

Studying and Interpreting the Bible

Before worrying about the information below, I can sum up the material this way: **Trees & Forest**.

- To interpret, we focus on details of the verse -- words and phrases. Do I understand the trees?
 - Then, we think about how the words fit within the Bible. Can I step back and see the forest?
 - ***Bible reading is a constant back-and-forth between the trees and the forest.
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Learning to Read the Bible - "You R.E.A.P. What You Sow" (Read, Examine, Apply, Pray)

*Read (or Listen) to the Passage

- Read the verses a couple of times. Read prayerfully, in a mindset of worship and expectation.

*Examine what the passage says.

- *Observation = What questions do I have after reading? What else do I need to know?*

1. Literature

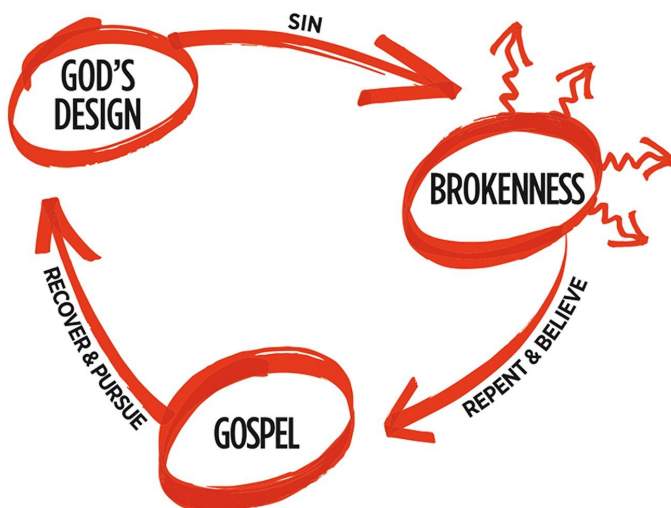
- a. Words - What key words (subjects, verbs, connecting words) do I see in this passage? Are there any words that I'm not sure what they mean?
- b. Phrases - How do the words connect together? What are the key phrases?
- c. Verses/Sentences - Do I see a certain pattern or flow in the sentences?
- d. Genre - Does the type of literature I'm reading impact the verses I'm studying? (Example - reading a proverb differently than a letter or a history section)

2. Culture/History

- a. Culture - What historical references (people, places) might be important?
- b. Answer these questions: Who? What? When? Where? How? Why?

3. Theology

- a. Scripture interprets Scripture
 - i. What connections do I see between this passage and other ideas/passages in the Bible?
 - ii. How does my passage fit into the big picture of God's Word?
- b. Gospel/Kingdom Themes
 - i. *How does my passage point to Jesus as the fulfillment of all Scripture?
 - ii. Look for elements of the 3 Circles --



- **Design** - What does this passage teach me about God? What does this passage teach me about people and the world?
- Where do I see **sin and brokenness**?
- Where do I see the **Gospel** at work in this passage? (What does this passage teach me about the relationship between God and people?)
- **Recover and Pursue** - What should we do as a result of reading this passage? (Focus not just on individual questions, but also questions about how we can live alongside one another and as part of the Church.)

- *Interpretation - Finding the meaning of the passage and sharing it with others*
 - **Paraphrase** - If I was forced to write this in my own words, what would it sound like?
 - Another tool is to write the opposite of the passage. Sometimes, by understanding the opposite of the passage (what it doesn't mean), it will get you closer to the actual meaning.
 - **Principles/Patterns**
 - Do these verses teach any core principles or patterns for living?
 - *One danger here is thinking that the Bible is simply a set of principles. Scripture doesn't come to us in bullet-point form, so we want to be careful about reducing it to a set of principles in our interpretation. Look for broad patterns.
 - **Purpose**
 - ***For me, this is the key = *What is the author's intended purpose and impact?*
 - This part of interpretation leads to the next step of application.

***Apply**

- How does this passage *impact my life*? How does this passage *impact the Church*?
- What should I *do (hands)*, *think (head)*, and/or *feel (heart)* as a result of reading this passage?

***Pray**

- Use the Verses to Guide your prayer. Pray the words back to God. Pray for courage to obey.
- Keep a Prayer List on Your Phone or in a Notebook.

Three Ingredients of Good Interpreters

1. Humble (Learn from Others and Remain Teachable)

- a. Historically
 - i. How have people before me interpreted this? What can I learn from them?
 - ii. *Use Commentaries and Books – get suggestions from pastors and other leaders
- b. Globally
 - i. How do believers in different cultures interpret this?
 - ii. Is there anything about my current situation that is skewing my interpretation?
- c. Local Church
 - i. What perspectives and wisdom can I gain from those in my local church?
 - ii. Do the pastors/elders in the church have a perspective on this passage?
- d. Other Christian Perspectives
 - i. How do Christians who disagree with me understand this passage?
 - ii. Even if I don't agree with their conclusion, do I understand their reasoning and understand why I am coming to a different conclusion?
 - iii. *In this step, we want to distinguish between doctrines of first importance that will ultimately form the boundary of Christian belief, and less clear doctrines which might cause disagreements but should not break our fellowship as believers.

2. Holy - a life of prayer, worship, and holy living is directly connected to interpretation

3. Hard-working - don't take the easy way out or give up; laziness and apathy aren't fruits of the Spirit; focus on faithful, consistent, lifelong growth in God's Word