

7. EXPLORE/DISCUSS AND INTERPRET THE PASSAGE

Once you are through marking the text, it's time to reap the benefits. So, here is a proven way to personally explore and interpret the passage that will also generate productive discussion for groups. A series of steps will take you progressively deeper into the text—up to your eyeballs—and beyond. Go as far as you want to. Pause along the way or stop when you feel you've gone far enough. Come back later and dig some more.

But before you get started, keep in mind: many people confuse discussing what they already know about a subject, with learning. Eager to contribute something to the study, they share whatever they can associate with the topic rather than dig to find out more. So, discourage commentary—matching the passage with what you or the group have seen or heard about it elsewhere. And encourage interpretation—explaining the passage only and directly from—the words in it. Firmly insist that everyone should use the words in the text to explain their views.

1. *The simplest way to get the most out of your study up to this point is to collect all the items of the same color, and let them explain each other.*

The Law of First Mention

Seasoned Bible students refer back to the first time a term or doctrine is mentioned in Scripture in order to get its fundamental, inherent meaning. Other writers mention it again to quote, clarify or amplify it. Since writers repeat what they said before to explain more clearly the meaning of a previously mentioned term, consider the effect the repetitions have on its first mention. For example:

- All the orange terms from your TextSheet
 - **Yield** is the first term
 - ▶ **Do, obey, honor,** and **treat** explain and demonstrate what **yield** means
 - In fact, 5:21: “**Yield to each other out of reverence for Christ**” summarizes what Paul is about to say (Law of Summary) in all three passages about **each other**.
- All the red terms from your Textsheet
 - **Each other** is the first term
 - ▶ **Wives, husbands, children, parents, fathers, mothers, slaves,** and **masters** identify who must **yield** and to whom.

2. *Then, use the Expanded Bible helps embedded in [brackets] in the text to understand each of the terms.* Use a good English dictionary or Strong's Concordance to define words left unexplained, and a Bible Dictionary or Encyclopedia to describe people, places, and things unaccounted for by the **Expanded Bible**. Take notes in the **Note** column of the Textsheet and write out any conclusions drawn from the text in its **Flow** column.

For example:

- **Yield** means “subject; be subject” (an attitude)
 - **Do** tells us that the LORD expects the various groups to put that attitude into action
 - **Obey** means to **yield** to authority
 - **Honor** means to respect; so to **yield** means more than doing what you're told. It also includes the idea of admiring the one you **yield** to
 - **Treat** tells us that **yielding** is a considerate way of behaving toward others so we deal with them as we should

- **Each other**

You marked whatever was the same, similar or related to see how the writer connected two or more ideas, objects, or people. Write or type out what the writer said about all the groups who either **yield** or are **yielded** to—in the text. Line up the ones that resemble one another.

For instance:

- **Wives yield** to your **husbands as you do** to the **Lord**
 - ▶ A **wife** must **respect** her **husband**
- **Children, obey** your **parents as the Lord** wants
 - ▶ **Honor** your **father** and **mother**
- **Slaves, obey** your **masters** here **on earth**
 - ▶ With **respect** and from **a sincere heart**, just **as you obey Christ**

All three groups are told to **yield** to **each other** in the same they **yield** to **Christ**. That's because all authority comes from God, and resisting authority is the same as resisting God (Rom. 13:2). Unless wives, children, and slaves understand that husbands, parents, and masters get their authority from God, they will never recognize and submit to them.

Yielding goes beyond physically submitting to someone else's jurisdiction. It also takes enthusiasm and commitment. That's why Paul demands that **slaves**:

- **Do** your **work** with **enthusiasm, as** if you were **serving** the **Lord**, not people
 - ▶ **Do** this not only while they are **watching** you to **please** them
 - ➔ **As slaves of Christ, do** what God **wants** with **all** your **heart**

A **wife** must **respect** her **husband, children** should **honor** your **father** and **mother**, and **slaves** ought to **obey** your **masters** here **on earth** with **respect**—because they all need humble attitudes when they **yield** to **each other**. Regardless of who they are, all must submit to **each other** with the same genuine humility and willingness they normally show to the LORD. Otherwise how could **wives yield** to your **husbands** in **everything** unless they do so **as** the **church yields to Christ**?

These same principles operate in reverse for the ones **yielded** to. It turns out that **wives yield** to **husbands** because **husbands** inspire them with **love as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her**. **Children obey parents** because their **fathers do** not **make** them **angry**. Instead, they ignite obedience **with the training and teaching of the Lord**. And **slaves obey masters**, not because they have to, but because rather than threatening them, **masters treat** their **slaves as** if they are **serving** the **Lord**, not people.

Just as the three passages began with a summary in v.21, they also end with a summary that ties them all together:

- The One who is your **Master** and their **Master** is in **heaven** and He **treats everyone** alike. The **Lord** will give a reward to **everyone, slave** or **free**, for **doing good**.

Whoever does the right thing, whether they **yield** or are **yielded** to—can expect a reward (*give back* or *pay back* exactly what they deserve) from the LORD, because they did it all to the **Lord**. Everyone must live the part God has given them, **as Christ** would. Whether we do or don't, He holds us all accountable and will eventually settle accounts with us.

For some, the **Expanded Bible** helps are enough. But for those who want to dig deeper, here are some *additional* tools for burrowing into the text.

3. *Look for ways the passage before leads into and prepares the way for the one you want to study*

- Look for something bigger than the words you already marked—like people, patterns, lists, events, or actions:
 - That *start* in the first passage and *continue* in the next
 - That *end* the first passage, then *start* the next
 - That are the *same, similar, or related* in both passages

For example:

- ▶ The passage before, *Husbands and Wives* (5:21-33), ends with the thought: a **wife** must **respect** her **husband**.
- ▶ Our passage, *Children and Parents* (6:1-4), begins with the thought: **Children**, **obey** your **parents**
 - ➔ Paul sums up the first passage with **respect**, a feeling of admiration—then begins the next with **obey**, calling for submission to authority. So, **wives yield** to **husbands** because **husbands** earn their **wives'** admiration with Christ-like **love**—while **children** and **slaves** (in the next passage), carry out the wishes of **parents** and **masters** who respect God's authority. Raising **children with the training and teaching of the Lord**, shows **parents yield** to God's authority as much as **masters** who refrain from bullying **slaves**—based on God having the last word.

4. **Prepare sheets of material related to your passage from the IVP Bible Background Commentary and/or Handbook for Bible Study.** Explore or discuss your passage based on insights from either or both books.

IVP Bible Background Commentary

[Eph. 6:1-4] *“At the same time, children were often taught through beating, which was standard in child rearing and education; fathers were considered responsible for their education. Paul is among the minority of ancient writers who seem to disapprove of excessive discipline (6:4). (Greek and Roman society was even harsher on newborn children; because an infant was accepted as a legal person only when the father officially recognized it, babies could be abandoned or, if deformed, killed. Early Christians and Jews unanimously opposed both abortion and abandonment. This text, however, addresses the discipline of minors in the household.)”*

Paul orders Christian parents to challenge the world's way of raising kids by letting the LORD who never takes discipline too far—train and teach their children through them. To emphasize this novel approach to child-rearing, Paul contrasts it with the usual method that goes too far and makes children angry. In a similar way, masters must not go too far, threatening their slaves. They must remember, while they rule on earth, the Master in heaven still has the last word.

Handbook for Bible Study

“...concern for shame and honor governed just about all relationships. People either acquired honor by what they did, or others ascribed it to them for who they were. “Honor,” says Malina, “is the value of a person in his or her own eyes . . . plus that person's value in the eyes of his or her social group. Honor is a claim to worth along with the social acknowledgment of [that] worth” (The New Testament World, p. 27). Honorable people, then, not only considered themselves worthy of honor, but the community also agreed with them and treated them accordingly.

“Consequently, one who is in [ancient Near Eastern] society depends on his honor rating, which situates the person on the status ladder of the community” (ibid., p. 28). [That's why a person's reputation for managing his household well—with children who respected and obeyed him—was the consummate qualification for an elder, 1 Tim. 3:4, 5]. The community, however, had only so much honor to go around. So individuals engaged in a frequent tug-of-war (as Malina calls it) when it came to honor and shame.

The ancient Near East considered honoring the honorable a social duty. More than a breach of etiquette in the eyes of the community, failure to do so virtually robbed honorable people of

what they owned or had earned. Obviously, then, the command to honor one's parents is much more than a demand for obedience on the part of children. Disobedience in our culture may connote a refusal to accept the authority of another, but in the ancient Near Eastern world, honor (which may have involved the issue of authority) went a whole lot deeper than that.

Ancient Near Eastern people constantly defended themselves against dishonor in their highly stratified society. Under no circumstances would they permit themselves to suffer shame in the presence of social inferiors—something like not losing face among modern Asians. They also divided honor along male and female lines corresponding to family roles (husband, wife, children) and created a double standard.

“Honor has a male and a female component,” says Malina. “When considered from this perspective, the male aspect is called honor, while the female aspect is called shame” (*ibid.*, p. 48). Shame in this context refers to a person's sensitivity to what others think, say, and do with regard to his or her honor. This distinction derived from physiological and spatial considerations. Females maintained their sexual purity and the honorable reputation of their husbands by “thwarting off even the remotest advances of their symbolic space” (*ibid.*, p. 43).

So, respect for husbands represented admiration based on recognition of who he was and what he provided for his wife. Disrespect for a husband would have cast doubts on who or what he appeared to be and robbed him of his honor or standing in the community. In the same way, disobedience would have questioned a father's qualifications or parents' worthiness for honor from the community. That's why Solomon warns: “Children who mistreat their father or chase away their mother are an embarrassment and a public disgrace” (Prov. 19:26). So, Paul's call for respect and obedience meant a lot more than harmony at home. It challenged the Ephesians to maintain the honor families needed to represent the LORD and win people to Him.

5. Check the NET Bible for insights into the language of your passage to get a better sense of what the writer says and means.

Ephesians 6:4

7 **tn** Or perhaps “Parents” (so TEV, CEV). The plural οἱ πατέρες (hoi pateres, “fathers”) can be used to refer to both the male and female parent (BDAG 786 s.v. πατήρ 1.b).

Most Bible versions translate this “fathers,” as though only men disciplined children. But, the NET Bible points out that literary evidence from Paul's time also supports translating the plural “fathers” as “parents.” Paul did mention both “father” and “mother” in 5:31, clearly distinguishing one from the other. Some might consider the quote, “the two will become one body,” from Gen. 2:24, an argument for “parents.” But the fact that Paul distinguishes a man and a woman as “husband” and “wife,” argues strongly for separating “fathers” from “mothers.” In fact, Prov. 1:7 separates fathers from mothers, saying: “My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother,” and Eph. 6:4 does talk about instruction. In the ancient world, the father traditionally applied the finishing touches to a child, based on the foundation (or, Law) laid by his mother.

6. Compare your passage with verses listed in the margin of your Bible. Since Bible writers built on the thoughts of those they quote, refer to, or mention, they can explain what one another say and mean. Before you try to explain or clarify your verse with another, ask yourself:
 - Are the *main* items (people, places, or things) *the same* in both verses?
 - Do the *main* items perform, permit, or receive the *same* actions?

If the verses pass *both* tests, they have an *inspired* connection engineered by the Holy Spirit and you can safely explore links between them.

For example:

The **Expanded Bible** suggests that 1 Peter 3:1-6 is linked to Ephesians 5:24.

1 In the same way, you wives must accept the authority of your husbands. Then, even if some refuse to obey the Good News, your godly lives will speak to them without any words. They will be won over, 2 by observing your pure and reverent lives. 3 Don't be concerned about the outward beauty of fancy hairstyles, expensive jewelry, or beautiful clothes. 4 You should clothe yourselves instead with the beauty that comes from within, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is so precious to God. 5 This is how the holy women of old made themselves beautiful. They trusted God and accepted the authority of their husbands. 6 For instance, Sarah obeyed her husband, Abraham, and called him her master. You are her daughters when you do what is right without fear of what your husbands might do. (1 Pet. 3:1-6)

Verses 1 and 2 sound almost identical to 5:24 and 5:33, challenging wives to yield to their husbands, with respect for God. These are the same three personalities mentioned in 5:24. Paul says essentially the same thing when he calls on wives to respect their husbands (5:33), but to yield out of reverence for Christ (5:21), as the church yields to Christ (5:24). The three personalities in 1 Peter perform, permit, or receive the same actions as they do in Eph. 5:21-33. So, 1 Peter 3:1-6 definitely has an inspired connection to 5:24. With that in mind, explore the connection for insights into what 5:24 means.

Yielding to a husband has a powerful influence on him—not by building up his ego, but by pointing him to Christ. Christian women who submit to their husbands rely on what God is doing inside of them, rather than cosmetics, jewelry, hairstyles or fashion to make them beautiful for their husbands. Sarah obeyed her husband, calling him her master in Gen. 18:12; and women are true daughters of Sarah—cut from the same cloth as her—if they always do what is right. Based on this concept, Paul explained to Ephesian wives that Christ gave Himself for the church to present her to Himself, “like a bride in all her beauty, with no evil or sin or any other wrong thing in it, but pure and without fault.” So, a wife is most glamorous when she lets Christ make her beautiful. By yielding to her husband, she permits Christ—the Amen, the faithful and true witness—to testify to her husband. No other evidence of salvation could be more powerful or persuasive than that.

Let these demonstrations of what you can do with a few simple study tools serve as examples to follow. After a few attempts, you will gain expertise and develop interpretive skill with them. In time, texts will regularly surrender their deepest truths to you.

Where to Find More Information

People are always asking, “Where did you get that?” referring to lingual, historical, and cultural insights that we present during our online studies or in our books. Here is an alphabetical list of recommended resources with our favorites in grey letters.

STUDY BIBLES

- The Holman Illustrated Study Bible (Introductions; no commentary)
- The Quest Study Bible (No Commentary)
- The KJV, NIV, or NASB Study Bible (Introductions plus commentary)
- The Life Application Bible (Introductions plus commentary)
- The Newberry Bible (Soon to be, The QuickStudy Inductive Bible)
- The New Interpreters Bible (Introductions plus commentary)
- The Open Bible (Introductions plus commentary)
- The Reformation Study Bible (Introductions plus commentary)
- The Spirit of the Reformation Study Bible (Introductions plus commentary)
- The Starting Point Bible (Simple introductions plus Key verses and words on every page)
- The TNIV (The NEW New International Version) Study Bible (Introductions plus commentary)