you come up with new insights. These new insights affect a series of relationships:

- A new relationship to God
- A new relationship to yourself
- A new relationship to other people
- A new relationship to the enemy

In Romans 12:2 Paul instructs believers: “*And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind....*” Certainly the Scriptures are the basis for renewing the mind with truth.

## **Four substitutes for application:**

What happens when we fail to apply the Scripture?

- We substitute interpretation for application.
- We substitute superficial obedience for substantive life change.
- We substitute rationalisation for repentance.
- We substitute an emotional experience for a decision of the will.

In order to apply the Word we need to ask:

## **How does this word, verse, passage...**

- apply to my life?
- apply to the church?
- apply to society?

One of the things to do with any passage of Scripture is to bombard the text with questions:

### ***Is there...***

- ...an example for me to follow?*
- ...a sin to be acknowledged or to avoid?*
- ...a correction to be applied?*
- ...a wrong to be put right?*
- ...a restitution to be made?*
- ...a command to be obeyed?*
- ...new truth to be grasped?*
- ...an error to be avoided?*
- ...a promise to be received or to claim?*
- ...a prayer to repeat?*
- ...a condition to meet?*
- ...a challenge to face?*
- ...some area of my life for which this truth is needed?*
- ...an encouragement to be taken?*

*...a vision to be appropriated?*  
*...a verse to be remembered?*  
*...worship, praise and thanksgiving to be given?*

God's Word is a never-changing truth in an ever-changing world:

The Word of God is eternal and unchanging, but our world is not. Therefore, living out God's truth demands that we plug it into our particular set of circumstances. We do not change the truth to fit our cultural agenda but rather, we adapt our application of the truth in the light of our circumstances.

How can we take a message that was written down in the 1st century A.D. or earlier and make use of it in the 21st century?

The place to start is context – both the original context of Scripture and the contemporary context in which we live. Context makes a profound difference in how a person applies biblical truth. The key questions to ask regarding the context are:

- What was the context then?
- What is the context now?

We need to be people who understand both the Word and the world. It is interesting that when David was putting together his army to establish a kingdom, he recruited the sons of Issachar, “men who understood the times, with knowledge of what Israel should do” (1 Chron 12:32).

In seeking to apply Scripture to our contexts today, we need an openness to God and to each other if we are to guard against approaching Scripture with cultural “blind spots”. As John Stott (in *The Contemporary Christian*) points out, “men and women, old and young, black and white, African and Asian, capitalist and socialist, waged and unwaged, middle-class and working-class, all read Scripture differently. Our spectacles have cultural lenses.”

A passage can never mean now what it never meant when written. However, there are times when a biblical teaching needs to be culturally transposed. When faced with a Bible passage whose teaching is culturally remote to us, we have three options:

- Total rejection - regarding the teaching as irrelevant, and therefore discarding it.
- Taking it absolutely literally and applying it directly into our culture.
- Cultural transposition - retaining the principle of what God is teaching or commanding, while re-clothing it in modern cultural dress. This is the option that we should aim for.

There may be specific matters that the Bible does not address directly but the Word gives us principles to apply to all issues of life. What does the Bible have to say on Genetic Engineering, birth control, euthanasia, health reform, AIDS, etc.? While the Bible may not address such issues specifically, it gives



us principles to apply to all of life. The Bible's primary subject is God and His relationship with humankind. It is largely our responsibility to work out the implications of that for everyday life. We have to think them through and make choices – biblically informed choices.

*“It's not difficult to be contemporary if you do not care about being biblical. And it is not difficult to be biblical if you do not care about being contemporary. But to be biblical and contemporary – that is an art.”* (John Stott)

## YOU TRY IT

### Deriving principles from Scripture to apply to life

The ability to state **principles** from Scripture is one of the most powerful skills you can develop in terms of application. It will enable you to relate the Word of God to nearly any situation you face. However learning to do so takes a bit of practice. Crafting useful and accurate principles requires accurate understanding of the text and perceptive insight into our own context.

Use the following questions to help you **develop** and **apply** biblically sound principles from three passages of Scripture:

Proverbs 24:30-34; John 13:1-17; and Hebrews 10:19-25

1. What can you discover about the *original context* in which this passage was written and applied?
2. Given that original context, what does this text *mean*?
3. What *fundamental, universal truths* are presented in this passage?
4. Can you state that truth in a *simple sentence* or two, a statement that anyone can understand?
5. What *issues in your own culture* and your own situation does this truth address?
6. What are the *implications* of this principle when applied to your life and the world around you? What *changes* does it require? What *values* does it reinforce? What *difference* does it make?

## 5. Preacher evaluation

1. What was the one central theme or purpose of this message?
2. Was the preacher faithful to his passage?
3. Was there a good introduction leading into the passage?
4. Were his points clear? Can you remember them?
5. Was there a strong conclusion and application to the message e.g. to bring a decision, to give direction or to encourage?
6. Did he have one good illustration?
7. How was his / her eye contact, bodily actions and voice projection?
8. Name one area that was good in his / her sermon.
9. Name one area that needs improving.

## 6. End Times passages for 5-minute sermons

1. Evangelistic message to the unsaved. Read Mark 13:1-13. Birth pains before Christ's return.
2. Message to Christian students taking a gap year and wanting to go to the nations. Read Matthew 24:14.
3. This is a preaching or teaching to a Christian congregation: The resurrection body. Read 2 Cor 5:1-10 and/or 1 Cor 15:42-49.
4. An Easter Sunday message to your local Church: The resurrection of Jesus. Read 1 Cor 15:1-8.

### APPENDIX D:

#### Suggestions for further reading:

Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 1971, Hodder and Stoughton

Michael Eaton: *The Gift of Prophetic Preaching*,

[www.newwineministries.co.uk](http://www.newwineministries.co.uk)

Email: [newwine@xalt.co.uk](mailto:newwine@xalt.co.uk)

Michael Eaton: *The Power of Prophetic Preaching*, printed by Africa Leadership School, Pietermaritzburg.