



A Bible Study Resource

THE EXPERIENCE
COMMUNITY CHURCH

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Introduction

Our hope for this resource is that, if you do not know how to read and understand the message of the Bible (or are not confident), by the end of this, you will be encouraged and empowered to do so. It is not a comprehensive guide, but hopefully it puts enough tools in your belt to get started. Before we start on this, though, we will outline how best to use this resource. We designed it to be used in the context of community (like a Life Group) but to be useful and accessible for individuals as well. For the sake of argument, let's say your Life Group is going through one topic per meeting. A few days before you meet, listen to the podcast episode for that topic (links are available on the ECC app and website). Then, a few hours before you meet, read the workbook chapter for a refresher. During your meeting, work through the questions provided and any additional questions that come up. You can approach the podcast and workbook in any order that works best for you, but that is what we recommend.

Mission and Metanarrative

BIG IDEA: The Bible tells one cohesive story which every Believer should seek to understand personally.

SCRIPTURE: “All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

Before we learn the “how” of Bible study, it is important we remind ourselves of the “why.” If we fail to do so, when we encounter difficult passages, confusing instruction, or hard-to-read text, we may be tempted to say, “It’s not worth it.” Nothing could be further from the truth. If we truly love God as we should, as our greatest and only treasure, then understanding who God is should be among our greatest joys. If you love someone, knowing them more deeply makes you love them more. So, knowing more about God through what He has said will grow our relationship with God and help us love our neighbor better. Knowing God fulfills the Great Commandments!

Why Bother?

But why do we have to do it ourselves? If you go to church every week, you are already getting 4–5 sermons a month about God, and if you listen to Christian podcasts, read Christian books, and talk to Christian people, how much more could you need? It is not about more. It is about directness. If you love someone, you do not just listen to other people talk about them. Obviously, you listen to them directly and read what they have written! It is the same with God. We should not only want to know about God—we should want to know God. Studying the Bible, which He has given us through the inspiration of human authors and faithful preservation of human scribes, is the best way of doing that.

Approaches to Reading the Bible

That being said, not every Bible reading session needs to be an hours-long deep dive into Greek and Hebrew while surrounded by stacks of technical commentaries. There are different ways of reading the Bible that are appropriate for different scenarios. This guide is not comprehensive, but we will briefly discuss two good methods (devotional and exegetical) and one bad method (eisegetical). The first and most common method is devotional. Devotional reading is your typical daily reading where you crack open a Bible, casually read a chapter or two, meditate on it for a few minutes, and then go about your day. There is nothing wrong with that. It is a simple intake where you let God’s Word wash over you.

The only drawback to devotional reading is that it is hard to draw specific conclusions about the text you have read. If I flip to Psalm 137 for casual devotional reading, verse 9, “Happy is he who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rocks,” is going to leave me awfully confused. Understanding God’s purpose in difficult passages like this takes more than two or three minutes of self-reflection. It takes an intentional approach to studying.

Before we look at a good approach to studying, let’s look at a bad approach many people, intentionally or not, fall into. It is called “eisegetical” reading. The prefix “eis” is from a Greek preposition meaning “into.” So, eisegetical reading takes an idea you already have and reads it “into” a text. For example, when you only consider 21st-century connotations of the phrase “come out” and its relationship to sexual identity, Jesus telling Lazarus to “come out” will mean something very different to you than it did to Jesus. A better approach to Bible study is known as “exegetical” reading. “Ex” is another Greek preposition, meaning “out of.” In exegetical reading, you are drawing the author’s intended meaning “out of” a text. You begin with the question “What did the author mean by this?” rather than “What does this mean to me?” Mortimer Adler, author of *How to Read a Book*, said it this way: “Your success in reading [a text] is determined by the extent to which you receive everything the author intended to communicate.” This workbook introduces you to tools which help you understand what the author of a biblical text intended to communicate.

Mission and Metanarrative (Cont.)

Metanarrative

One of the most important tools for understanding an author's intent is context. The meaning of a word is clarified by the sentence, paragraph, chapter, book, testament, and canon it is in, in that order. The most immediate context, the text closest to it, is the most important for understanding that text. But there is a broader context that affects every word we read, and that is called the metanarrative or "big story" of Scripture. There are two main ways to break down the metanarrative. The shorter way is just four movements: creation, fall, redemption, restoration. The longer way is outlined below. But first, let's dig in to each of the four movements above. Creation refers to the act of God at the beginning of time to bring everything into being. All of creation was not only good, but very good, and without sin (Genesis 1–2). The fall refers to the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, which introduced sin and brokenness to the universe (Genesis 3). Redemption refers to the atoning sacrifice of Jesus, which made it possible for us to once again have a right relationship with God. Restoration is the end of all sin and brokenness in the new heaven and new earth at the end of time. This four-part structure of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration is a timeline on which every part of the Bible falls and also a set of themes which occur in every story, both in the Bible and our lives.

Now, let's take a look at the longer metanarrative of Scripture:

- Creation
- The Fall
- Flood/Rescue of Noah
- Era of Patriarchs
 - Abraham
 - Isaac
 - Jacob/Israel
- Israel in Egypt
- Exodus Wilderness Wanderings
- Conquest Era of Judges
- Israel as Kingdom
 - United Monarchy: Saul, David, Solomon
 - Divided Monarchy: Israel and Judah
 - Fall of Israel
 - Fall and Exile of Judah
 - Exiles Begin to Return/Rebuild
- Intertestamental Period
- Life/Death/Resurrection/Ascension of Christ
- Church Era
- Christ's Return
- New Heavens and a New Earth

Summary

- Everyone can and should study the Bible themselves.
- It is better to ask "What did the author mean?" than "What does this mean to me?"
- Every story takes place within the creation, fall, redemption, and restoration metanarrative.

Discussion Questions

- Why is it important to study the Bible for yourself?
- Among the three Bible study methods listed (devotional, exegetical, and eisegetical), which do you tend to practice most?
- Do you ever find yourself bringing non-biblical ideas into your study of the Bible?
- In your own words, what is the overall story of the Bible?
- How does understanding the metanarrative of Scripture help us as we study God's Word?
- Are you living each day like the story of the Bible is true? In what ways are you doing or not doing that?

Inductive Method

BIG IDEA: The best way to find the author's intended meaning is to observe, interpret, and then apply the text.

SCRIPTURE: "Be diligent to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who doesn't need to be ashamed, correctly teaching the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

The systematic approach we recommend for studying the Bible is called the "inductive" method. It is called inductive because there are two kinds of logic, or ways of determining what is true. Deductive logic figures out specific facts based on general principles. Here is an example of deductive logic: 1) All dogs have four legs. 2) Bert is a dog. 3) Therefore, Bert has four legs. As long as the principles you are working with are true, then deductive logic works great. But you may have already seen the potential problem. Have you ever met a dog with three legs? Is it no longer a dog because it has three legs? How does that affect our definition of dogs? Deductive logic breaks down when the general principles are not true. So, how do we build and test general principles? That is where inductive logic comes in. Inductive logic figures out general principles based on specific facts. In the example above, I may have met 98 dogs that have four legs, and two that have three legs. So, from all those specific facts and observations, I can conclude that most dogs have four legs.

Now, let's bring in a biblical example to show how this relates to Bible study. If I want to figure out what God is like (a general principle), then I need to start gathering specific facts about God. Let's start with a snippet of an out-of-context verse: "God is love" (1 John 4:16). While we know that specific fact is true, we may not have enough specific facts to start making general conclusions about God. In order to build a correct general principle, we need to take into account Acts 5 (the killing of Ananias and Sapphira), 1 Corinthians 6 (a list of those who will not inherit the Kingdom), and other New Testament and Old Testament passages which might challenge our idea of love. But when we observe all those specific facts (combined with a few thousand years of other Christians' insights), we can interpret them to mean, "God is perfectly and simultaneously love and justice." But how does that apply to our lives? One way is that we should demonstrate God's character to the world by being loving to those we meet and trusting that God will enact proper punishment on all those who mistreat us for loving them biblically. Do you see the flow in this example of determining what it means that God is love? We began by observing the text, interpreted it based on its context, and finally made an application from that interpretation. That method of observation, interpretation, and application is what is known as the "inductive" method.

Observation

The first step in studying the Bible inductively is, shockingly enough, to observe the text! Understanding starts with careful reading. This step is the simplest of the three, but that does not mean it is as easy as it seems. There are a few important principles to keep in mind during the observation step. The first is to make sure you are observing not just a narrow slice of text but the context it is in as well. How much context? Enough. The exact amount is going to vary based on what kind of text you are reading (more on this in the Interpretation section below), but a good rule of thumb is to read at least a chapter at a time. As you are observing a text within its context, you will want to have a few key questions in the back of your head: who, what, when, where, why, and how? Who is writing? Who are they writing to? What are they saying? When was this written? Where are the author and the audience geographically? Why was this written? How was this delivered? There are additional questions you could ask of a text in the observation phase, but these are good ones to keep in mind. Oftentimes, a good study Bible will answer these and more in the introduction for a book, so be sure to check there before you start speculating.

As you are reading a text, you might have preconceived ideas about what is important about it, but let the author tell you what they think is important. They will indicate what they think is important through things like repeated words and phrases. If they are saying the same thing over and over again, they are probably concerned to make sure you get it.

Finally, notice the connector words between phrases and sentences. An author will tell you about the relationship between two statements through words like "but," "therefore," and "for." These words are small, but they indicate important details about the argument, or line of reasoning, the author is laying out.

Inductive Method (Cont.)

Interpretation

Now that you have thoroughly observed the text in its context, it is time to start asking questions of the text itself. The most important question to answer is “What does the author intend to communicate?” There are a number of other questions that help us answer that most important question. Before we talk about those questions and how to find good answers for them, we need to emphasize something about outside resources. Do not be so worried about outside resources that you lose sight of the text of the Bible. There was a great meme one time about books theologians read. It was a pie chart, with 98% “Lots of books” and 2% “the Bible.” Do not let that be true of you. The author of a biblical text wrote enough for his original audience to be able to understand him and, with few exceptions, he wrote enough for you to understand him as well. So, when you have questions, look for answers in the text itself. The authors themselves probably answer your questions.

Now back to questions. What kind of questions should you ask of a text? Start with any part of the text that stuck out to you as unclear, confusing, or contradictory. The questions that are most interesting to you are a great place to start.

Now that you have great questions, where do you get great answers? As we said above, the text itself is the best place to get answers. Start by looking at the immediate context of the text—what came immediately before and after. They probably anticipate your questions or answer them shortly after. If that does not help, look at the whole book. If it is really a key theme, it is probably brought up multiple times throughout the book. Still wondering? Look at other texts that the author wrote. If it is a super important idea, they probably communicated it to several audiences. Still wondering? Maybe now you can start to bring in some outside resources. Start with the simplest and most direct ones, like the footnotes and introduction of a good study Bible. 95% of the time, you will have a decent answer by the time you take all of these steps. In the remaining 5% of cases, reach out to your church or use online resources you trust. Be wary of Google and AI results, as you do not know their perspective or goal.

Application

Now that you have carefully observed and interpreted the text, it is time for the purpose and pinnacle of Bible study: application. Now comes the “so what?” Just to emphasize the importance of application in the study process, let’s look at a definition of learning. You probably know at least one someone who “knows” a lot about God and the Bible but does not live like it. It is possible they have not truly learned anything at all. The Federal Aviation Administration, which has a vested interest in people learning to be highly effective pilots, defines learning this way: “Learning is a change in behavior as a result of experience.” That is a good definition for a lot of reasons, but especially because it emphasizes behavior change as the centerpiece of learning. So if you have a great experience studying the Bible (or reading this workbook!), but your behavior does not change as a result of that experience, then technically you did not learn anything. All that to say, you have to do something with the answers you come up with in the interpretation phase. If you have questions about how to do application well, refer to the application chapter in this workbook.

Summary

- Begin by observing the text. What is being said? Who is saying it? Who are they saying it to?
- Once you have read through the text and started asking questions, begin interpreting the text by answering any questions you have about the text.
- Finally, put the answers you have discovered above into practice in your own life. Interpretation is not finished until you apply it!

Discussion Questions

- What scares you about studying the Bible? How can you combat that?
- Why is it important to have a process for studying the Bible?
- Explain the inductive study method in your own words.
- Why is it important to study the Bible with the inductive method versus a deductive method?
- What is the danger of trying to apply a text without first working to interpret it?
- Why is it dangerous to ask, “What does this text mean to you?”
- What are some important questions to ask during the observation phase?
- What are some important questions to ask in the interpretation phase?
- What are some important questions to ask in the application phase?

Genre: Letters

BIG IDEA: Letters are highly structured, and each part tells you something important about the letter.

SCRIPTURE: “Though I have many things to write to you, I don’t want to use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to come to you and talk face to face so that our joy may be complete” (2 John 12).

For the next few topics, we are going to apply the general outline of the inductive method (observe, interpret, apply) to some of the most common genres in the Bible. These genres are similar to the various genres of movies, books, and music, in that you expect a similar feel and purpose from comedy movies, but you have different expectations of a documentary. In the same way, we should have different expectations of letters, poetry, and history. We will talk about each of those in due course, but right now we are going to hone in on the letters of the New Testament.

Structure

The first thing to know about New Testament letters is that they have a very particular structure, and each part has a particular role to play. For a modern equivalent, think about professional emails. If you are writing an email to your boss, you will put their email in the “to” line, write a short title in the “subject” line, convey your message in the body of the email, then wrap up with a final greeting and your signature. Because these elements appear every time and in a particular order, it is easier for you to read, write, and understand. If, instead, you put the subject in the “to” line, sign off at the top of the body, and paste the whole body in the subject line, the email would not even be sent, much less be understood. In the same way, letters in the ancient world followed particular rules so they could be sent, received, and understood easily.

A basic outline of an ancient letter looks something like this:

- Opening
 - Sender identifies himself
 - Letter recipient is identified
 - Greeting
- Body of the letter
- Closing

The opening of a New Testament letter tells you who wrote it, to whom they wrote it, and some of the key themes. Knowing the author and audience of a letter can help you place it in the proper literary and historical context. The literary context is the other letters that the author wrote. Paul, for example, wrote 13 letters in the Bible. So, while the best place to understand Romans is Paul in Romans, maybe something Paul said to the Galatians or Ephesians could help us understand Paul in Romans as well. The historical context applies to both the author and the recipients, but usually the recipients’ context is more significant. That is because the author is writing to an audience with a particular situation they are facing in mind. Most of the time, we can figure out what that situation is from the letter itself. This is called “mirror reading.” It is easy to overdo, but basically you look for frequent and unusual (for the author) themes to let you know a unique situation is being addressed with the audience. When it is not clear from the letter itself, your study Bible will probably fill you in on anything else you should know about the recipients’ life situation. Lastly, the opening of a letter will (usually) divulge some of the key themes. It is the author’s opportunity to set the tone for what is to come. For example, compare the openings of 1 Peter and 2 John:

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ:

To those chosen, living as exiles dispersed abroad in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient and to be sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ.
May grace and peace be multiplied to you (1 Peter 1:1–2).

Genre: Letters (Cont.)

The elder:

To the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth—and not only I, but also all who know the truth—because of the truth that remains in us and will be with us forever.

Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love (2 John 1–3).

Right off the bat, you can tell Peter is focused on obedience and salvation while John is focused on truth and love. So when you are trying to figure out what the main idea is in a letter, listen to what the author tells you is the main idea.

The body of a New Testament letter is where the author conveys most of their message. With a good English translation (like the CSB, ESV, or NLT), it is very straightforward and easy to understand. That is because the original author wrote to their original audience in a way that would be easy and straightforward for them to understand. On the road of interpretation, you might hit a few potholes, like idioms that do not translate well, but by and large, you should have a smooth drive. Your study Bible will help you navigate those last few obstacles.

Finally, in the closing of a letter, the author sends their final greetings and well-wishes. Oftentimes, they will also name-drop their companions who also want to say hi to the audience, or give credit to the scribe who wrote down the words the author spoke.

Summary

- The opening of a letter tells you who wrote it, to whom they wrote it, and some of the major themes of the letter.
- The body of a letter is where most of the communication happens. It was written to be plainly understood by its original audience.
- The closing of a letter is the author's last chance to send their greetings and the greetings of those who are with them.

Discussion Questions

- In what ways is modern communication (text, email, phone calls, etc.) different from or similar to ancient communication through letters? Does that affect the way we should read ancient letters like the ones in the Bible?
- Are there any passages in biblical letters you have found difficult? Does the information in this topic help?
- What is your favorite letter in the Bible? Why? What is the overall message of that letter?

Genre: History

BIG IDEA: Stories are typically descriptive rather than prescriptive, but they help us remember what God has done and commanded throughout history.

SCRIPTURE: “When your son asks you in the future, ‘What is the meaning of the decrees, statutes, and ordinances that the LORD our God has commanded you?’ tell him, ‘We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a strong hand’” (Deuteronomy 6:20–21).

The historical accounts in the Old Testament have been a major stumbling block for many people, both inside the Church and outside of it. Did these things really happen? Why are some parts so graphic and brutal? How could a loving God even allow, much less command, some of these things? And why are there so many names? It seems like faith would be a lot easier if we left the Old Testament at the Ten Commandments and then moved on to 1 Corinthians 13. But such a desire says to God, the all-perfect Creator and Sustainer of all things, “I wish you were different.” And to relegate God’s wrath to the Old Testament and God’s love to the New Testament splits God’s character in a way that does violence to the Old and New Testaments. We serve and study one God whose character never changes. So, in light of that, how should we approach the historical narratives in the Old Testament? In this topic, we will look at the unique role stories can play, how important context is, and how to derive applicable lessons from these stories.

Why Stories?

The purpose of the Bible is for all people to know who God is and how we are to live in response to that. It is a book whose message is not just meant to be read and checked off a reading list but retained and lived out. While there are some people who learn best from technical manuals and data charts, most people process and retain information best in story form. How many stories from childhood could you remember and explain right now if you had to? *The Tortoise and the Hare*? *Harry Potter*? *Green Eggs and Ham*? Odds are, there are a lot of stories you remember (even if it is not those), and you can probably even give “the big takeaway” for each. Slow and steady wins the race. Love is greater than hate. Try new things. Stories have a uniquely effective way of communicating complex lessons in a way that is easy to remember. Now contrast that with non-storied teaching. How much of the periodic table could you recite right now? Unless you are a scientist, probably not much. If you had to learn it at all, it was probably rote memorization, maybe aided by a jingle. If you had a test next week on it, you would have to study and study and study. But if I asked you right now to describe the plot of *Star Wars*, even if you have not seen it in years, you could probably get a lot further than with the alkaline metals of the periodic table. So the stories in the Bible, whether Genesis, Exodus, or Acts, help us remember and apply teachings of the Bible in a way that clicks.

Context: Historical and Literary

Before we get to memorization and application though, we have to begin with understanding the stories in the Bible. There are three main tools for doing that: literary context, historical context, and discerning between descriptive and prescriptive elements. In this section, we will hit the first two, and we will address the third in the section below. What do we mean by literary and historical context? Literary context is everything else in the story. Take the story of Joseph in Genesis, for example. The most relevant literary context is what precedes and follows it. The stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lead up to it, and the story of Moses and the Exodus builds on it. For example, it is hard, if not impossible, to properly understand Joseph’s refusal to sleep with Potiphar’s wife apart from Abraham and Isaac’s lack of fidelity, and it sets the stage for later references to Israel as unfaithful to God. Ultimately, every part of the Bible should inform how we read every other part (to varying degrees), but the most relevant parts are the closest parts. Historical context is everything else that is not inside the text. Sometimes it is tricky to figure out what historical context is relevant for the passage you are reading. For example, knowing the details of Lyndon Johnson’s election to U.S. President in 1964 probably is not essential for understanding the 1966 film *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*. But knowing a little about the Roman judicial system can help you understand why Paul appeals to Caesar in Acts 25:11. If you have a good study Bible, it will mention any relevant historical context and help you see how it affects the passage you are reading.

Genre: History (Cont.)

(Mostly) Clear Lessons

We still have not hit on what trips up most people in the historical narratives in the Bible: what to do with the parts that seem so awful. Passages abound, especially in the Old Testament, of heroes of the faith doing terrible things. Are we supposed to be like them in those ways, too? How can we tell the difference between the good, the bad, and the ugly? It takes discernment to figure out what is descriptive or prescriptive. By prescriptive, we mean that God, through the Bible, is saying, “Be like this.” Usually, this is clearly indicated by some form of affirmation, like in Job 2:10: “Throughout all this Job did not sin in what he said.” Sometimes when the Bible is condemning a particular action, it will be equally as clear as in Exodus 4:13–14: “Moses said, ‘Please, Lord, send someone else.’ Then the LORD’s anger burned against Moses.” If there is not a clear affirmation or condemnation, we have some interpretive work to do. The first question to ask yourself is “How does this fit with what I know the rest of the Bible to teach?” So when it comes to things like the polygamy you see kings in the Old Testament engaging in, how does that fit with what the rest of the Bible teaches about monogamy? If it does not fit, it is probably implicitly being condemned. On the other hand, if it does fit with what the rest of the Bible teaches, for example, Abraham’s servant praying for Isaac’s wife to be revealed (Genesis 24:12–14), then it is probably an implicit affirmation. That does not mean it is directly applicable to every circumstance (if you are single, do not start bringing camels to church to see who waters them), but there are general principles you can derive from it and apply to your life (pray humbly that God would grant you favor in the endeavors which you have taken on with wisdom).

Summary

- Stories can present the complicated nature of being a fallen person following a perfect God in a unique way.
- Understanding the full context of a story is especially important when it comes to reading history.
- When there is a clear lesson to be learned, the author usually points it out. If they do not, it is likely that they are just describing what happened rather than saying, “Be like this.”

Discussion Questions

- Would you learn more about a king by his rules and laws, or his interactions with his people? How is this similar to the narrative structure of the Old Testament?
- How are descriptive stories effective for teaching complex ideas?
- Why is understanding the full context of a story particularly important when reading history?
- Why is it important to identify “clear lessons” when reading historical events in the Bible?

Genre: Poetry and Wisdom Literature

BIG IDEA: Poetry uses metaphorical imagery to convey truth about God. Wisdom literature uses general principles, not exact promises, to communicate general wisdom.

SCRIPTURE: “My heart is moved by a noble theme as I recite my verses to the king; my tongue is the pen of a skillful writer” (Psalm 45:1).

Poetry and wisdom literature make a lot of exceptions to the general rules of biblical interpretation. They also have their own oddities, so they are worth discussing separately from the rest of the genres. What they do have in common with the other genres, though, is worth starting with. What matters most is what the author intended to communicate. The way they differ from the other genres is how they communicate that intention. With poetry, the author will almost exclusively use imagery, metaphor, and a rigid literary structure to get their message across. With wisdom literature, the author uses general principles and typical cause-and-effect patterns to guide decision making in normal circumstances. That means if we try to apply an overly simplistic “it means what it says” literalism to these genres, we will end up expecting a free trip to Saudi Arabia if we are a good electrician (Proverbs 22:29), or that God is a bird (Psalm 91:4), so let us look at some ways to better understand biblical poetry and wisdom literature.

Imagery

The first question we can ask of poetry is “Why did God bother with it?” Why would He not just say what He means? You could ask the same question of creation. Why would He bother with beauty? Would the world not be a simpler place if everything was the same? You probably already see where this is going. God created diversity so that we could see His beauty in part through the beauty of creation. Sunsets, paintings, and jungles are “unnecessary” if you think what is “necessary” is a clear and cold statement of fact. But they are entirely necessary for seeing the full picture of creation and God’s character. So when it comes to the imagery we see in poetic sections of the Bible, it is not that God is trying to confuse us or make us wonder what He really means. There is an intangible quality that cannot be reproduced in a scientific article with tables and equations. With that in mind, consider Psalm 91:4: “He will cover you with his feathers; you will take refuge under his wings. His faithfulness will be a protective shield.” God’s purpose in this passage is not for us to think that He is a bird-like iron shield. It seems like His purpose is to take something we know and understand, like how a mother bird protects her chicks, and how a shield protects a soldier, and use that as a way to describe and understand the nature of God.

Genre: Poetry and Wisdom Literature (Cont.)

Structure

Much like English-language poetry has some specific forms and rules to it, Hebrew and Greek poetry sometimes use structures that are not entirely familiar to us in the 21st-century Western world. So when you come across a passage like Proverbs 6:16, “The LORD hates six things; in fact, seven are detestable to him,” it is not that the author remembered a seventh thing after he already said six. The “X, X+1” format was just a common literary style in Hebrew poetry. So here are a few common formats of Old Testament poetry to keep in mind:

- Synonymous parallelism: the second line clarifies what is meant by the first line (ex. Psalm 52:8)
- Antithetical parallelism: the second line contrasts what is meant by the first line (ex. Luke 1:52)
- Synthetic parallelism: the second line builds on what is meant by the first line (ex. Luke 1:51)
- “X, X+1” poetic form: emphasizes a list of items (ex. Proverbs 30:18)
- Acrostic: each line of the poem begins with a subsequent letter of the Hebrew alphabet (ex. Psalm 119)
- Chiasm: a series of ideas which are repeated in reverse order (ex. Mark 2:27)

Summary

- While all biblical genres aim to convey the author’s intended message, poetry does so through metaphor, imagery, and structured literary forms, and wisdom literature provides general principles rather than exact promises.
- Poetic language uses familiar concepts to help readers grasp concepts that cannot be conveyed as effectively through direct statements.
- Poetry employs various literary techniques, such as parallelism, acrostics, and chiasms, which can shape meaning and should be considered when interpreting biblical texts.

Discussion Questions

- Can you think of a biblical or non-biblical example of a metaphor or image that helped you understand something you otherwise struggled with?
- Are there passages in the Bible where you are not sure if they are meant to be taken literally or symbolically?
- Do you have a favorite Psalm or biblical proverb? What is it that resonates with you?

Application

BIG IDEA: The most important part of studying the Bible is applying the teachings of the Bible to your everyday life.

SCRIPTURE: “But beyond these, my son, be warned: there is no end to the making of many books, and much study wearies the body. When all has been heard, the conclusion of the matter is this: fear God and keep his commands, because this is for all humanity” (Ecclesiastes 12:12–13).

The Pinnacle of Interpretation

Theology leads to doxology which leads to orthopraxy. Said in plain language, understanding who God is leads us to worship Him, which leads us to live in the way He instructs us. And as we said in the inductive method section, learning is a change in behavior as a result of experience. So, for this final topic, we want to focus on the role of application in biblical interpretation. Ultimately, all interpretation should lead to application. Otherwise, if our interpretation does not have an application, it is trivia at best and irrelevant at worst. Below, we are going to talk about a few tools that will help ensure we move from understanding to application.

Community

Being consistently involved in a long-term community and doing the work of biblical interpretation in that community has at least three benefits. First, when you talk about what you are seeing in the Bible with other Believers, or even non-believers, you will get fresh insights that will sharpen your own understanding, either by seeing where they are right or where you can help them. Second, you can live out the teaching of the Bible with the other people in that community. You can serve each other in times of need, and serve alongside each other when others are in need. Third, when people get to know you intimately over a long period of time, they can point out your blind spots. They can see how you interact with and talk about your family, for example, and point out how you have grown in that and where you still need to grow. And you can do the same for them as well! These are just a few of the benefits of doing biblical interpretation in a community rather than in isolation.

Application (Cont.)

Discovery Bible Study

Another helpful tool in moving from knowledge to application is a Bible study method called Discovery Bible Study or DBS. This is not meant to replace inductive study but to work alongside it. You can Google “Discovery Bible Study” for more details, but in short, DBS asks four simple questions of any Bible passage:

- What does this teach you about God?
- What does this teach you about people?
- How can you apply this?
- Who can you share this with?
- When you do this with a group of people, the key to long-term success is following up at your next meeting. For example: “You said you would share this with your brother. Did you do that, and how did it go?” Though it may seem simplistic, if applied over time, it leads to incredible breakthroughs, not only in your own life but in the lives of others as well.

Space

If you are struggling to find an application for a passage, a tool you could use is the acronym SPACE. By the time you have looked for any of these five things in a passage, you will probably have at least a few ways to apply that passage.

- Is there a Sin to confess?
- Is there a Promise to claim?
- Is there an Attitude to change?
- Is there a Command to obey?
- Is there an Example to follow?

Summary

Interpretation ends with application. If you have not answered “So what?” you are not done yet! Doing biblical interpretation in a community increases the likelihood that you will follow through on application. If you are stuck on how to apply a passage, the DBS and SPACE models can help.

Discussion Questions

- Why is Bible application about transformation and not just information?
- What does it mean to you for Scripture to be more about character formation versus circumstance manipulation?
- Reading and studying Scripture should always lead to worship of the Lord because the Bible is a book about God. How can you apply this to your Bible reading?
- What are some benefits of reading Scripture in community?
- How can you use your Life Group to share what God is doing in your life?
- How can you use the SPACE method to help apply the Bible to your studies?

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