

IN  **NEXT**
LEVEL

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Opening Thoughts

(1) Begin with the right goals.

- We cannot succeed in anything until we know what we're trying to accomplish.

- What are we trying to *do* when we read the Bible?
 - o Our goal in reading must be rooted in the kind of book the Bible is.

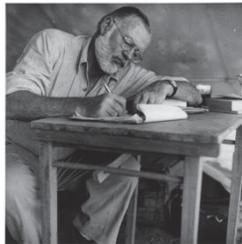
 - o The Bible is a living WORD (act of communication) from God to his people through his people.

- Therefore, our goal is twofold:
 - o *First of all, our goal is to discern the voice of God.*

 - o *Second, our goal is to discover the author's intended meaning.*

- Think about how communication works...

AUTHOR



TEXT



READER



- Who determines the meaning of a text?

- We pursue “exegesis” and try to avoid “eisegesis”
 - Exegesis = drawing meaning out of the text
 - Eisegesis = reading meaning into the text

- This is not separate from hearing God; it is *how* we hear God.

- We don't bypass the human author to get to the Divine author.

- *Our goal is to discern God's voice by discovering the author's intended meaning.*
 - o Put simply, we listen to God by understanding the text.
 - o 2 Tim 2.7: *Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.*

(2) Read with humility.

- Your character is just as important to understanding the Bible as your method.
- Technique is important but humility is paramount.
- The key character ingredient to reading well is “readiness to obey.”
 - o Psalm 119.60: *I will hasten and not delay to obey your commands.*
 - o Psalm 25.9: *He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way.*
- If you don't plan on heeding, don't plan on hearing.
- What this means in practice is, first of all, that we pray.
- And secondly, this means we *check our assumptions at the door.*
 - o We all have them, but only some of them stink.
 - No one comes to Scripture without assumptions.
 - Assumptions can either help or hinder faithful interpretation.
 - o What should we do with our assumptions?
 - Recognize... Become aware of what we think without thinking.
 - Evaluate... Think through how our assumptions hold up against the Bible.
 - Submit... Allow our assumptions to be confirmed or corrected by the Bible.
- Never underestimate the importance of letting Scripture tell you how it is rather than the other way around.

(3) Pay attention to the details. (Investigation)

- Like it or not, the Bible must be interpreted...
- We're taking common sense and applying it to Scripture.
- Remember our goal – to hear God by understanding the text.

- Good Bible study begins by reading the text closely with attention to detail.

- At this early investigation stage you are basically playing detective.

- What are we looking for? What are we investigating?
 - o Investigate what the words mean...
 - How do various English translations differ?
 - Where are the verbs and what are they doing?
 - Any metaphors or figurative language?

 - o Investigate how the words relate to one another...
 - Are any comparisons or contrasts being made?
 - How does the logic or plot move forward?
 - Any connectors like “if... then...” or “therefore...” or “because...”?

- Basically you do two things:
 - o Ask questions.

 - o Make observations.

(4) Discern the author's flow of thought. (Literary Context)

- We're going to play a little game.
 - o “Give him a *hand*.”

 - o “That's the largest *trunk* I've ever seen.”

- Without a context, words are meaningless.

- *Discern the author's flow of thought*.
 - o In interpreting texts, what we're talking about is typically called “literary context.”

 - o Literary context is the words and paragraphs surrounding our text.

- *This is the single most important aspect of sound interpretation.*

- Psalm 14.1 – “There is no God”
 - Ephesians 4.24 “Put on the new man”
 - Matthew 18.20 – “Where two or three are gathered, there I am with them.”
 - Philippians 4.13 – “I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.”
 - Philippians 2.12 – “work out your salvation with fear and trembling”
- So let’s get practical – what are you supposed to do?
 - *When studying individual verses, read the surrounding verses and ask how the context clarifies what your verse means.*
 - *When reading paragraphs or larger sections, ask how they relate to what came before and after.*
 1. Divide the text into sections (typically paragraphs or events)
 2. Summarize each section as best you can
 3. Look for connections
 - As we like to say at Ozark Christian College, context is king.

(5) Study the world behind the text. (Historical Background)

- We must understand and honor the way God chose to communicate.
- The Bible was God’s word to them before it became God’s word to us.
- And to do this, we’ve got to close the gap between them and us.
- How can you do this?
 - Increase your general knowledge of the biblical world(s).
 - *The Greco-Roman World* by James Jeffers
 - *Day of Atonement: A Novel* by David deSilva
 - *A Guide to the New Testament World* by Albert Bell
 - *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* by Everett Ferguson
 - *A Week in the Life of Corinth* by Ben Witherington
 - *In the Steps of Jesus* and/or *In the Steps of Paul* by Peter Walker
 - Watch documentaries or miniseries on ancient Israel, Egypt, Mesopotamia, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, or the Roman Empire.
 - *Identify and research* persons, places, events, customs, etc.
 - Inside the Bible itself

- Bible Dictionaries & Handbooks
 - *The IVP Bible Background Commentary* series
 - Study Bible Notes
- What to look for:
 - People (author, readers, relationship)
 - Places
 - Events
 - Cultural habits and assumptions

(6) Read each passage in light of Scripture as a whole.

- If you could only give someone three chapters of the Bible, what would they be?
 - What we're doing in this class is hardly new!
 - And virtually every "hermeneutical handbook" includes this principle.
- General Rules:
 - Interpret unclear texts in light of clear ones.
 - Don't ignore or disregard some texts to protect your misinterpretation of others.
- Question 1: What else does the Bible say about this?
 - Two kinds of "parallel passages" –
 - When an author quotes or alludes to another text.
 - When two texts talk about the same thing.
 - How to find them:
 - Cross-Reference Bibles or Websites
 - Concordance (search individual words)
 - Nave's Topical Bible (search topics or themes)
- Question 2: How do the two texts relate?
 - Harmony or tension?
 - If tension, how does it resolve?

- Question 3: How does this text point to Jesus?
 - o The whole Bible is about Jesus.
 - Matthew 5
 - John 5.38-39
 - Luke 24.25-27, 44
 - Hebrews 1.1-2

 - o We're not looking for Jesus instead of the original meaning of the text.
 - o Whatever is true, Jesus is . . .
 - Whatever is good, Jesus is . . .
 - Whatever is broken, Jesus came to...

 - o Ask how your text points to Jesus as Savior and Lord.
 - Jesus as Savior / receiving grace –

 - Jesus as Lord / living as disciples –

(7) Be sensitive to genre.

- Like in sports, we benefit by learning the “rules of the game.”

- All of the principles apply to each, but not always in the same way.

OT Narrative

1. Let the story draw you in. Pay attention to setting, characters, and plot.
2. Remember that God is always the hero.

OT Law

1. Purpose was to create and shape a peculiar people.
2. Ultimately the laws are rooted in who God is.
3. Many particular Laws do not reflect God's perfect will but his accommodating guidelines for people with hard hearts. (See Mark 10.3-12)

Poetry

1. Organized by parallelism, not rhyme (i.e. parallel in content, not in sound).
2. Designed to evoke emotion and to guide us in prayer.

Wisdom / Proverbs

1. Wisdom literature is designed to make you wiser by making you think.
2. Proverbs contains general truths, not divine guarantees.
3. Let other “wisdom literature” (like Job and Ecclesiastes) challenge Proverbs’ simplicity.

Prophecy

1. Be mindful of the intense, dramatic, and often figurative language.
2. Just as much (if not more) about the present as the future. Prophets announce God’s judgment on sin as well as hope for divine rescue.

Gospels

1. The Gospels center the church in the story of Jesus.
2. Get to know each unique portrait of Jesus while not losing sight of the whole.
3. Find yourself in each story.

Acts

1. Church continues the story of Jesus.
2. Wherever the Spirit leads, we fearlessly follow.

Letters (Epistles)

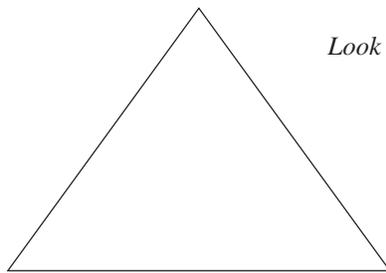
1. We’re reading one side of a conversation, and therefore historical context is huge.
2. The letters give us truth applied to real life situations.

Apocalyptic

1. Extremely high use of dramatic figurative language.
2. Blends theological and political concerns.
3. Speaks specifically to an original audience (churches in 1st Century Asia Minor).
4. The Point: Things are bad. Things are getting worse. In the end, God wins.

(8) Live what you learn.

- *Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. (James 1.22-24)*
- You have not finished studying well until what you have studied determines how you live.
- Spiritual maturity is never measured by how much you know, but by how well you live –
- The goal is always to “hear” the Word of God...
 - o Deuteronomy 6.4: *“Hear, O Israel, the LORD is our God, the LORD alone...”*
 - o (See also Deuteronomy 30.11-20; Matthew 7.24-27; John 14.15, 21; 1 John 5.3)
- The Basic Process:
 - o How did the text apply to the original audience?
 - o How is their world different from ours?
 - o How might the text apply to us today?



Look not to your own interests but others’

Wash one another’s feet

Don’t cook a young goat in its mother’s milk

- Here are some application questions to ask to guide your reflections:
 - o What is God telling me to start, stop, or continue?
 - o How does this text speak into different parts of my life?
- Lastly, distinguish between “degrees of certainty” in application.
 - o What is this text definitely demanding of me?
 - o What is this text probably asking of me?
 - o What is this text possibly asking of me?

APPENDIX 1: Commentaries

A “commentary” is simply a book written by a scholar that walks through the text commenting on each section or verse or word. Commentators are usually professionals trained in what I’m teaching you to do, and they bring a wealth of knowledge and skill to the task of interpretation.

Let me briefly unpack why to consult commentaries, when to consult them, and which ones to look for.

WHY?

At the end of the day, humility leads us to consult commentaries because we know we’ll never see everything on our own. But more specifically, we’re looking for four things:

1. Confirm, deepen, or correct our own interpretation.
2. Discover new insights we didn’t see on our own.

WHEN?

My opinion on when to read a commentary is betrayed by what I just said – I think you should do it after you have done some study work on your own. You will always get more out of reading a commentary if you’ve already studied the text yourself. Otherwise you won’t have much of a context for what it’s saying, and it’ll go right over your head. (Or just as bad, you’ll just accept someone else’s reading as perfect without discovering the Bible for yourself.) When you’re extra busy or if you’re brand new to serious study of Scripture, it is perfectly okay to read the text a couple times, get a general sense of what it’s about, and then bring in a commentary right away to guide your thinking.

WHICH ONES?

Generally speaking, commentaries can be divided into a few levels of length and intensity:

- Baby Bear – *For Everyone* series by N. T. (Tom) Wright and John Goldingay; the *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*
- Momma Bear – *NIV Application Commentary* series; *Paideia* series; Zondervan’s *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* series
- Papa Bear – *Pillar New Testament Commentary* series; *New International Commentary on the New Testament* series; *The New Interpreter’s Bible* commentaries

Hundreds of scholars write commentaries and many of them are quite good, but some trusted names to look for include Peter O’Brien, N. T. Wright, F. F. Bruce, John Stott, Ben Witherington, D. A. Carson, Craig Keener, Charles Talbert, and Richard Hays.

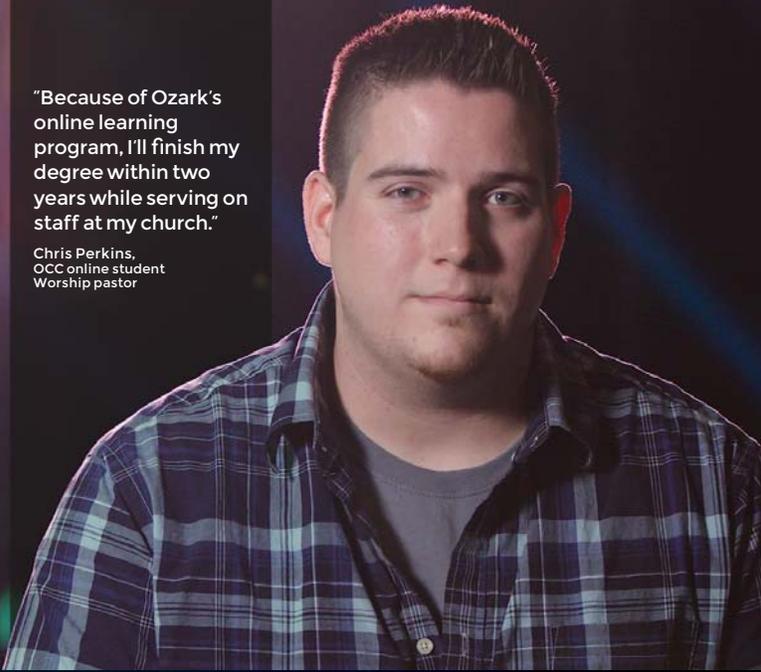
The rabbit hole goes much further, but this is plenty to get started!

APPENDIX 2: Bible Study Websites

- Blueletterbible.org
- Biblegateway.com
- Bible.org
- Biblehub.com
- Biblestudytools.com
- Openbible.info/labs/cross-references
- Lifejournal.cc
- NTGateway.com

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Chris Perkins,
OCC online student
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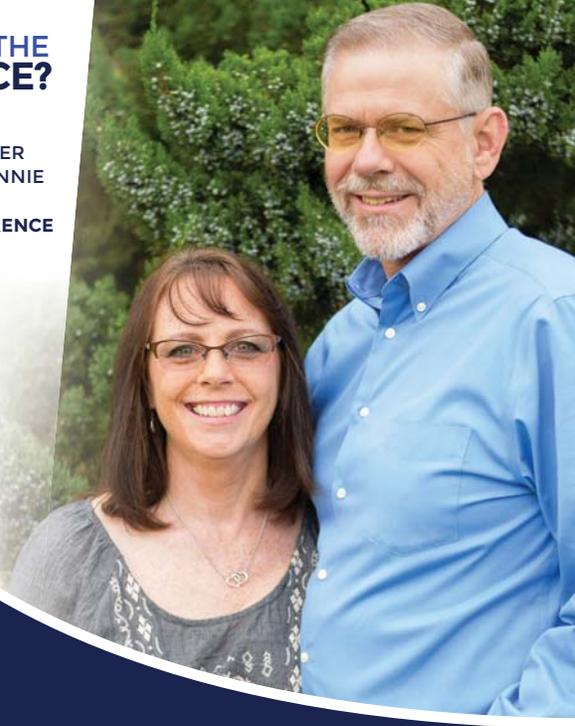
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