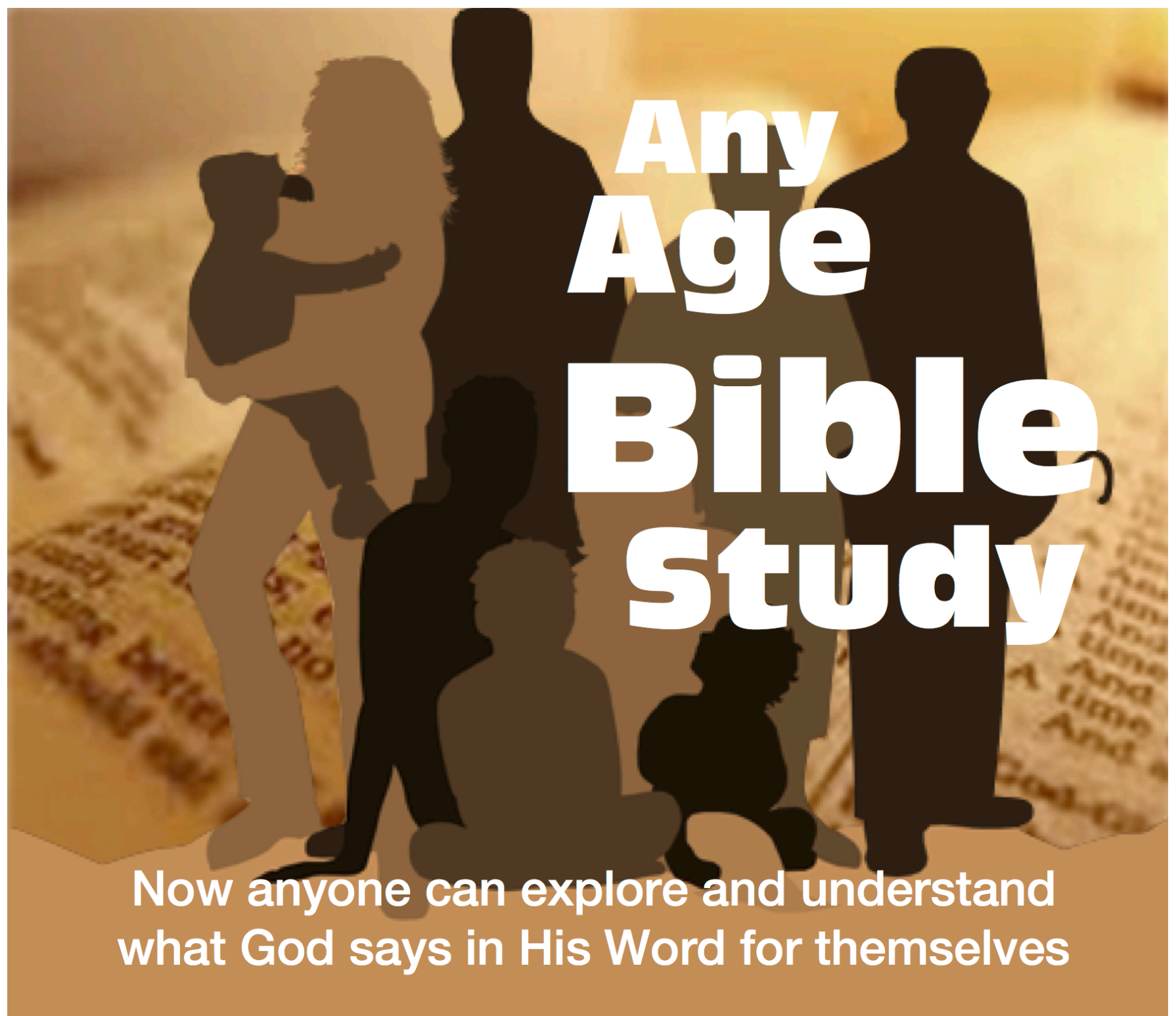


Lee Gugliotto, Ph. D.

Sitting at Jesus' Feet



ALONE. AS A FAMILY. AS A COUPLE. AS A CLUB.

Introduction



Where do we start?

Do you play football? The Green Bay Packers do; they're a professional football team. Once, when they lost a game they should have won, their coach--Vince Lombardi--called a special team meeting.

The team expected Coach Lombardi to scold them for playing so bad, but he didn't. Instead, he said, "We must get back to basics." Then he shocked everyone by picking up a football and telling them, "Gentlemen, this--is a football!"

As Coach Lombardi showed his team the basics of football, so they could play their best., this book will show you the basics of Bible study, so you can study your best. Before we go any further, then, let's start at the beginning: "Boys and girls, this--is a Bible."



What is a Bible?

A different kind of book

It comes from God

Before the Bible, people learned about God and the world from nature:

The countless stars at night, the blazing sun rising and setting every day across a huge sky, convinced them that an impressive God **created** everything

The many types of animals, trees, plants and flowers appearing in all sorts of sizes, shapes, and colors showed God's **great imagination**

The way the earth comes "back to life" in the spring, after nature appears to "die" during the fall and stays buried throughout the winter showed God's **awesome power**

But, people needed to know **more** about God and their world than nature could tell them. So, God did something wonderful: He used a bunch of guys in beards and sandals to tell the rest of the people what they still needed to know.

Here's how He did it:

First, God told or showed the Bible writers something to share with others

Then, the Holy Spirit guided the writers as they used their own experiences, education, and personalities to put God's thoughts into words

Like the apostle Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is inspired by God." So, the driving force from start to finish—God—is behind every word we read in the Bible. That's why we call the Bible—**God's Word!**

It took a long time to write

The Bible was not a rush job. God worked with 40 different writers over a period of 1800 years to produce the Bible. God wrote the Ten Commandments on clay tablets—while the human writers wrote on small sheets of dried papyrus plants or long scrolls of animal skins from sheep, goats, and cows.

It has two main sections

The **Old Testament** comes first:

- It has 39 books
- It took around 1700 years to write
- It was written in the Hebrew and Aramaic languages
- It covers the history of God's people from the creation – to 432 years before Jesus
- It prepares us for the **New Testament** by setting the stage for Jesus to arrive

Christian versions have **four main parts**

1. The five books that **Moses** wrote about the beginning of the world and the birth of God's people

Genesis Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy

2. The books about **Generals, Heroes, Heroines**, and **Kings** that describe the ups and downs of Israel in the Promised Land

**Joshua Judges Ruth 1, 2 Samuel 1, 2 Kings 1, 2 Chronicles Ezra
Nehemiah Esther**

3. The books written by **Poets** and **Smart Guys** to show that God can answer any questions we may have about life

Job Psalms Proverbs Ecclesiastes Song of Solomon

4. The books of the **Prophets** that pointed Israel to Jesus and the awesome future God planned for them

Major Prophets [major only because they wrote longer books]

Isaiah Jeremiah Lamentations Ezekiel Daniel

Minor Prophets [minor only because they wrote shorter books]

Hosea Joel Amos Obadiah Jonah Micah Nahum

Habakkuk Zephaniah Haggai Zechariah Malachi

The **New Testament** comes next:

- It has 27 books
- It took around 100 years to write
- It started, spoken in Aramaic, then was written in Greek
- It covers the birth of Jesus, His life and ministry on earth, His death, burial, and resurrection, and the ministry of His followers
- It picks up where the **Old Testament** leaves off and finishes the story of God and the kingdom that started in the **Old Testament**

It also divides into **four main parts**:

5. The **Gospels** that announce the birth of Jesus and tell His life story from four different angles

Matthew Mark Luke John

2. The **History Book** that describes the birth of the church and tells the amazing story of the first Christians

Acts

3. The **Epistles** or **Letters** that explain how to live the life Jesus won for us on the cross--every day

Romans	1,2 Corinthians	Galatians	Ephesians	Philippians
Colossians	1,2 Thessalonians	1,2 Timothy	Titus	Philemon
Hebrews	James	1,2 Peter	1,2,3 John	Jude

4. The last book of the Bible, the **Book of Revelation**, that shows how God's people who are suffering today--still win in the end

Revelation

Jewish versions have **three main parts**

Consisting entirely of the **Old Testament**, Jews call their Bible, "TaNaKh" blending the first Hebrew letter for each section into a single word:

1. "Ta" stands for the Law, the Torah, or Five Books of Moses
2. "Na" stands for the Nevi' I'm, or Prophets
3. "Kh" stands for the Ketuvim, or Writings

New Testament writers and speakers abbreviate "the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings," as simply, "the Law and the Prophets" (Jesus in Matthew 7:12, 22:40 and Luke 16:16; John in 1:45 of his Gospel; Luke in Acts 13:15; and Paul in Romans 3:21). Though they share the same books, TaNaKh differs from the Protestant Old Testament in the

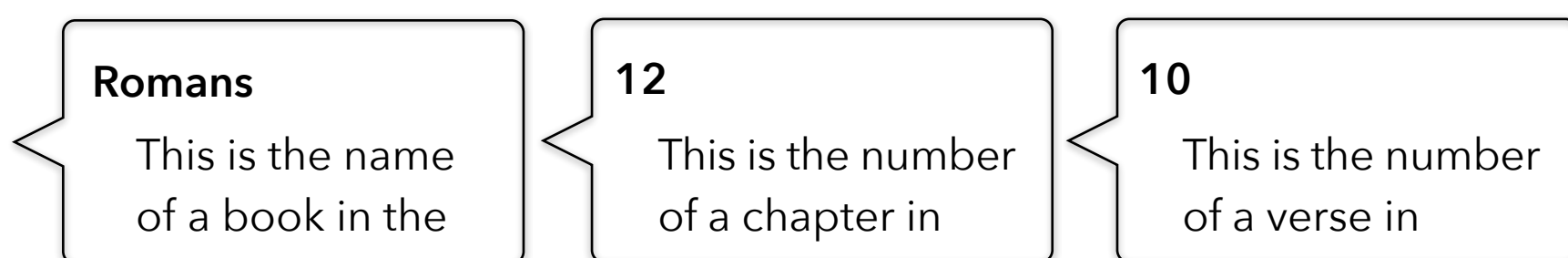
order of the books, the numbering of some verses, and its emphasis on the LORD as both Creator and Redeemer.

It shows where you are

The Bible has its own system of coordinates--like a map does. When you want to look up something in the Bible or tell someone else where to find something in the Bible--all you need is its **chapter** and **verse**!

For example, suppose someone asks you to look up **Romans 12:10**; what should you do?

Step number one is--to find out, "What does **Romans 12:10** mean?"



So, if someone asks you: "**Look up Romans 12:10,**" they're really saying, Go:

- To the **New** Testament
- To the book of **Romans**
- To the **12th** chapter of Romans
- To the **10th** verse of chapter 12

Whenever you look up a reference in the Bible, here's what to do:

- Identify the **Testament**, **Old** or **New**, that contains the book
- Go to the **Testament** that contains the book
- Go to the **book**
- Go to the **chapter** of the book
- Go to the **verse** of the chapter...and you are there!

A word about translations

One of our colleagues brought up a valid point during an online study: it is unsafe to tamper with the *original* words of scripture - but that doesn't apply to its translations. Uninspired versions of the Bible, like the KJV, or King James Version, do not share the same sacred status as its original documents. Unlike the *original* authors who composed their writings under direct divine influence, translators simply select what they consider the best English word to represent the *original* Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek word in the *inspired* text. More or less educated guesses, they frequently choose different ones to carry out the same job, so that rival translations of the same text aren't always the same.

True, we do not have any of the *original documents*, but the *original* language *manuscripts* we do have are far closer to them than any twice removed translations. Fainter echoes of the autographs than the manuscripts, translations are actually interpretations of the *originals* that vary based on the theology, education, and perspectives of all too human scholars. As a rule, liberal thinkers take unwarranted liberties with the text, presumptuous minds usually treat assumptions like facts, and culture-driven advocates typically slant the text toward their agendas.

In addition to these differences, translators also approach their task from either a word-for-word or thought-for-thought point of view, dividing them into two mutually exclusive camps. Word-for-word supporters simply *reword* the text, reproducing the exact same words of the source in the target language, while thought-for-thought advocates see their task more as bringing out the meaning of the text with as many words as it takes to get the job done. For example, notice how stiffly the KJV renders Genesis 1:5: **"And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day"** compared to the dynamic impression of what happened at that historic moment according to the New Living Translation: **"God called [to] the light, 'Day', and [to] the darkness [He called] 'Night'."** The NLT certainly captures the Creator's thrill at recognizing the dark and the light for what He made them to be!

While formal versions may bear a stronger resemblance to the original, duplicating in English and the same order, the words of the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek text, dynamic ones are just as faithful to the originals because they aim to capture what the writer said, idea by idea, without changing any of their meaning. Consequently, most people have less trouble understanding wordier, dynamic translations than verbatim, formal ones.

Understandably, the safest and surest way to examine the Bible is in the original languages, prayerfully and carefully examining God's Word in its native Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek. As natives naturally have a better grasp of a language than foreigners, so whoever works with the Bible in its *original* languages has the advantage over those who rely on translations. 1Corinthians 6:15, for instance, ends with the literal expression, **"May it never be!"** While you can look up the individual words in a concordance, that won't be enough to grasp its full significance. An idiom, or group of words natural to a native, it derives its meaning from the way it was used rather than from its words. That's why the KJV translates it, **"God forbid,"** and the Expanded Bible, **"Never,"** explaining that it actually means, **"Absolutely not!"** At the mercy of imperfect interpretations and their attendant problems, "biblical tourists" often settle for less than the original languages have to offer.

Translations, for instance, often rely on the same English word to translate different Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek ones so you can't always tell the original word the writer or speaker uses from its English translation. So, the word **"know"** translates four different Greek words in the New Testament:

1. ginosko - knowledge grounded on personal experience
2. eido - knowledge from insight
3. epistamai - knowledge from comprehension or acquaintance

4. suniemi - knowledge gained through the five senses

Unless you look up the original language word translated by “**know**” in your English version of the Bible, you will never be sure of what it means from the translation, alone.

What’s more, each of the ancient languages also follows its own system of principles and processes to express thoughts or feelings and convey ideas and provides information unavailable to those unfamiliar with Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Action words, for instance, may stress the action, the subject, or an agent who acts on the subject, and use continuous, point, or completed action, sometimes with lingering results, based on facts, possibility, or probability. Case in point: the word “**wept**” in John 11:35 where the young apostle captures Jesus about to have a good cry. Instead of catching Him in the act of crying - at one with the crowd that mourned for Lazarus, the word translated “**wept**” snaps a picture of the Savior at the moment He suddenly and unexpectedly “**burst into tears**,” reacting to the plight of a crowd of spiritually dead people oblivious to their own tragic condition. Remember how He calmly and apparently unemotionally described what had happened to Lazarus to His disciples earlier in the chapter (6:1-6)? Well, on His way to the cross to die for the sins of those gathered at Lazarus’ home, the irony of it all overcame Jesus. He then resurrects Lazarus, not for the love of a friend, but to demonstrate to the crowd that He has the power to raise anyone from the dead who is on friendly terms with Him - whether “dead because of their disobedience and many sins” (Ephesians 2:1) in this life, or in the grave awaiting Him to “raise them up on the last day” for the life to come (John 6:44). So, instead of highlighting Christ’s compassion, the text underscores His unique awareness of the mystery of inquiry - how sin has damaged us all! While everyone else focused on Lazarus’ death, Jesus saw past the funeral to His cross and crucifixion.

So while you may look up English words from your translation in Strong's Concordance to get their original language meanings, you will still miss the deeper insights from knowing their languages. Someone might say: “But that’s what commentaries and dictionaries do.” Even so, relying on man-made resources to show us what we can’t find ourselves leave us dependent on others instead of the Holy Spirit - a dismal alternative to actual Bible study. On the bright side, English study built on sound principles of interpretation, though prone to manipulation and restricted by its obvious limitations, may still produce worthwhile results. Regardless, learning how the biblical languages work will dramatically improve your studies.

But, a word of caution: rather than selecting a definition from the concordance that suits your theology or agenda, jot down the root idea of the word from which the Bible gets its definitions. The root idea is the truest sense of a word and definitions are merely expressions of it generated by context. Strongs identifies this core meaning before the colon (:) that separates it from definitions derived from it. So, instead of latching on to a convenient definition, let the context explain itself to you. Listen to the people, places, and things in the text as they use the root idea of the word. Allow them to teach you what the author meant when he used it.

To interpret a word, then, look it up in Strong's Concordance and jot down its original, core concept. Starting with this root idea, let the context have the last word on what it means. Incidentally, for those of you who want to become more proficient interpreters of God's Word, we currently offer a no-grammar Hebrew/Greek class. Stripping them down to the basics, we simply explain how biblical languages work so you can analyze and understand any text without getting bogged down in heavy details. We'll equip you to get close enough to the truth in the text to tell it from the counterfeit.



What is Bible Study?

Not what you'd expect

Now you know what a Bible is and how to work with it – but you still need one more thing before you can study the Bible: you must know what **Bible study** is.

What it's not

Some people would rather visit the dentist than study the Bible. Just the words "**Bible study**," give them a big, red, itchy rash. If you ask, "**Why?**" some of them might say, "**I'm too tired and can't find the energy to study,**" or "**I'm too busy and can't find the time to study.**" What they really, mean to say is, "**I haven't got a clue how to study.**" In fact, most people don't even know what Bible study is!

- Some people consider Bible study a **lecture**. They think they need **teachers to explain the Bible to them**. That's because they rely on other people too much and can't study the Bible for themselves any more. All they get is bits and pieces that are as plain as the nose on their face. The deep stuff is over their heads, unless they can get somebody to explain it to them.
- Others consider Bible study a **research project**. They think they are supposed to **figure out what the Bible means**.

What it is

Actually, Bible study is **spending time with God, allowing Him to explain what it means**. You see, God speaks to us through the Bible: its words speak with His voice. This book will show you how to make **God** your teacher, so you can learn the Bible--directly from Him. Think about it. You won't have to rely on other people, anymore: you can have God all to yourself - every time you open His book!

What it is for

People have many reasons for studying Scripture, from gaining personal knowledge to going one up on others who challenge their beliefs. The fact is, Bible study brings us together with the LORD, as a family - with one hitch: how do you study with children without watering down the experience?

The concept of family appeals to virtually everyone - even in the secular world. Take for example, the Fast and Furious franchise, one of the most successful movie ventures, ever. 16 years and 8 films later, the series has "thrived by steering away from the first three films' narrow focus on street racing and urban car culture in the U.S., which appealed to a limited audience, and reframing the series as stories about a close-knit team that pulls off daring heists around the world." As Troy Craig Poon, president of director Justin Lin's production company, Perfect Storm Entertainment told Variety's Marc Graser: "think what people resonate with in "The Fast and the Furious" is these characters become a family, an unconventional family. People from around the world can't wait to see this non-traditional family come together."

The family concept overrides the lawlessness of the franchise characters, or so says Donna Langley, co-chairman of Universal Pictures: "while "Fast" has evolved into a legitimate action franchise, "what's unique is that we've maintained the heart and soul of the original film - a movie about family, people with a code and characters that are archetypal even though they're anti-heroes and on the wrong side of the law."

In a secular world that tries to imitate the church, the Christian community has lost sight of what it means to be a family gathered around God's Word, seeking advice together from our Heavenly Father. Most households divide Bible study in two: one for adults and another for kids, without realizing the harm this does to a family. Laboring under the misconception they can teach the Bible to underage children, parents unwittingly expose

them to truths beyond their capacity to understand. Filtered by their undisciplined minds and unbridled imaginations truths emerge as childish impressions. I recall my own inability to deal with the word, "Colossians," morphing it into "Galoshans," to fit the image it triggered in my head. When my mother read the letter that Paul wrote to the Colossians, I envisioned him speaking to rows of rubber boots!

Instead of explaining texts to children, expecting them to grasp even some of their meaning, parents should generate interest in God and His Word, as early as possible, or so Moses recommended to God's people as they prepared to enter the Promised Land. He called on mothers and fathers to "***teach diligently*** [what God commanded them] ***to your children***" (Deuteronomy 6:7). Normally, the Old Testament uses one of two other words to describe the role of parents in passing down God's instructions to their children: yara, "to point out" or lamad, "to goad, or train." But the word translated "teach" here, essentially means "to whet," to excite or stimulate - in this context - the child's desire, interest, and appetite for God and His Word.

Since the children in the context of Deuteronomy 6 rely entirely on their parents, either talking with (v.7) or asking (v.20) them for information about spiritual matters, this appears to be the goal of instructing children who cannot educate themselves. So, spiritual education of children divides into two phases - before and after they can read.



Educating Children before They Can Read

Deuteronomy 6 is a virtual mission statement for parents of pre-school children. It lays out a detailed plan of action for them, starting with their attitude toward the LORD God and His commands.

Attitude

According to v.5, before parents can get children interested in God, they must have a great personal interest in God, themselves. The verse advises them to, “Love the LORD your God with all your heart.” This is the foundation for true obedience of His commands, because they must also make His orders a matter of the heart rather than the head (v.6). In the same way, the first four of the Ten Commandments explain how to love God, before the last six describe how to love our neighbor.

Method

A favorite in both the Old and New Testaments, repetition saturates young minds with information, embedding images as it corrects former misunderstandings. So, Moses recommends repeating them over and over at every opportunity to the kids, “talking about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you go to bed and when you get up” (v.7). This 24/7 lifestyle in public as well as behind closed doors implies a heartfelt commitment to God’s Word, consistent with verses 5 and 6 and leads us into verses 8 and 9.

Example

Many church-members can recite scripture, quoting it word for word; but few actually live it – the next requirement of parents raising children for the LORD. Moms and dads must “practice what they preach,” backing up what they say with a consistent example worthy of imitation. So, v.8 calls on parents to let God’s commands control the way they act and think. In this way, children can see for themselves, the relation between God’s Word and behavior as the outcome of a mental process. Gradually, they realize that God expects them to carry out His instructions just like their moms and dads.

But, it is not enough to make the process of heartfelt obedience come to life. Parents must also show their boys and girls how to live for God wherever they are, any time of day. That’s why Moses warns parents to let God’s Word guide the way they live at home or away from it (v.9a), and to demonstrate the same loyalty to scripture at the end of the day as when it began (v.9b). Children may not have the ability to read books, but they can read people. They notice disconnects between what we say and how we act, as well as whether or not we are consistent. Attempts to excuse ourselves only tears us down in their eyes. Worse yet, they resent demands to do what their parents will not.

Opinions

Opinions reveal the truth about us, far better than our words or actions. Based on the way we look at things and relate to reality, unguarded views expose who we really are and reveal the true value we place on our so-called values and principles. Moses mentions two: the LORD God and His Word.

The LORD God

So, if we want to interest our children in the LORD and His Word, we must fear, or respect Him so much, we would never serve anything or anyone else (v.13) and resist the urge to worship any of the gods, or idols of our neighbors (v.14). What’s more, you must never ask God to prove Himself (v.16). For all your claims to love God and His Word, a lack of respect for Him will give you away as a slave to self, an enemy of God, and headed for destruction (v.15).

God’s Word

Equally important to this mission is your true opinion of what the LORD has to say. We must not become like Saul who modified God’s instructions instead of carrying out what he was told. So, Moses tells us to diligently keep God’s commands (v.17) in order

to do them (v.18). The word “keep” means “to guard, or reserve,” just as we say we put things in the refrigerator to “keep, or prevent them from decomposing.” Building on 4:2 where he defined “keep” as, “Neither add a thing to what I command you nor subtract from it, so that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God,” Moses says “keep” God’s commands in order to “do” them, because we must take God’s commands just as He gives them – without alteration – in order to carry out exactly what He says.

Taking into account what Moses said earlier, only a love for God deep enough to cherish His Word in your heart will overpower urges to modify what God says. Counting on this phenomenon, Jesus said, “If you love me keep my commandments,” (John 14:15). In contrast to Jewish slavery to the Law, Jesus stresses God’s desire for obedience based on love. He wants parents to demonstrate compliance with God’s commands based on a warm parent-child relationship with Him. Children should obey because they “want to” rather than “have to.”

Opportunity

The Bible teaches us to wait for God to open doors rather than impetuously invading others’ space. So, for example, Paul delayed his return to Corinth because God opened a “wide-door” of evangelistic opportunity in Ephesus [his way of saying God gave him divine permission to win souls there] in spite of human resistance (1Corinthians 6:9). Even Jesus, “stands at the door and knocks,” waiting for us to willingly open it and let Him in (Revelation 3:20). Even so, many parents still barge into children’s minds and force ideas on them. No wonder kids resist and often reject what their moms and dads tell them.

The same God who opens doors for Gospel ministry outside the home, also creates opportunities to reach children in it. The repeated reference to parents with the word, “you” in Deuteronomy 6, makes it clear that God expects them – rather than pastors, school teachers, or other church leaders – to personally educate their children in spiritual matters. Read the chapter for yourself and list everything He wants “you” to do.

Case in point. Throughout North America, children taught by their parents know scripture better than those who rely on professional educators and Bible classes. Following the disappointing results of the first Valuegenesis report in 1990, the Seventh-day Adventist Church beefed-up ministry to young people, even rewriting Bible lessons for youth of all ages. Those who responded ten years later to the follow-up Valuegenesis questionnaire did show a greater faith maturity, but admitted that they spent less time reading their Bibles. In other words, they were able to repeat what they were told by the church – through its revised lessons – but they didn’t get it from the Bible. What’s the difference as long as they get it,” you may ask. Only this: secondhand information from others can never replace firsthand experience with the source.

It may amaze you to know, kids who learned scripture at home spent more time in God’s Word than those enrolled in SDA schools. Despite earning a grade in Bible as part of

their daily curriculum, they treated Bibles like their other textbooks, setting them aside over weekends, refusing even to take them to worship. It seems that kids persuaded against their will are of the same opinion still. Unlike professionals, parents educate children 24/7 with the necessary reinforcement of their lifestyles, etc.

To counter the effects of being told about God whether they are interested or not, Moses advises eager moms and dads to wait till their children *ask* questions about God's instructions - *before* they remind them of what God has done for His people since the beginning (verses 20-23). When kids voluntarily break the pane of resistance to know what you have to share with them, explain that God expects them to study His Word and live by it, so He can continue to bless and keep them His people, as He has done for faithful others up to the present time (v.24). Love for God and His Word are signs of a true relationship with God and real respect for His Covenant (v.25). That's another reason why Jesus told His disciples: "If you love me you will keep my commandments" (Jn. 14:15). As the Net Bible says: "Obedience is the proof of genuine love."



Secrets of Successful Pre-School Education

When Jesus called His disciples, He wasn't looking for employees, puppets, or gofers. Though rightfully their Master, He preferred to call them "friends", and told them, "everything the Father told me" (John 15:15). Doesn't it make sense, then to follow His lead, and view your children as *equals* rather than *subordinates* as you pass on whatever the Father has revealed to you. Instead of *apprentices*, treat them as *classmates* in the School of Christ.

You see, unlike Jewish disciples who mastered their rabbis and went on to start schools of their own, no one ever graduates from the School of Christ or stands in His place (Matthew 23:8, 10). In fact, any attempt to claim you have - will only lead to rebellion. After all, even the most respectful children still resent living up to the expectations of someone who is less than perfect. To avoid the trap too many parents have fallen into, let your children know that Christ is the **ONLY** Teacher and both you and they are His students. Explain that you are still learning from Him and invite them to join you in His

class so you can learn together. Then, wait for opportunities to pass on what Christ has taught you when they ask questions or turn to you for help. Study, pray, and practice your faith shoulder to shoulder to serve and enjoy God hand in hand.

From the main ways to draw children's attention to God, here are a few we have tried and recommend:

Attention Getters

Recitals

Read to your children from the Bible, not to commit the stories to memory, but to draw them into its action. Using thought for thought rather than word for word translations, help them to see God through the eyes of the writer and characters. Urge them to experience God like the men, women, and children in the text. Show them the blessing of a relationship with the Almighty, and expose the desperation of trying to live without one. Instead of clueless memorization, aim for curious recognition of the story and a desire to know more about God.

Sing-a-longs

Music has a way of getting through to children like nothing else. According to Google, *"The playing and listening to music have positive effects on the brain.... Music activates several regions of the brain, including auditory, motor, limb and emotions. The emotional and cognitive benefits of music are due to these activations."* So, pick songs that kids can identify with and instead of the lyrics, focus them on the spirit of each tune. When you sing, "Father Abraham," for example, help them to feel like one of the great patriarch's descendants, marching through this world on their way to the Kingdom. Guided by the One who sees and knows everything, they follow a path unknown to everyone else. The One who loved them enough to die for them will lead them by the hand to His Father's house where they will live forever.

Plays

Nothing enables children to experience Bible texts better than dramatic exercise. Playing biblical characters permits them to act the part and identify with scripture's heroes or villains. Instead of telling them about who they portray, let them feel what it is like to be that person. They will gain a sense of walking with or without God, of living with or without hope, of knowing grace and mercy or futility and condemnation. A skit based on Romans 7, for instance, will give a child firsthand familiarity with the hopelessness of dealing with sin. Failing to stop itself from doing bad, or to make itself do good has the potential to point the child to God for help, as it did, Paul.

Promises

From an early age, children look forward to the fulfillment of the good things their parents tell them will happen. If these projections fail to come true, they feel disappointment and grow resentful toward the moms and dads they believe let them

down. Salvation takes trust in God and confidence in His promises. You must show them that God always keeps His word, that more than forecasts of what may or may not come about, His promises are guarantees of what must happen. Use this format to describe biblical prophecies, especially about the Savior – from OT predictions *about* Him to the incarnation of Him. Don't forget to include His unselfish journey to the cross, the grave, and the right hand of God – for our sakes.

Make sure they understand that God let nothing stand in the way of keeping His word – giving up His only divine Son to rescue them from a world doomed to disappear and take everyone with it – and deserves their tireless trust and confidence. As Moses said, we must always tell our children that everything God did in the past, He did for them. This adds depth to His love, intensifies His faithfulness, and personifies the whole history of salvation. Jesus did agree to die for us before the foundation, or beginning of the world (Revelation 13:8), came at just the right time to give His life (Romans 5:6), and rules on our behalf until death is defeated and God grants us immortality (1Corinthians 15:54).

Role Play

What better way to help children experience the Bible than to have them interact with you and others to acquire the skills, traits, and attitudes of Bible personalities. Acting out or performing the part of speakers or characters in the text is a way to train and acquaint them firsthand with God's expectations and the consequences of carrying out or contradicting them. According to the Corporate Training website: "*In training scenarios, the principle applied is: I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand.* Role play makes sense of theory. It gathers together concepts into a practical experience."

Role play can either lay a foundation for learning, or seal a learning experience. Instead of tying together facts or recommendations, role play enables children to put principles and precepts into action by emulating role models who exemplify them. Introduced to what you want them to assimilate, you will find it easier to reinforce lessons by showing them other characters who either agree with, contradict, or incorporate some of the desired traits. In the same way, role play can help kids sum up what you have shown them, so you can assess how well they understand texts.

What better way to point kids to Christ or to help them understand the plan of salvation than for them to pretend they are a sacrifice or a piece of sacred furniture, or to act out the ministry of the priests, Levites, and the High Priest – in a life-size sanctuary? Let them step in Christ's ascended shoes to see the difference between His Melchisedek and Aaron's priesthoods.

Prayers

Many believe that prayer changes things, as if God can't act without advice or prompting from us. But the truth is, God already has a plan and is the only One smart

enough to come up with and carry it out. Though He intervenes supernaturally at times, prayer usually changes people who then bring about changes. So, instead of praying for God to change others, it's best to pray for Him to change you so you can become a factor in changing them. As the HealingIsYours website remarks: "He [God] is all-powerful and He is able to bring answers to your prayers. It is He who will enable you to change your circumstances, your relationships, and your attitudes." Case in point: the son of a famous evangelist overheard his frustrated dad pleading with God for the wisdom to end the boy's rebellious ways. Impressed by his father's sincerity and trust that God had the answer, the lad went off to pray for himself, changed, and grew up to succeed his pop in the ministry.

At the heart of prayer is the relationship with God. One of the most potent ways to practice His presence in your life and world, prayer develops faith in God. The Healing Is Yours website goes on to say: "God wants you to trust Him and to take your eyes off the circumstances of your life. By reading, memorizing, and repeating the words of the Bible (the Word of God) your mind will be renewed and your life will change. Yes, prayer changes people. As you meditate upon the Word of God, you will sense His presence, and in His presence there is fullness of joy and there are pleasures forevermore. Therefore, let me encourage you to pray on a regular basis. Just talk to God and let Him talk to you. As you learn to agree with God's Word in your praying, you will experience unity with Him, and you will be able to live in His kingdom of love and joy on a daily basis."

Don't forget to model your reliance upon God for your children with frequent displays of prayer. Pray in every circumstance. Invite them to join you in prayer – for them, others, or situations they consider urgent. Consistently offer or encourage them to ask you to pray. Turn your prayers into conversations with God – talking *with* rather than *to* or *at* your Heavenly Father – and your child will find it easier to start praying with you, and ultimately graduate to praying on his or her own.

Service

One of the most effective ways to train children for the LORD is to involve them in service. If you want the kids to serve the LORD, then get them started working for Him. Our own children were never closer to God than when we included them in our work – like the time we launched a massive prison ministry for our congregation. Though only 10 to 12 years of age, we took them with us to visit and interact with inmates in person, and urged them to take collect calls from those who phoned for help. You should have seen them searching their Bibles for texts to offer godly advice, as well as leading murderers, robbers, and other assorted tough-guys in prayer. Their spirituality hit an all-time high, the Mt. Everest of mountaintop experiences with God.

To succeed at what they do for God, children will have to lean on Him. As they learn to rely more on the Almighty to help others, they will also grow more dependent on Him for themselves. Service will improve their personal relationship with God, each other,

and with you. Instead of a boss/employee connection with you, and a coworker mentality among themselves, service provides opportunities to become a team that answers to God. In fact, supporting each other, parents develop a healthier bond with children when they forge a triad together with God. As Solomon explained: "Two are better off than one...Three are even better, because a triple-braided cord is not easily broken" (Ecclesiastes 4:9, 12). Give it a try. Believe me – it works!

Games

Ministry takes a terrible toll on a pastor's family. Ask my wife. Along with the hurt, she'll also remind you of what we did to counter the wear and tear of dealing with other people's problems as well as our own. *Family Game Nights* enabled us to build relationships, connect with our children, make memories, have fun, and learn in the process – in spite of the wounds we experienced healing others. According to the My-Little-Poppies website: "Children are doing so much more than simply having fun when they are engaged in play. Playing games works on a host of skills, including:

- *Verbal communication*
- *Self-regulation*
- *Turn-taking*
- *Sharing*
- *Listening*
- *Cooperation*
- *Focus and attention*
- *Following directions*
- *Creativity*
- *Social skills*
- *Learning to handle wins and losses*
- *Cognitive skills such as counting, color/shape/pattern recognition, strategy, problem solving, early literacy, etc."*

Rather than some frivolous option, "Play is the science of childhood. Children learn how to navigate their world through play. And, when parents play *alongside* their children, they have the opportunity to work on those precious social skills *while having fun*. Playing a game presents many opportunities for teachable moments *and* you are building relationships and making memories in the process! While direct instruction of social skills has its place, there is something to be said for the hands-on, experiential learning that playing games together provides."

Of course, you can't ignore the subjects of the games you play with your kids, because they will slip under the radar, land in their minds, and influence what they become. So, avoid secular and always play spiritual, Bible-based games to have the best effect on your child's development. Either purchase the commercially produced versions or

come up with your own - based on scripture. Whichever you choose, the kids can't lose! Everyone wins!

Models

When God wanted to live among His people to prove His love and demonstrate His commitment to them, He ordered Moses to build a sanctuary. Because it also pointed to His Son and His saving ministry in the remote future, the structure sported details known only to Him. So, He commanded, "You must build this Tabernacle and its furnishings exactly according to the pattern I will show you" (Exodus 25:9). To make sure craftsmen constructed it to His exact specs, the LORD showed Moses a scale model of the final plant and insisted that it turn out *exactly* like its 3-D miniature. The LORD knows that a precise physical representation beats blueprints every time.

The same is still true for your children. Instead of dry texts, try using interesting models to help the kids see rather than imagine the ark full of animals, or visualize the priests at work in the sacred courtyard, or picture that fateful day at Golgotha. As an added stimulus, let the youngsters help you make the models using the Bible text for step-by-step instructions. Not only will biblical models replace secular decorations in their rooms, but as long as those replicas last, they'll have graphic reminders to explore firsthand for more insights that can also correct as well as refresh their memories.

Show and Tell

One of the greatest skills you can help children to develop is the ability to go from biblical principle to real life. Unfortunately, only a handful of Christians can transition from words on a page to reality. So, here in North America, many teachers have adopted a teaching tool called, "Show and Tell," to help students merge the classroom with the world in which they live. Setting aside a time each day for this exercise, teachers encourage young children to bring items they have selected to class and describe them to their classmates. I personally hated to let a day go by without showing and telling something to the other kids in my school.

Ask your children to show and tell the family about someone or something that reminds them of the Bible. They can clip it from a magazine, snap a picture with a smartphone, download it on their computers, or even bring physical objects to the Family Altar and explain its resemblance to persons, places, or things in scripture. This will help them to view the world from a spiritual point of view and to recognize the impact the Bible has made on the world. Practiced daily, connecting scripture with everything around them may even become a way of life. Pray for it!

Visual Aids

Preschoolers listen more eagerly when visual aids illustrate what the Bible says. Seeing what they are told makes it easier for them to identify what they hear and helps build the vocabulary they need to penetrate the text and become part of what's happening in it. Avoid interpretive materials that slant the text toward opinion and stick with those

that simply illustrate what the text says. Try not to transplant your beliefs in the child. Instead of using movies, pictures, felts, or other clever devices to drive them toward your or other’s conclusions before they have the tools to analyze and evaluate the text for themselves. Instead, let the Holy Spirit guide them to an inspired perspective from which He will enable them to see the truth of it when they naturally acquire the maturity and tools to decode what they read, connect/compare its contents with what they already know, and think deeply about it.



TAG DESCRIPTION	
LINKS	Words that set up a comparison, contrast, or connect persons, places, or things
PERSONS	Human or divine beings
PLACES	Physical or abstract locations
THINGS	Material objects, animals, ideas, inanimate entities
EMPOWERING WORDS	Words that give person, places, and things what they need to play their part

Educating Children Who Can Read

Before anyone can truly study the Bible in the conventional sense, they need to know two things: (1) how to read, and (2) how to understand language.

What it means to read

The *Oxford-American Dictionary* defines “read”: to look at and comprehend the meaning of (written or printed matter) by mentally interpreting the characters or symbols of which it is composed. But, in its basic sense, readers simply recognize words and remember what they mean. At first, we know letters by sight, remember how they form words, and recall what each word means. Then, over time we learn to grasp what groups of words

mean – from a sentence to a paragraph until we can work with Bible texts one passage at a time. To understand God’s Word, we must take on these groups of sentences/verses that talk about the same person, place, or thing and serve as the basic unit of Bible study.

What it means to understand language

Essentially, language is a system of communication based upon words and the formation of words into sentences. Grammar, another name for the system, studies both the forms that words take and the ways we arrange them. Whether spoken or written, we have the ability to combine individual words into an infinite number of sentences that talk about virtually anything and everything.

Though today’s schools teach grammar as early as the first grade, kids still have a difficult time mastering the fundamentals of language until they reach the sixth grade. While pre-schoolers identify what they hear with certain meanings, it takes time for them to match meanings with the forms of words that writers, speakers, and actors use to share information. With the help of a good dictionary, children can eventually decode any sentence if they know the way each form functions to contribute something to the whole thought.

Alas, any attempt to have children do this before they have the tools and maturity for it may prove disastrous. Working with an incomplete apparatus for understanding is just as harmful as tackling a text short of all the facts. You may say, “We already know what’s right and we will see to it that our children adopt our correct beliefs,” but childhood is not a time for indoctrination, though many parents believe it is. They subscribe to the view that they and the church must work together to save their children. Others take the stance that only Christ saves and do everything they can to connect their child directly with the Savior. Regrettably, too many parents rely on their church to hold their kids to what they told them during their formative years, instead of enabling youngsters to embrace truths for themselves that will last a lifetime.

A surprising number of church members believe salvation comes from belonging to a church, attending it faithfully, and living by its teachings. This institutional point of view distorts the way they look at the Bible and practice what they think it teaches. So, for example, many accept the prevailing view that Proverbs 22:6, “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it,” means that sons and daughters will miraculously return to what their parents told them as children. So, they “get their licks in early,” bombarding a captive audience of children with cherished beliefs, counting on the church to resume and finish their work later when the child comes back to the congregation.

But more accurately translated, “Get a child started in the way he should go and when he grows old he will still be walking in it,” this text promises that boys and girls who truly convert during childhood remain believers for the rest of their lives. While many parents blame the world, most children defect to the world when they grow up because their parents taught them what to think instead of who to believe in. Attachment to teachings cannot match the power of a spiritual bond to Jesus. On top of that, they compound the

problem by confusing a return to church with going back to Christ, relying on membership in the church in place of a personal relationship with Christ to save their children. That's why families generally protest "cleaning [their children's names from] the [church] books" after years of absence from church life. Wrongly likening church membership to salvation, many parents equate removal from the church register with giving up on their kids – despite the admission by most church leaders that joining a church does not mean you belong to Christ.

In one denomination, when asked about the spiritual condition of its members in 1893, a church leader candidly replied: "It is a solemn statement that I make to the church, that not one in twenty whose names are registered upon the church books are prepared to close their earthly history, and would be as verily without God and without hope in the world as the common sinner." In other words, less than 5% of its members had a relationship with Christ that would survive their death. Yet, parents in that religious group still cling to the false hope that should their wayward children start attending church again, they will make it to heaven.

When the Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved," they replied: "Rest your faith entirely on the LORD Jesus Christ, and you will be saved along with everyone in your household" (Acts 16:30-31). You see, people don't join the church to get saved, but because Christ is already saving them. That's why Protestant churches used to call themselves "meeting houses," places where believers merely gathered for prayer, study, and worship. So, instead of bombing young children with your beliefs to control their early thinking, hoping your church will preserve that mindset, get little ones into a relationship with Christ as early as possible and the bond with Christ should last as long as they live.

Understanding language without grammar

To get children started at the earliest possible age, don't wait for them to develop enough competence at grammar to study the Bible. I mean, even college students still struggle with parts of speech. Why, to some of them, a gerund is just a kind of noun that looks suspiciously like a verb!

You can get the same results by switching to a simpler system that kids can master sooner than the tougher traditional parts of speech. While we will provide more practical details later, here, for now, is the way we have children ages 5 and up label what they find in the text. Instead of eight categories, we use only five tags: *links*, *persons*, *places*, *things*, and *empowering words* to identify what's in the text. In a nutshell:

You don't have to be a rocket scientist to recognize and identify these five types of words in scripture. Kids are already familiar with them and require little training to employ this simple terminology. The entire quintet of virtually turnkey markers is ready for their immediate use.

Tips for studying with children

In her lone literary effort, "I Remember," Christian author Vetriss A. Arnold recalls studying the Bible as a child. She writes: *"I remember going to Bible study with my sisters. I loved going because we would always learn things about God, Jesus, and what the Bible said. ...We could walk to Bible study because this lady that lived around the corner from us held it at her house. I usually skipped or ran because I wanted to be one of the first ones there....There were lots of children and some of us would always have to sit on the floor. But we didn't care. We are just glad to be there. Her house was always warm, and sometimes we had hot chocolate, and sometimes we had cookies....I vaguely remember her using a felt board that was used to display Bible figures or certain scriptures. It was so cool because stuff seemed to stick to it like magic. Nothing ever fell off, and everyone in the room could see. She told stories and read to us from the Bible. We got to ask questions and sing songs, too....This woman always welcomed us in her house. It was like we were all her children and she was happy to see us. She was so kind....the Twenty-third psalm...makes me feel as if all is peaceful, and the need to worry doesn't exist. There is compassion and sincerity. That's how I felt about Bible study too. At the end of every Bible study we held hands and prayed. We were safe and happy."*

A godly teacher, lessons from the Bible, and a friendly, informal atmosphere add up to warm memories of a very pleasant spiritual experience. The author's eagerness to attend, even if she had to sit on the floor exemplifies the desire to know and the kind of enthusiasm every parent would give a right arm to see in their own home. No Bible thumping, indoctrination, or arguments. Just the Bible, a kind spirit, and fun.

Now, contrast this with the same author's remarks about recent studies she has visited. She says very frankly: *"Sometimes I still go to Bible study. But it's different now. It seems everyone is trying to make a point about what THEY think the scripture says. There are arguments over whether the term "man" used in the Bible refers to men and women or its just a sexist interpretation of the author. There are wise cracks over the fact that wisdom takes on the feminine gender and that men would do well to pay closer attention to women (or what, go to hell?). There is resentment over passages that say women should consider their husbands as their masters (maybe that's why I'm not married cuz ain't no man gonna tell me what to do!)....it saddens me when I think back on the feeling I used to get from going to Bible study as a child and the feelings I leave with now. There is something to be said for child-like innocence. It's a different kind of attitude that allows the mind the freedom to absorb without prejudice or suspicion. It's a different kind of attitude that can allow for wonderful memories."*

Shifting the focus from Christ to self, trying to satisfy who we are rather than God, drains the happiness from Bible study. It turns an opportunity to behold the LORD and be changed into a forum for self-righteous egos, unwilling, unyielding, and unable to tolerate anything but their own thoughts. The clash of opinionated points-of-view banishes humility, welcomes pride, and invites Satan to feed the chaos. Unlike the warmth of her childhood memories, the author now leaves with anxiety in the place of peace, resentment instead of joy, and a desire to be somewhere else rather than return.

Wouldn't you like your children to say the same things about time in the Bible with you that the author said about Bible study during her childhood? Then, recreate the learning environment that her tender mentor did – complete with all the warmth, kindness, and geniality she put into her scripture sessions with neighborhood kids. Here's how:

Set a time *with* rather than *for* them

Kids like routines – but they hate the pressure of deadlines. So tell them it's an *appointment with God* and ask them what's the best time for them – before or after dinner, just before bedtime, whatever. Bible study is an interview with God who alone can explain it to them – the right way, every time. Weekends are a world of their own, so you may schedule studies at different times altogether. Besides studying together, encourage them to study or at least read the Bible, alone and daily. Eventually you want the kids to study on their own. And, whatever you do, be consistent. Changing the times you meet may give the impression that you considered something else more important – at least enough to preempt your "appointment with God". Stick to the schedule to show them the priority of Bible study and that they mustn't miss opportunities to be with the LORD.

Invite their friends

Peer pressure begins early, so tell them their friends are welcome to join the study. This saves them the trouble of admitting they study the Bible or having to explain themselves. The fact that classmates and playmates come to the study reinforces what you are trying to do with them.

Always *begin* and *end* with prayer

Prayer addresses God. It assures children that God is present and that the appointment is underway. Offer to pray, but let the children pray if they want to. Eventually you want them to pray spontaneously and consistently – for themselves. If you pray, show them the unselfish, intercessory side of prayer. Ask them if there is anything they want to ask God – help with the study, something that is troubling them, or on behalf of someone else. Also show them how to depend on God by praying whenever opportunities arise during the study – from divine help with something they can't understand to showing them you need God's help, too. Always close with prayer to dramatize the end of the appointment. Include thanks for the time God spent with you, how sad you are at the thought it's over, and how much you look forward to the next time.

Bring everything with you

Make sure they have everything they need. Kids tend to forget things and may use a failure to bring worksheets, handouts, or some other vital item as an excuse to draw back from what they are supposed to do or even drop out. Instead of asking them if they didn't bring something they should have, simply make the items available for them to take when they need them. Children get easily embarrassed and don't have the mental or emotional mechanisms to deal with shame in front of their friends, or to handle your disapproval in public. Spare them from humiliation and do everything you can to

facilitate their interaction with God. Let the LORD discipline them, instead as the writer of Hebrews explains: "Since we respected our earthly fathers who disciplined us, shouldn't we submit even more to the discipline of the Father of our spirits, and live forever? For our earthly fathers disciplined us for a few years, doing the best they knew how. But God's discipline is always good for us, so that we might share in his holiness. No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it's painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way" (Hebrews 12:9-11).

Gear the study to *their* needs rather than *your* agenda

Nothing kills interest faster than forcing kids to deal with something they can't identify with. This usually happens when we, rather than they, pick the texts for study. Eventually we want the kids to consult the Bible for advice when they or others they care about need guidance. So, make it a point to study what they consider relevant. Ask them what is happening in their lives, what may be troubling them, or what they want to know more about. Train them to match what they suggest with texts in the Bible. Let them see for themselves that God speaks their language by showing that He talks about the things that matter to them through His Word. Open their eyes to the One who watches non-stop over and always knows what's best for them.

Teach them to discover for themselves

In her popular guide to inductive Bible study - *The Joy of Discovery* - author Oletta Wald encourages readers to dig to learn something new rather than interpret the text by what you already know. Talking from experience she recalls: "I had been a student of the Bible several years before I became a discoverer on my own. I could follow the suggestions of others and answer the questions they asked, but I floundered when I tried to launch out on my own. I did not know where to start or what to do. The treasures of the Bible seemed locked behind abstract words. I always had to depend on someone else to open the door." Sound familiar? It should. It's the story of nearly 9 out of 10 church members.

Then, she had a breakthrough studying for the ministry "at the former Biblical Seminary in New York," where she was taught, "how to explore the truths of the Bible in a methodical and systematic way. I learned," she recollects, "some steps to take when studying a passage. I found that it was like working a combination lock. When I followed the steps, the word opened up to me. I felt free. I realized that I was no longer dependent on others to gain insights into scripture. I had become a discoverer." Looking back over years of rewarding analysis, she concludes: "In a new way, Bible study became more meaningful and personal. Most of all it was deeply satisfying to know how to discover the truths in God's Word. I had experienced the joy of discovery in Bible study!"

Isn't that what you want for your kids? Then, train them to discover truths leaning entirely on Christ and the Spirit. Work yourself out of a job. Always ask the them if they

want to read. Instead of scolding them if they won't, ask them to read with you. If you correct or criticize them, they will see you trying to replace God as the authority when they study. Try sharing insights from the LORD to get them back on track. The Holy Spirit will back you up for opening a door to its guidance. Eventually you want the kids to study with Christ, on their own.

Regrettably, parents generally rely on "Bible studies" to save their kids. Instead of using scripture like a torch to help kids find their way to Christ, they weaponize the Bible to brainwash children into surrender. For a refreshing change of pace, since today's children view parenting as a way to deprive them of choices, make the study about Christ - getting to know and fall in love with Him - rather than referring to sins, heaven, hell, and conversion. Let Christ speak for Himself through His Word and He will draw the kids into a personal relationship far more redemptive than adherence to a set of beliefs, subscription to a sacred lifestyle, or membership in any church.

So, instead of fill in the blank studies that lead them to other's conclusions from the text, let them dig in and find answers for their own questions. Countless participants at our workshops over the years have stood and cheered the moment they connected with truth in the Bible. Your kid's eyes will bulge and they may even give you a high five to celebrate what they discover. But it won't stop there. The experience will, as it has for innumerable others, ignite a burning desire to study with Him as the Teacher for the rest of their lives. Seeing firsthand what He alone can do will make their bond to Him grow stronger and more intimate every day. They'll never settle for anything else, ever again and nothing will ever overthrow their personal relationship with Him.

Study Aids

As we have already pointed out, audio/visual assistance aids the learning process. So, get creative. Amplify God's still small voice in the text. Paint pictures from the descriptions in each passage. Screen out anything that would compete with Christ for their attention. Campaign for the Savior by designing things like bookmarks that put sound study principles at kids fingertips, utilizing coloring books that feature Christ as the main point of scripture, or lining up Christ-centered tapes and videos that point them to Christ, etc. John drew his readers' attention away from the spectacular images in Revelation and directed them to Jesus by introducing the book as, "the revelation [or unveiling] of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 1:2). As a result, everyone looks for the Savior, in every line of the book - the only way the book makes sense, the solitary path to understanding its abstract imagery and flamboyant language.

Be Human

When David wanted the people to see that God, not he, was the true King of Israel, he humiliated himself, dancing before the ark like some fool jester. He wasn't worried about losing face before the people. Knowing that his authority came from God, he benefitted from boosting the divine reputation. The same holds true for parents. To

paraphrase John the Baptizer: authorized by God to raise children for the LORD, parents only gain strength from decreasing, so God may increase.

So, don't be afraid you don't have the answers or understand the text. Frequently ask God for help, pausing to pray with the children for God's guidance. Remind them that you are their classmates in the School of Christ and still learning like them. Inject humor when you can and make your studies, fun. Laugh a lot. Be yourself. Let them be their selves. And, ask them to help you sum up in the fewest possible words, what you've just learned. Instead of praising them when they contribute to the study, praise the LORD together for what He has allowed them to see and show to you. Otherwise, you will inflate their egos rather than build up the LORD. Then, smile and move on to deeper things, together.



Grammar-free Bible Study

My favorite author used to say: *The word of the living God is not merely written, but spoken. The Bible is God's voice speaking to us, just as surely as though we could hear it with our ears. If we realized this, with what awe would we open God's word, and with what earnestness would we search its precepts! The reading and contemplation of the Scriptures would be regarded as an audience [or, a formal interview granted by and] with the Infinite One.*

An audience with God is not an academic exercise

Too many people, today treat Bible study as some form of mental exercise, as though understanding the Bible is within the grasp of human intelligence. But the apostle Paul makes it clear that we do not have the capacity to detect the meaning of divine things. He told the Ephesians: "I'm asking God to bestow a gift from his glorious, unlimited resources and give you inner strength and power through his Spirit, so Christ will live at your core through faith. Then, sinking your roots in the ground of his generosity, you will be able to grasp with all of God's people how wide, long, high, and deep is his love that goes far beyond human knowledge. In the end, you should be completely filled with everything God has to give" (3:16-19). Wonderful as they are, our God-given minds cannot measure the infinite dimensions of God's love - unless God confers abilities above and beyond our natural faculties through his empowering Spirit.

Yet, plenty of people, probably most, still strain their brains trying to figure out what verses mean. Oh, they may pray for divine guidance, but instead of relying on the Spirit to penetrate the mysteries of the text, they surround themselves with reference books, Bible software, and other forms of manmade perception to make heads or tails of scripture. Like some defiant child with the “terrible two’s,” they try to go it alone – with God standing by, in case they need Him. But no one knows the Word like He does. After all, it is HIS Word, isn’t it? So, the next time you open your Bible, try asking Him to explain it rather than trying to figure it out. Consider study time an “audience with the Infinite One” and humbly enter his presence as you would approach a revered king or queen. He wants you there, so do not hesitate to ask Him questions about the text and listen for the still small voice that gently whispers eternal truths without fanfare or spectacle. That’s the ONLY certain way to make sense of Bible texts.

Human effort may enable us to scratch the surface of scripture, but even an inspired scholar like Paul admitted to the Romans: “Oh, how great are God’s riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand his decisions and his ways. For who can know the LORD’s thoughts? Who knows enough to give him advice? And who has given him so much that he needs to pay it back? For everything comes from him and exists by his power and is intended for his glory. All glory to him forever! Amen” (11:33-36). No one can match the Creator’s genius, or even come close to it. So, instead of clever ways to pry truth from scripture, Bible study employs divine communication skills – simple tools and techniques demonstrated by Christ, the prophets, and other Bible personalities, that allow God to explain what he says in his Word – to us. We need His explanations, because God only grants us the ability to receive and get the meaning of what He tells us, not to find it out on our own.

My wife, Jo and I routinely informed those who attended our seminars and workshops of this simple fact: faith trumps human intelligence when it comes to Bible study. Or, to put it another way: those who depend on God get closer to the truth than those who rely on their gray matter. Rather than wise men draining truth from its pages, Bible students are more like children who climb into God’s lap and simply request: “Tell me a story, Daddy. Tell me a story.” We did our best to replace the false impression of scholars poring over their Bibles while God watches, with the image of an infinite genius explaining infinite truth to infinite morons. In case you missed the point, compared to the infinite genius, God – we are infinite morons! And, Bible study is a miracle made possible by our generous God who freely grants comprehension of infinite truth to those who ask for it (cf. James 1:5 – “If any of you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not think less of you for asking”).

The goal of true Bible study

You’d be surprised at what passes for Bible study, these days. The expression, “Bible study,” means just what it says: study of the Bible, not using the Bible to study something else. Yet, making use of the Bible and clever, attractive packaging, all sorts of promotions

masquerade as the real thing. What's more, regardless of their bent, these scriptural advertisements usually share the same goal: to convince people of what to believe so they can join the church and get saved. Treating people as targets for baptism, they usually differ in one respect: the beliefs they promote or encourage. And, to enlist subscribers to their views, they typically offer a fill-in-the-blank, true or false, or multiple-choice format that steers prospects to their predetermined conclusions. Then, once those who complete the so-called "studies" agree to it, the sponsors baptize them into their church. In a nutshell then, most of today's "Bible studies" aim for baptisms as part of some systematic search for new members.

Not exactly what Jesus had in mind, according to the Great Commission. In Matthew 28:18, Jesus informed the disciples: "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth." He had frequently referred to Himself as "the Son of man," from Daniel 7:13-14, predicted to receive upon his arrival in heaven: "authority, honor, and sovereignty over all the nations of the world, so that people of every race and nation and language would obey him. His rule is eternal—it will never end. His kingdom will never be destroyed". "Coming with the clouds of heaven," after His resurrection (cf. Acts 1:10), "He [Jesus] approached the Ancient One and was led into his presence," to accept the authority He announced in v.18. But notice: Jesus claims jurisdiction "in heaven *and* on earth," expanding the Son of Man's rule to cosmic proportions. That's because He is also the Messiah, David's descendant destined to sit at God's right hand, as co-regent of the universe (Ps. 110:2).

At His ascension, the Father invites Jesus to, "Sit in the place of honor at my right hand until I humble your enemies, making them a footstool under your feet" (Ps. 110:2). Meanwhile, "The LORD will extend your [Jesus'] powerful kingdom from Jerusalem; you will rule over your enemies" (Ps. 110:3). So Jesus orders the disciples to: "make disciples," an expression that translates literally, "make pupils of," or "enroll students" for Him from "all the nations." And in Acts 1:8, Jesus promises to empower them for this global mission - with the Spirit (at Pentecost) - so they can testify to Him starting in Jerusalem, then "throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." To fulfill the prophecy in Psalm 110:2, then, Christ has us reaching out for Him, the (Father's) "Anointed, or hand-picked" King, enrolling student/subjects from all of earth's families for His School now, as well as the Kingdom to come.

As for baptism, rather than a rite of entry into local churches, Jesus considered it the rite of initiation into the School of Christ. In those days, teachers renamed new pupils to project their goals for them. Working with students made in God's image, shattered at all points by Adam and Eve's fall, Jesus ordered the disciples, "baptize [new students] in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost." Since they don't fit the combined name of the Trinity - the Persons in the godhead that said, "Let us make man in our image, to be like ourselves" (Gen. 1:26) - Jesus brands them with it to project what they will be when He has finished discipling them: restored in the image of the Trinity, or the Creator God.

The apostle Paul reflected this completely Christ-centered view of his own mission when he announced: "Christ didn't send me to baptize, but to preach the Good News—and not with clever speech, for fear that the cross of Christ would lose its power" (1Corinthians 1:17). The great church-planter explained his priority on preaching, telling the Romans: "So then, "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." But how can people call on him if they have not believed in him? How can they believe in him if they have not heard his message? How can they hear if no one tells [the Good News]? How can people tell the Good News if no one sends them? As Scripture says, 'How beautiful are the feet of the messengers who announce the Good News'" (Romans 10:13-15).

Paul uses a series of questions to describe what it takes for people to call on the name of the Lord and get saved. First, they have to believe in Christ when they hear about Him. Second, someone has to tell them about Christ so they can hear and believe. And, finally, someone has to send messengers to announce the Good News about Christ to them. Then, he quotes Isaiah 52:7 to emphasize the awesome privilege of delivering the Gospel as the best news anyone can receive. Apparently, his highest joy in ministry, even greater than baptizing converts was leading people to Christ - satisfying the deepest longing of their fallen hearts with the news of Messiah's arrival.

That's what Bible study is all about - connecting people with Christ. Or, so Christ insisted when He scolded His fellow Jews for misplacing faith in scripture instead of Him: "You study the scriptures," He began, "because you think they give you eternal life; but they point to me, yet you refuse to come to me so you can receive life" (John 5:39-40). Jesus wanted the religious leaders to know that true Bible study always leads to Him. Had they come to scripture searching for truth instead of confirmation of what they already believed, they would have recognized their need for Jesus. So, instead of peddling your beliefs, show Jesus to the people in every text. Jesus did that for the disciples on the road to Emmaus; so should we. In the Gospel ministry, exposing people to Christ should always precede doctrine, because a relationship with Christ reduces natural resistance to truth and makes people more receptive to spiritual teaching.

Congregations meet because they already have a saving relationship with Christ, not to get saved. In fact, evangelism is something every believer should personally do, 24/7 at home and in public (Acts 2:42-47a). What's more, it is the LORD who adds converts daily to the church through the individual efforts of its members rather than the church enlarging itself (Acts 2:47b). Then what is the purpose for meeting together? According to the writer of Hebrews, the church assembles as a group, "To motivate one another to acts of love and good works...and...encourage one another all the more as you see the day [of Christ's return] approaching" (10:24, 25). In the face of considerable Jewish and Gentile hostility, the early church drew inspiration from those brave enough to meet, and considered "community cohesion...an important coping response" (IVP New Bible Commentary) to resist opposition and any efforts to disband it.

The mindset of true Bible study

People approach Bible study from two chief attitudes: **deductive**, basing interpretation of a text on pre-existing knowledge; or **inductive**, postponing interpretation until all the facts are in from the text under study. The first relies on **theology**, either borrowed from scholars or personally acquired to size up the text, while the second relies on **principles of interpretation** and **study skills** to extract information from the text.

In the purest sense, a deductive study starts with a premise or a topic, then searches the Bible for verses that support it – the origin of modern “Proof-Text,” or “Topical” studies that string verses together to teach a pre-planned lesson. So for example, let’s say we start with the general statement, “Left-brained people are analytical.” Someone might notice: “Since Christian motivational speaker, Jeanne Robertson calls her husband ‘Left-Brain,’ he must be analytical.” Using the general statement as a starting point, the deductive thinker draws the conclusion that Mrs. Robertson’s husband submits whatever he sees or hears to a logical examination.

A deductive thinker would approach the Bible the same way. Starting with the general premise, “Sin leads to death,” he or she “must...go to Scripture to find passages that support that statement. He might cite Romans 5:12, Romans 6:23, Ezekiel 18:20, and Jeremiah 31:30. If he finds that Scripture does indeed support his premise that sin leads to death, he can then make a more specific application: we are all in danger of death, because we are all sinners (Romans 3:23)” (from the gotquestions.com website)."

Inductive study does the opposite, taking a verse or a passage, breaking it down, and examining its details to draw out the meaning. So, suppose a woman comes across a large stack of letters tied together with a ribbon. She unties it and starts reading the letters. The first is a love letter written to her by her husband before they were married. So, is the second and every other after that. Taking the first love-letter as a sample of them all, she concludes, “This must be the letters my husband wrote to me during our courtship.”

Inductive thinkers size up scripture the same way, typically starting with the background of the book that includes the passage they want to study. They can’t even begin to analyze a text unless they know who wrote it, to whom he wrote and why, what he wrote about, plus where and when he wrote it or it takes place.

Next, zeroing in on the actual text, they would identify how the passage fits into the book so they can see the context – the setting for the passage, the immediate circumstances and its relationship to what comes before and after it, so it can be fully understood. Then, they break down the text into linking words, persons, places, things, and empowering words, so they can capture the flow of thought, look up the persons, places, and things, and check to see how the empowering words enable them to play their part in the passage. Finally, they interpret the text using what they’ve learned from it to understand and explain it. This allows them to move from the past to life today, as they strip each verse down to its original principle or precept to apply it to anyone, anytime, anywhere.

While we may benefit from both approaches, students must be especially careful to avoid the pitfalls of deduction. First and foremost, deduction relies on content, the words in the text, to connect verses together across the span of scripture. A favorite of Jewish rabbis, they also used “catchwords” to link texts they believed described or explained their ideas or theories. Unfortunately, focusing entirely on the words in the text determined to make their point, they ignored context to draw unwarranted conclusions from the text. That the NT reproduces this format of exposition does not justify its use by today’s Bible students. Under divine inspiration, the Bible writers avoided the errors of Jewish commentators to produce authentic interpretation. Directly supervised by the Holy Spirit they crafted brilliant, faultless versions of earlier texts.

Among the ways they showed the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, NT writers used the midrashic method that produced interpretations “from [or, based on] a careful search” of scripture for details. *“Occasionally Scripture is the starting point for the pattern, working from quoted Scripture to the current event, which was the rabbinic norm of operation. But most New Testament testimonia [worked] from current event back to the quoted Scripture, as in ‘This took place to fulfill what by the Lord had been spoken’ (Matt. 1:22).”* The particular text quoted and the modifications in it reflected the essence of the larger Old Testament/New Testament context according to the [inspired] exegetical insights [from a careful analysis of the text] of that writer. So when Matthew cited only Isaiah 7:14 in Matthew 1:23, he probably had the entire section of Isaiah 6-9 [that he had studied in-depth] in mind.

Implicit [or, implied] *midrash* within the actual text itself, appears in two basic forms. First, there are *double meanings*, which contain a play on the words involved. For instance, Matthew says that because Jesus lived in the town of Nazareth, thus fulfilling the prophecies that suggested the Messiah would be a Nazarene, someone who was either a pious Nazirite (see Judges 13:5-7 in the LXX), or a *netzer*, someone who was the branch of Isaiah 11:1 (see also Isaiah 49:6; 60:21; 61:3 Jeremiah 23:5).

There were also *interpretive alterations* made in the original text itself. These were made by inserting words or phrases that do not appear in the original passage, such as the way Paul slipped in the term *everyone* in Romans 10:11 (NIV) so as to make Isaiah 28:16 fit better into his argument that God extends an invitation for salvation to all of earth’s families. Or sometimes the New Testament writers substituted words or phrases, such as when Paul in Galatians 4:30 (NASB) wrote “son of the free woman” for the expression “my son Isaac” so as to better adapt Genesis 21:10 to his line of reasoning. “Son of the free woman” sharpens the contrast between slavery to the Law associated with circumcision and the old covenant and represented by Hagar and Ishmael, and the freedom of the new covenant associated with faith and grace and represented by Sarah and Isaac.

“Explicit [or, obvious] *midrash* consisted of the text plus exposition, such as we commonly find in rabbinic commentaries. The form most often used in the New Testament is known as the *proem midrash*.” The word *proem* refers to a preface or preamble to a speech.

"The synagogue version of the proem midrash went something like this: (a) a text from the Pentateuch was assigned for use that Sabbath; (b) a second text—the proem or opening—served to begin the oral discourse; (c) the exposition or discourse contained additional Old Testament verses, parables, or other commentary, all of which were linked to the initial texts by repeated catchwords; and (d) a final text, which usually repeated or alluded to the text for the day."

Pesikta Rabbati was a medieval Midrash on the festivals of the year. The word *peseta* means "section," and this Midrash consists of a series of separate sections of homilies – meant for spiritual edification rather than doctrinal instruction. Its stories on the pentateuchal and prophetic lessons of festivals differed from most earlier midrashim (the plural for midrash) that are continuous commentaries to the Bible. It is called *Rabbati* ("the greater") probably in contrast to earlier, less advanced versions.

Here is one of them, Pesikta Rabbati 33:7 that reveals this basic *proem* pattern.

Original text	Isa. 51:12
Second text	Hosea 6:1
Exposition	Parable and application linked to the second text
Additional text	Lam. 1:13
Concluding text	Isa. 51:12

Isaiah 51:12 proposes the subject for the midrash. Then, Hosea 6:1 serves as the proem or preface to the lesson that is linked to it. The homily adds Lamentations 1:13 to the lesson so it can conclude, or climax with a closing reference to Isaiah 51:12.

Although they closely resemble each other, there are differences between New Testament and rabbinic exegesis. New Testament midrashim may not (a) have an initial text from the Pentateuch, (b) have a proem or second text, or (c) end with a final text that corresponds or alludes to the initial text. Generally, New Testament midrashim have an eschatological [or, end time] bent, because the Bible moves from shadowy preview to glorious fulfillments as redemption works its way toward the Kingdom of God. Here is a New Testament madras without the Pentateuchal text for the day:

HEBREWS 10:5-39

Verses 5-7	Initial text: Ps. 40:7-9
Verses 8-36	Exposition with additional quotes (verses 16ff., 30) <i>linked</i> to the initial text by the <i>catchwords</i> "sacrifice" (verses 8, 26); "offering" (verses 8, 10, 14, 18); "for sins" (verses 8, 17, 18, 26)
Verses 37-39	Final text and application alluding to the initial text with the verbs "to come" and "to please" (Isa. 26:20; Hab. 2:3ff.)

Psalm 40:7-9 serves as the basis for the theme in verses 5-7 for the entire midrash.

Then, beginning the exposition in v.8, the writer teaches that God incarnated or gave Messiah a flesh and blood body so He could be the perfect, once-for-all sacrifice for sin. After His offering, God installed Messiah as co-regent of the universe at His right hand. Sitting down on His throne also signifies that, unlike earthly high priests who kept standing at the time of writing to offer additional sacrifices, Messiah completed His priestly work. He is after all, according to Psalm 110:4, like Melchizedek who was both a king and priest of the Most High God. Considering the need for both Christ's sacrifice and priesthood to live a full Christian life, he wraps up his exposition with a warning against ignoring or discounting Messiah's complete ministry and rebukes the Hebrews for even contemplating a return to Judaism.

Finally, in verses 37-39 he completes his call for faithfulness to Messiah and reminds his readers once again of the terrible ramifications for deserting the Savior – based on the original text, Psalm 40:7-9, as quoted in verses 5-7.

A final word of caution. While inspiration protected the writers of the New Testament from error, today's deductive thinkers, driven by their premises and the need to prove them, might read into the text what isn't there. What's more, if their basic premises aren't true, then conclusions they draw from them may also be false. On the other hand, less likely to let preconceived notions bungle their efforts, inductive students tend to lead the truth out of a text rather than make it reflect the personal idea or viewpoint of the so-called interpreter. Given the choice, then, between one mindset or the other, go with the inductive. It is always better to rely on the infallible God to unfold truth than to lean on all-too-human scholars, theology, or a denomination.

The skills for true Bible study

Picture this: a woman opens her Bible, surrounded by reference books, a pitcher of lemonade, and a cup full of multicolored pencils. She prays briefly, cracks her knuckles, and begins digging into a text. One verse later, several hours have passed and she can hardly keep her eyes open. So, she retreats from the scene and calls off the assault on God's Word – after advancing a mere millimeter toward her goal.

Sound familiar? That's because too many people attack the Word, expecting to plunder its treasures in a single, sweeping campaign for truth. Unfortunately, the Bible is not a fortress that surrenders to strong-willed invaders. Instead of attacking your Bible, approach it humbly. Rather than pouncing on a passage to overpower its defenses, draw near hoping God will release its secrets to you – and He will.

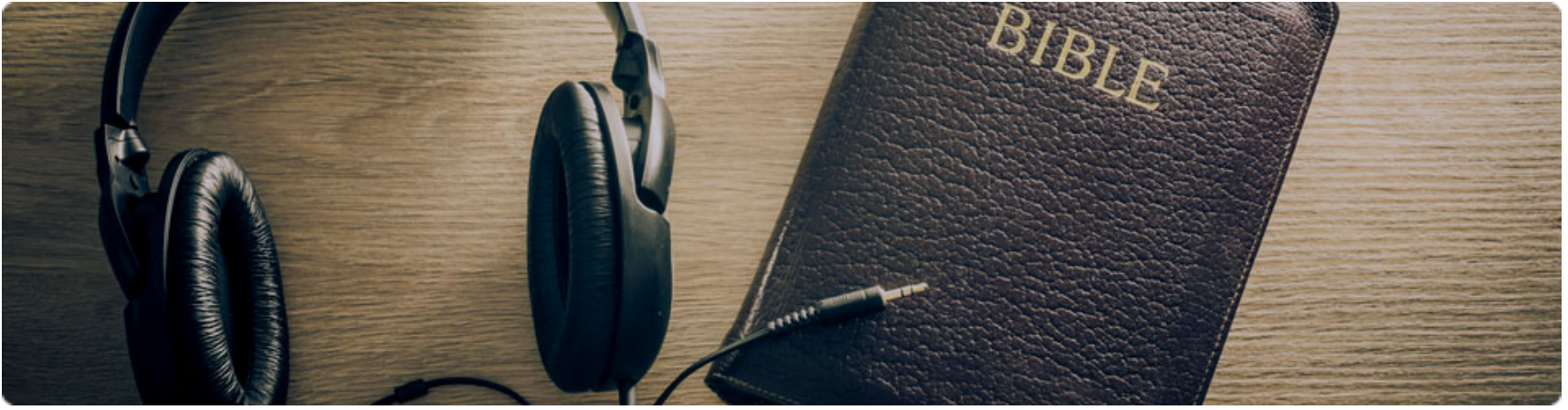
You see, Bible study is a process that yields progressively productive views of truth. Instead of draining all the truth a text has to give in a single sitting, as they are ready, our infinite God reveals more of Himself through His Word to believers, along with other associated themes. As a result, no matter how many times you analyze a text, it always has more to say.

So, consider Bible study an audience with an understanding Father, who brings His lofty thoughts down to our level. When we ask Him what a text means, He only tells us as much as we can handle, at the time. If we return for more, He will disclose additional insights, provided we can deal with the fresh details. But rather than biased journalists who interview persons of public interest to promote an opinion and sell their publications, Bible students dialogue with God as children usually do with their fathers, to learn and live by what He wants for them.

You might say, "But, that reduces Bible study to a conversation with God," and you'd be right. While some subject the Word to critical examination trying to solve its mysteries, successful students use biblical communication skills rather than educated systems to request and receive information from God, through His Word. They constantly consult with Him on everything – to identify the context, analyze its contents, reflect on discoveries, and apply timeless truth to life. Building on what others have discovered before you, He uses books and other records of their findings plus His perfect recall and unparalleled teaching abilities to open up the scriptures for us. Like Belshazzar and the wise men at his feast, many educated people look at the handwriting on the wall unable to grasp its meaning. But Daniel, guided from within by God's own Spirit, explained every word to the king. Like John said: "The Spirit of truth [does in fact] lead [those who let Him] into nothing but truth" (John 16:13).

Many people assume because they are believers that they should automatically understand the Bible. They also mistake listening to a sermon or attending a Bible class where people discuss what they already know – for Bible study. In fact, they think Bible study is arriving at what their church teaches. But, Bible study takes a special mindset and total dependence upon God to comprehend scripture. How sweet it is to learn that Bible study depends on God's knowledge rather than your intelligence, your years in school, or anything else for that matter. All it takes is a true interest in what God has to say, faith, and some simple training to enjoy a productive face-to-face with the Almighty. Children love it when we tell them they can dig into the text and discover truth for themselves. The rest of this book will train you and your children to communicate with God through His Word.

Though many people rashly zoom in on verses, the basic unit for study is *the passage*--a group of back-to-back verses that talk about the same person, place, or thing. Like a *paragraph*, it normally starts with a topic sentence that contains the main idea, followed by sentences that develop and support the idea, and end with a concluding sentence. Consequently, verses in a passage work together to express what the writer wants to say, so that it takes all of them to make his point. That means we must take into account all the verses in a passage--both before and after those we want to understand, in order to interpret them. Fortunately, most Bibles divide the text into passages for you--inserting titles or subheadings between them.



Opening up a dialogue with God

"God said [to Elijah], 'Go out and stand in front of the LORD on the mountain.' As the LORD was passing by, a fierce wind tore mountains and shattered rocks ahead of the LORD. But the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind came an earthquake. But the LORD wasn't in the earthquake. After the earthquake there was a fire. But the LORD wasn't in the fire. And after the fire there was a quiet whisper" (1Kings 19:11-12).

Dialogue is two-way communication

People of the Ancient Near East made gods out of the forces of nature. In the struggle for security in a hostile, fiercely belligerent world, they worshiped the 800 pound gorilla who could climb the tallest tree and thump his chest harder than the apes of other countries. Consequently, Canaanites believed that Baal, the so-called "storm-god" they invented from thunder, lightning, and wind, could knock over trees with the volume of his voice. But the true God does not compete with false gods from nature. He refuses to shout over, out dazzle, or outperform them. Instead He silences them, just as Jesus ordered the wind and waves in the Sea of Galilee to be "Quiet!" and "Be still." Once He mutes them, then He whispers, calmly and softly in the absence of their chaos.

But, even when God did speak to them, the people preferred to hear someone else. For instance, after they saw God's majesty and power at Mt. Sinai, they made up an excuse: "Don't let God speak directly to us, or we will die" and begged Moses, "You speak with us and we will listen" (Exodus 20:19). Commenting on this baffling request, Oswald Chambers remarks: "We show how little love we have for God by preferring to listen to His servants rather than to Him. We like to listen to personal testimonies, but we don't want God Himself to speak to us. Why are we so terrified for God to speak to us? It is because we know that when God speaks we must either do what He asks or tell Him we will not obey. But if it is simply one of God's servants speaking to us, we feel obedience is optional, not imperative. We respond by saying, 'Well, that's only your own idea, even though I don't deny that what you said is probably God's truth.'" That's also why so many people prefer to hear someone else interpret the word for them than learn to listen for God's still small voice in the text. They want the option to say, "That's just his or her opinion, so I'm safe if I don't agree with it" They know they can't pull that stuff with God.

To communicate with God, you must let him silence the false gods in your life so you can hear His calm, collected voice for yourself and answer directly to Him. And to open up a dialogue with Him, you must capture the context so you can see the meaning God put in the text for you.

Capture the Context

Evangelists about to leave a field experience mixed emotions. Eager to move on with God, they nevertheless feel remorse over saying goodbye to their converts. What's more, haunted by the thought of unfinished business, evangelists might even feel guilty that some souls might be lost because of their premature departure. The LORD did threaten to hold Ezekiel **"responsible for their deaths"** if he failed to warn the wicked that they were under the penalty of death, or to caution the righteous not to sin (Ezekiel 3:18, 20). And, Moses actually warned the people about to enter the Promised Land about secondhand guilt for someone's blood in Deuteronomy 21:1-9, calling it the crime of **"murdering an innocent person,"** and explained how to **"absolve the guilt of this person's blood."**

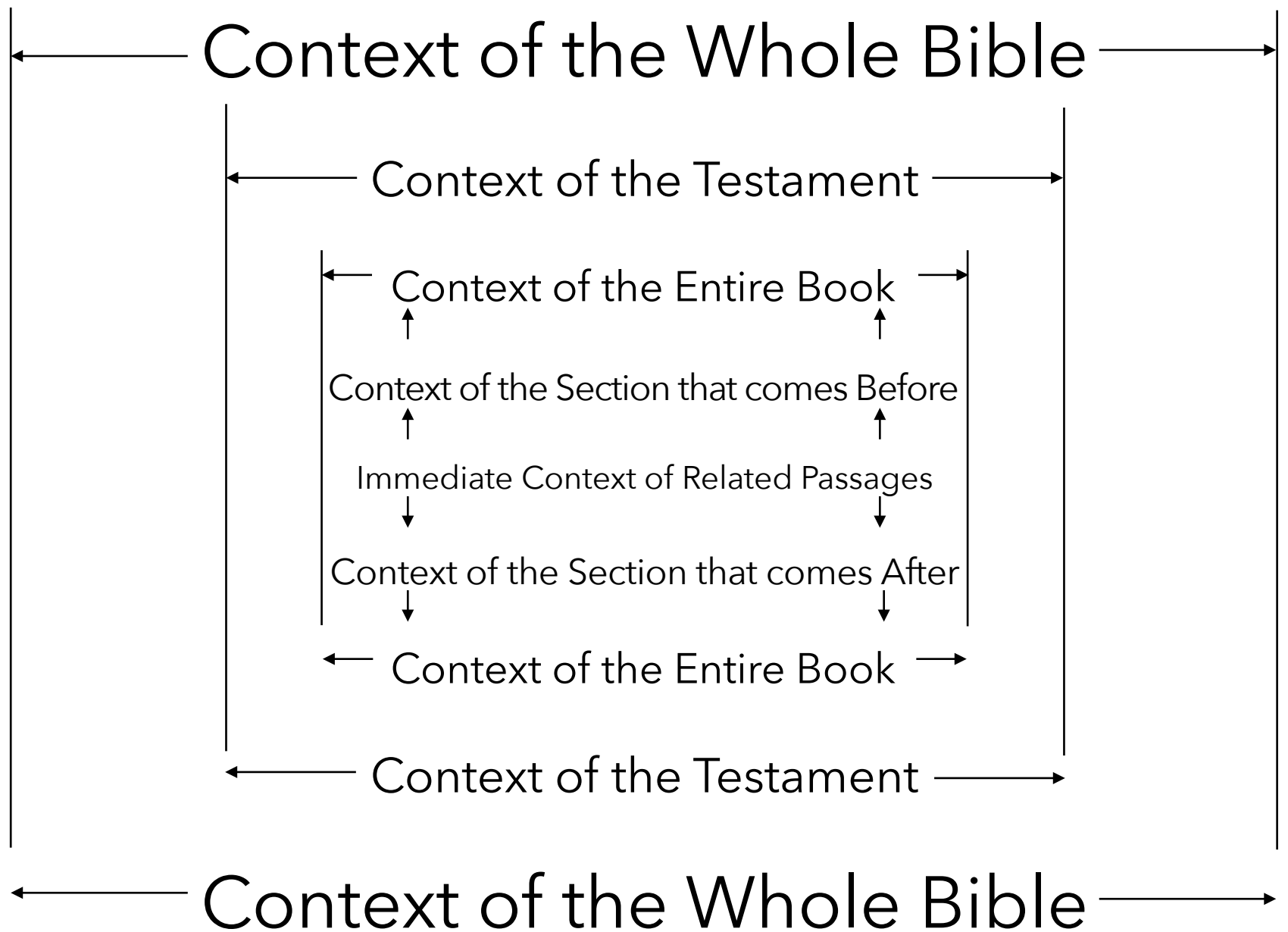
The apostle Paul addressed these issues the night before he sailed from Ephesus. Sad to leave, he told the Ephesians: **"You know that from the day I set foot in the province of Asia until now I have done the Lord's work humbly and with many tears...now I am bound by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem...And I know that none of you to whom I have preached the Kingdom will ever see me again"** (Acts 20:18, 19, 22, 25). But at the same time, he also declared his innocence of anyone's blood, because: **"I have been faithful. If anyone suffers eternal death, it's not my fault, for I never hesitated to declare the whole counsel of God to you"** (Acts 20:26, 27). Referring to preaching and teaching from the Word of God, Paul claimed that he had drawn on every possible text across the entire body of scripture to **"warn Jews and Greeks to change the way they think and act and to believe in our Lord Jesus"** (Acts 20:21).

You and I can do no less when we study or share what scripture has to say. As members belong to the body, so Bible verses are connected to the entire Bible. A knuckle, for example is the way the whole person appears at that finger-joint. In the same way, a verse is the way the whole Bible looks at that particular part. To properly understand a verse, then, we need to take everything into account and relate it to the rest of the Bible, of which it is a part. We need to capture the context to get on the same page with God.

There are five contexts for Bible study.

1. Starting with the verse or verses in their Immediate Context
2. We expand to include the passages in their Section of the book
3. Then we widen the context to the rest their Book
4. Next we include the other books in their Testament (Old or New)
5. Finally, we extend the context to the whole Bible

Here is a diagram that shows how they all relate to each other:



A bit overwhelming at first, this makes perfect sense when you stop to think about it. A verse is part of a passage that is a member of the section in the book that shares a theme. Expanding from there, we see the section is part of the book that belongs to one of the two testaments of the Bible. And finally, since one testament is incomplete without the other, we extend the context from one cover of the Bible to the other, so nothing gets left out!

Let's briefly demonstrate each one to give you a better handle on the context as a whole.

The Bible Context

Scholars have proposed many designs that show the layout of the Bible. The trick is to accurately describe the relation between the Old and New Testaments so that they work together to reveal God's plan. Some say the Old Testament simply prepares us for the New. Others say that the New Testament fulfills what God promises in the Old. A few have even suggested that the Old Testament was written to the Jews, while the New addresses the Christian church. Most believe that God has always had one plan of salvation, revealed first to the Israelites and then realized to the world through Christ. After all, Hebrews 4:2 explains: **"We [the church] have heard the same Good News that your [Israelite] ancestors heard. But the message didn't help those who heard it in the past because they didn't believe."** As Walter Kaiser, Jr. refers to it, this "one promise-

plan to all who believe in Messiah Jesus” is the Gospel, the divine offer through Christ for those who recognize Him as the only way to salvation.

“Biblical scholars have argued with each other about the possibility that the Bible has a single overarching theme. Those who insist that it does have such a theme differ among themselves, however, regarding what that theme might be. I side with those who suggest that there is one overall theme that unifies every moment of history into one divine working plan, uniting every biblical verse into a single, powerful message. This all-inclusive motif would thus be the main setting for every Bible study—the ultimate context even for individual verses. And just what do I think this theme is? The everlasting covenant. God’s promise/plan to all who believe in Messiah Jesus is the grand story line that unfolds itself across every sacred page. ‘In both testaments, the same God offers the same salvation by the same Savior through the same actions’ (John Marsh, *Biblical Authority for Today*, p. 189). Spread cover to cover, this canonical [Bible-wide] context can serve as the foremost framework for Bible study because it shows us both where a text is [ultimately] coming from and where it is [eventually] going” (Lee Gugliotto, *Handbook for Bible Study*, p.26).

Salvation is a promise that unfolds progressively throughout a period of time rather than a prediction limited to a particular fulfillment. The Scriptures serve as clear evidence that the everlasting covenant has worked for human beings of every age, accommodating itself to a variety of historical contexts. To illustrate this point, just think of the mountainous Okanagon region of Canada and the U.S., spotted with lakes. What appears to be a series of separate bodies of water is actually an underground river that surfaces from time to time. In other words, they are all part of a single water system. The same phenomenon occurs across the Bible. Though they appear to be stand alone agreements with God, the covenants are actually different editions of the one eternal covenant as it occasionally surfaced in different ages. Starting with Eden, they advance and develop into something better, the new covenant, its final version.

Did you get that? The everlasting covenant began in Eden – before the sin that ruined the human race. In order to tie the entire Bible together, then, an overall theme must connect Genesis 1, 2 before sin – with the rest of the Bible after the fall. Instead of starting after Adam and Eve messed up, God’s plan began before He created heaven and earth. The new covenant of which Christians speak is not a separate arrangement, but the ultimate expression of the Creator’s faithfulness and determination to carry out His original plans for the Creation. That’s why the Bible describes the New Earth as a return to Eden. Peter announced, **“We look forward to a new heaven and new earth, the home of righteousness”** (2Peter 3:13), where Isaiah says those who are redeemed from sin and this fallen world by the Messiah **“will be called oaks of righteousness, trees planted by the LORD to display His splendor”** (Isaiah 61:3).

The New Covenant was progressively disclosed in the previous covenants. Israel’s hope, revealed in the progression of divine covenants, reached climactic proportions in the person and ministry of Jesus. He was the promised King who was to perpetuate the

covenant, make it possible for Israel to complete her original mission [as His church], and inaugurate the age that will usher in the final edition of the kingdom—the new earth.

God’s one-covenant kingdom plan looks something like this:

EDEN	NOAH	ABRAHAM	MOSES	DAVID	THE NEW COVENANT		
Gen. 1, 2	Gen. 9	Gen. 12, 15, 17	Ex. 19-20	2Sam. 7	FORETOLD Jer. 31; Ex. 36	INTRODUCED Matt. 26	ESTABLISHED Heb. 8
<div><div>Pre-redemptive</div><div>Redemptive</div></div>							

Only the covenant covers both the pre-redemptive (Genesis 1, 2) and the redemptive periods (the rest of the Bible). And, instead of a plan developed at the fall, the covenant progressively fulfills God’s original plan conceived before creation, initiated in Eden, and resumed in the person and work of Christ. As a progressively fulfilled promise rather than a prediction limited to a particular fulfillment, the covenant also helps to see that we are still living during the stage when branches bud, grow, and bear fruit. That means we must interpret every verse in terms of the partial fulfillment of God’s plan at Christ’s first advent, awaiting future and complete fulfillment at His return. “We still draw strength from God’s record of faithfulness in the past in order to believe He will act according to His promises in the future. Like our Old Testament brethren, we live by faith, awaiting the ‘age to come.’”

The Testament Context

Remember how the Bible divides into two parts? No, not the theological halves of the New and Old Testaments. I'm talking about the natural divide between Genesis 1, 2 before the human race needed saving from sin, and the rest of the Bible from the Fall in Eden to the glories of the Revelation that unfolds the story of its redemption. As soon as Adam and Eve chose to sin, the Creator saw the devil on a collision course with His Son at the cross (Genesis 3:15). After explaining the consequences of what they had done - He made garments for them out of animal skins - and redemption got under way. He chose Abraham to gather a people for Him from all the families of the earth (Genesis 12:1-3), but when Abe’s descendants failed, Christ became Israel reduced to a single obedient Israelite (Isaiah 53:1-12) and resumed the mission to collect converts from everywhere in the world (Ephesians 2:11-22).

When God rejected Israel and sent it into exile, He really confused His people. Up to then, He kept pulling a Hosea - taking them back over and over after they messed up - to demonstrate His unconditional love. But, when the time came to teach another lesson - sin separates the sinner from God - He evicted the rebellious descendants of Jacob-turned-Israel from the Promised Land and banished them to Babylon. He also sentenced them to death intending to spare those who repent and put their faith in the Suffering Servant for dying in their place to heal them with His stripes (Isaiah 53:5). Every Israelite since then remains under that sentence of death (Ezekiel 5:4), unless they turn to Christ for their salvation (John 3:18). This handful, or remnant of survivors will return to the

Mighty God (Isaiah 10:21), symbolically in the Old Testament, and ultimately in the New – when Christ rounds up the church drawn to Him by our Heavenly Father from all the families of the earth (John 6:44; cf. Isa 56:6-8).

Just where the passage you wish to study fits into the overall plot of the Bible depends on the Testament it belongs to. If it is part of the Old Testament, it occurs during the run up to the cross that bridges it to the New. If it is already on the other side of the bridge in the New Testament, it advances something that began in the Old Testament. The bridge of course – is the cross of Christ that separates the shadows of the Old from their splendid realization in the New. To arrive in the New, everything must pass through the cross, imported from the Old – with one exception: nothing makes it into the New Testament without changing a little. Transformed by Christ at His first coming, imports continue to develop as they move closer to the time of His return. Working in reverse, you can also trace imports back to their roots, to see their beginnings.

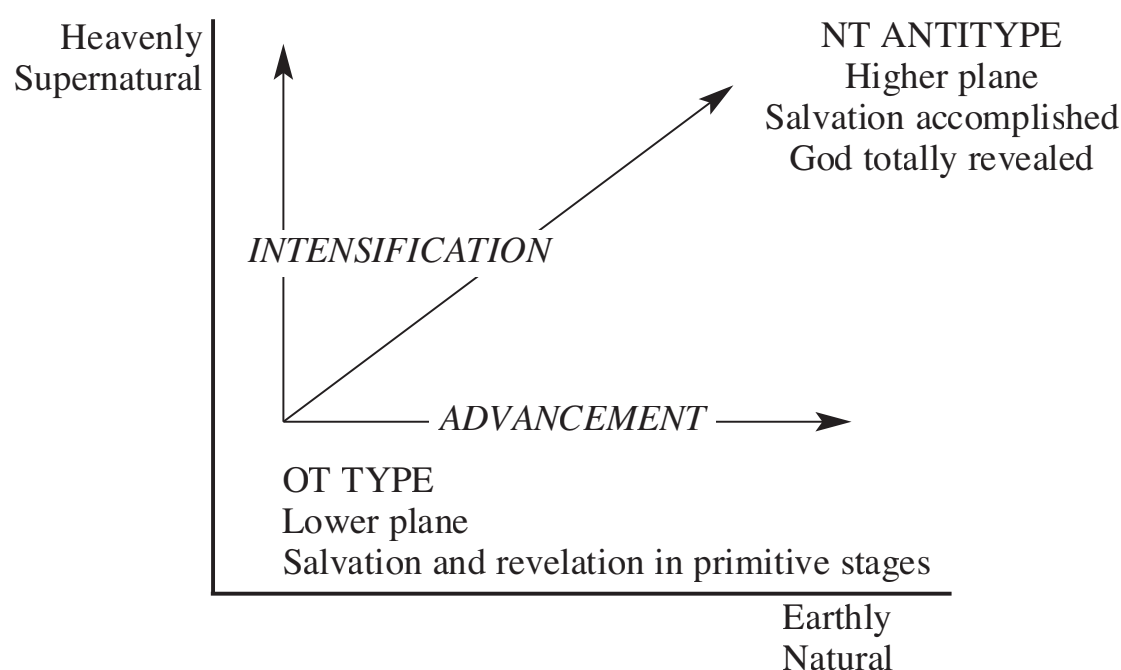
In a nutshell then, the Old Testament is symbolic – filled with real people, places, and things that point to someone, someplace, or something greater than themselves. Originally, they represented spiritual truths meant for National Israel to fulfill God's promises to Abraham. The symbols that make it into the New are called "types." While a symbol pictured redemption in its own day and a type looks forward to the future, the things symbolized and typified are not different sets of things. They are the same with this one difference—the symbolical came first (at an earlier, preliminary stage of development in the work of redemption), and the typical came at a later, more advanced one. Yet "typology is not just a matter of collecting all the resemblances between the Old and New Testaments, but rather of understanding the underlying redemptive and revelational process which begins in the Old Testament and finds its fulfillment in the New" (C. T. Fritsch, "Principles of Biblical Typology," *Biblia Sacra* 104 [1947], p. 214).

Though literally achieved under Solomon, the people misunderstood the deeper lessons of the symbols and relapsed into their old, evil ways. So the prophets called them back to God so He could bring back the glory days of Solomon. But, after they refused repeatedly to repent, visionaries understood that God could not fulfill His promises to Israel in their day. So, they used the pointing power of symbols to reach into the future – to the latter days when Messiah will complete God's plan on a grander scale than previously imagined and elevated relevant symbols to the level of types. Greater than Solomon (Matthew 12:42), Messiah will bring in a Kingdom beyond anything David's son ever ruled.

The prophets used symbols called "types" to postpone God's fulfillment of His promises until the Messianic Age. Instead of looking back to regain the best of the past, types look forward to unprecedented future fulfillment (antitypes) through the person and work of the Messiah, or the church. As they enter the New Testament through the cross, types shatter the limitations of their Old Testament roots. People morph into Christ or His followers! Locations shed boundaries! Spiritual overtakes natural!

So, for example, Solomon's kingdom literally realized many of the promises God made to Abraham. But pointing to Christ, a king greater than Solomon with "authority, honor, and sovereignty over" a Kingdom of "all the nations of the world, so that people of every race and nation and language would obey him," forced the prophets to look beyond National Israel to the universal church, past Palestine to the whole world, and for more than a mere mortal monarch. After all, unlike any primitive, earthly king or kingdom, "His rule is eternal—it will never end. His kingdom will never be destroyed" (Daniel 7:14). So, Jesus claimed: "My Kingdom is not an earthly kingdom... my Kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). Destined to rule the universe by God's side, His domain extended to the stars. That's why 1Chronicles 29:23 reports: "So Solomon took the throne of the LORD in place of his father. David, and he succeeded in everything, and all Israel obeyed him." Instead of an ordinary ceremonial chair, David and his descendants sat on the LORD's throne, pointing to Christ as the Messianic King in David's line who would reign together with His heavenly Father.

Christ's upward climb exerts a heavenly (supernatural) pull on types so that they cannot develop along a simple, natural straight line. His cross sets up the typology of both the church and prophecy. So, instead of remaining the same as they advance toward fulfillment between Christ's first and second comings, types progress toward the greater persons, places, or things they symbolize. Starting out as literal, local, and natural representations of the preliminary, primitive Old Covenant they work toward the figurative, universal and spiritual realities of the ultimate, advanced New Covenant.



So, local, National Israel gives way to universal, Messianic Israel, the church; apostate Jerusalem suffers a fate that points to Babylon's end, and the Kingdom that began in the hearts of Christ's converts eventually covers the whole earth.

You see, even prophecy develops along typological lines. Just as the Old Testament types expect and promise infinitely advanced, absolutely superior final editions that must come, so the Old Testament prophecies also look forward to much greater fulfillments than initially imagined. The prophet Jeremiah, for example, forecasted Old Testament, local, literal Babylon's doom, saying: "My people, go ye out of the midst of her...deliver

ye every man his own soul from the fierce anger of the Lord" (Jeremiah 51:45, KJV). Then, Jesus repeated the warning in regards to Jerusalem during His first coming: "When you shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies . . . let those who are in Judea depart" (Luke 21:20-21, KJV). Finally, an end time voice from heaven urges: "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues" (Rev. 18:4, KJV). Stripped of geographic and ethnic limitations on this side of the cross, Babylon emerges as the worldwide, end time enemy of God's universal Israel, the Christian Church. This spiritualized or universalized Babylon will meet its literal end just as the Scriptures describe it. But before type meets apocalyptic (end time) antitype, Jesus surprises us by applying the doom prophecies for Babylon to the Jerusalem of His day. The fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 foreshadows the utter destruction of end time Babylon, which has completely defected to the enemy.

Bear in mind, then, verses in the Old Testament look forward to fulfillment, while those in the New develop what began in the Old. Transformed by the cross, symbolic people, places, and things imported from the Old Testament enter the New Testament partially fulfilled at Christ's first coming, mature, and develop completely by the time He returns. Consider, for instance the double description of the Sea Beast in Revelation 13:1, 2. At first glance, John sees: "a beast rising up out of the sea. It had seven heads and ten horns, with ten crowns on its horns." As a satanic animal, it resembles the dragon from Revelation 12:3 with its scarlet color, seven heads, ten horns, and seven crowns.

But, what appeared at first as a single creature turns out to be an amalgamation of the four sea monsters from Daniel 7. As each arose from the water it swallowed up its predecessor, so that the fourth, though it had iron teeth, also had bronze claws. In other words, comparing the creatures to their counterparts in Daniel 2, the iron creature must have devoured its bronze predecessor. So each kingdom is a type of its successor, which absorbs it and continues to display some of its characteristics. In this way, the first three creatures lived on in their successors (Daniel 7:12), the second swallowing the first, the third swallowing the first two, until the fourth swallowed all three. More than that, since they are part of the monster in Revelation 13, the original beasts are also types of the last-day edition of the enemy—even in its end-time phase. That's why John describes the Sea Beast in verse 2: "This beast looked like a leopard, but it had the feet of a bear and the mouth of a lion! And the dragon gave the beast his own power and throne and great authority." While the New Testament imported the fourfold monster from the Old Testament, the cross changed it into a beast that resembled the dragon to expose its collusion with Satan.

Typology is a fascinating phenomenon that best accounts for this relationship between the Testaments. Unfortunately, the early church, like many Greek thinkers and rabbinical schools of Judaism believed that the Bible has more than one level of meaning. And, focusing on the spiritual rather than the literal sense, distorted typology into allegory – a collection of Old Testament stories with hidden meanings. So, for instance, they saw the story of Jonah and the big fish as a creative Old Testament way to talk about Messiah's

death and resurrection, since it is about a prophet who spends three days and nights buried in the belly of a fish. While Jesus Himself saw a connection with His three-day confinement to the tomb, Jonah's tale simply points to His experience rather than actually telling it in a symbolic way. Please consult Chapter 10 in "Handbook for Bible Study" for more details of a responsible typology that should dramatically improve your studies.

The Book Context

Once you have established solid contact with the overall theme of the Bible and the way the Testaments develop it, it's time to search for the overall plan and purpose of the book from which you have selected a passage.

The 5W's

Because you are only getting started, use the legendary 5 W's to get a rough sketch of things. According to the WordPress Toolkit website, "The 5 W's and H refer to the six questions that a reporter should answer in the lead paragraph of a news story." So, interrogating the text with the 5 W's is a great way to start gathering information for deeper study of the scriptures. Subtle details should come later. For now, just get in touch with who wrote the book, when, where and to whom he addressed it. Then try to determine why. How you choose to do this depends on your experience, training, and skill.

Advanced students usually extract answers directly from the text. Since first century correspondents signed letters from the beginning, the opening words of Ephesians 1:1, "Paul an apostle of Jesus Christ" indicate he wrote it. And since they typically addressed letters to recipients the same way we do, the inscription, to "God's holy people in Ephesus" identifies them as his audience.

Less experienced investigators of the Word, normally look up the answers to the 5 W's in a resource like the introductions to Bible books in a good study Bible. We recommend the Life Application Study Bible available in a variety of translations. Labeling them "Vital Statistics," the LASB lists the answers to the 5 W's for each Bible book. Here, for example, are its replies to inquiries about the Epistle to the Ephesians:

The 5 W's	Explained	Label	Replies
WHO	Who wrote the book?	Author	Paul
	Who did he write to?	Audience	The church at Ephesus, then circulated to neighboring local churches. Because the letter contains no specific references to people or problems in the Ephesian church and because the words "in Ephesus" (1:1) are not present in some early manuscripts, Paul may have intended this to be a circular letter to be read to all the churches in the area.

The 5 W's	Explained	Label	Replies
WHAT	Who did he write about to him/them?	Key People	Himself, Tychicus
	What does he say about himself?	Setting	Paul had spent over three years with the Ephesian church. As a result, he was very close to them.
	What does he say about his audience?		Paul met with the elders of the Ephesian church at Miletus (Acts 20:17-38)—a meeting that was filled with great sadness because he was leaving them for what he thought would be the last time.
	What does he say about the others?		Paul sent the letter with Tychicus
WHEN	When did he write the book?	Date of writing	Approximately AD 60
	When do the events in the book occur?		During Paul's Roman imprisonment
WHERE	Where did he write the book?	Location	From Rome
	Where do its events take place?		In local area churches
WHY	Why did he write the book?	Purpose	To strengthen the believers in Ephesus in their Christian faith by explaining the nature and purpose of the church, the body of Christ

The outline

After you get in touch with its background, find out how your passage fits into the book – to stay in context as you zero in on your text. Since many tend to lose sight of context as they focus on smaller portions of scripture, we suggest you consult an outline of the book before concentrating on any part of it. Briefly breaking down the book into its main parts, an outline shows the whole book at a glance, allowing you to see where the writer came from when he got to your passage and where he was headed as he left it – at the same time. Then you can safely home in on your passage, without isolating it from the writer's original purpose for it and make it say something it doesn't.

Life Application Study Bible correctly calls its outlines, "The Blueprint" since they show the design of each Bible book. Noted for its crisp and concise thumbnails, the LASB will put the entire layout at your disposal in the simplest format. So, for example, it divides Ephesians into just two main parts: **Unity in Christ** (1:1-3:21), and **Unity in the body of Christ** (4:1-6:24). A brief paragraph follows to explain the relation of the parts and simplify what they should mean to the reader. In this case, it says: "In this letter, Paul explains the wonderful things that we have received through Christ and refers to the church as a body to illustrate unity of purpose and show how each individual member is a part that must work together with all the other parts. In our own life, we should work to eradicate all backbiting, gossip, criticism, jealousy, anger, and bitterness, because these are barriers to unity in the church."

The Immediate Context

Aware of your passage’s connection with the previous contexts, you may now pin down where and how it fits into its book. Unlike its forerunners, however, this step presents some unique challenges. As A. Berkeley Mickelson points out: “The first responsibility of every interpreter is to note carefully what precedes and what follows any verse or passage which he is interpreting. This often involves going back two or three paragraphs and ahead two or three paragraphs. Chapter divisions do not necessarily serve as boundary lines. One may need to go back to the preceding chapter or ahead to the next chapter to get the true context” (Interpreting the Bible, p. 102).

So, we recommend you consider at least two paragraphs, or passages besides the one you have chosen. The one before leads into and prepares you for it, while the one after shows how the writer used it to set up the next. The three passages naturally capture the writer's or speaker's inspired flow of thought so you will see the text from his point of view. To find them, just look for the subheadings in your Bible, that divide the text into passages (back to back verses that talk about the same person, place, or thing). Passages begin with the first verse after a subheading, and end with the last verse before the next. Once you've located all three, arrange them for study. The layout should look something like this:

❑ Story ❑ Explanatory

Flow	Text: James 2:5-7	Notes
	DISCRIMINATION 2 For example, suppose someone comes into your meeting dressed in fancy clothes and expensive jewelry, and another comes in who is poor and dressed in dirty clothes. 3 If you give special attention and a good seat to the rich person, but you say to the poor one, “You can stand over there, or else sit on the floor” — well, 4 doesn’t this discrimination show that your judgments are guided by evil motives?	Identify the text you are studying – the one in the middle
<div>Check the format. A story unfolds one event at a time, usually in the order they happen. An explanation unfolds one thought at a time, in the order the writer arranged them</div>	FAVORITISM 5 Listen to me dear brothers and sisters. Hasn’t God chosen the poor in this world to be rich in faith? Aren’t they the ones who will inherit the Kingdom he promised to those who love him? 6 But you dishonor the poor! Isn’t it the rich who oppress you and drag you into court? 7 Aren’t they the ones who slander Jesus Christ, whose noble name you bear?	Place the passage before, here, single-spaced.
<div>Place the passage you want to study, here, 1.5 spaced</div>	OBEDIENCE 8 Yes indeed, it is good when you obey the royal law as found in the Scriptures: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” 9 But if you favor some people over others, you are committing a sin. You are guilty of breaking the law.	Insert subheadings before each passage as we did for this one, here
		Place the passage after, here, single-spaced.

Each biblical book can be broken down into passages, or paragraphs, that is blocks of related thought. (The Old Testament was not originally written in passages—just as the entire Bible was not originally written in verses. The passage/paragraph was originally considered a form of punctuation among the Greeks and was the only punctuation mark that Aristotle ever mentioned. Aristophanes, in developing his theory of rhetoric, subdivided long segments of writing into periods, colons, and commas, which, of course, we, today consider punctuation marks and not sections of copy. The Hebrew books of Scripture were divided into parashiyyot, (*a portion of the Torah read in the synagogue on the Sabbath and holy days*) not paragraphs, and at least some of these parashiyyot were given names. For example, the parashah [singular of parashiyyot] of Moses' encounter with God in the wilderness was called "the bush" and appears that way in Mark 12:26; Luke 20:37; Acts 7:35.)

Even if your text is only a fragment of a passage/paragraph, your search for its connection with what came before and after it may span an entire section. Sometimes, your investigation may extend to other sections—especially if your text is part of a section that resumes or develops an earlier topic or theme that differs from those of bordering sections. Normally, passages link one or more of three ways. Either:

1. What ended the previous passage, starts the one you wish to study

So, for example, the passage Isaiah 1:5-9 ends with a distant connection of Jerusalem to the ungodly cities of Sodom and Gomorrah in v.9. The first verse of the next passage, verses 10-17, however, begins with a more direct comparison, suggesting that Jerusalem's wickedness is on the same level with those cities, implying that God should judge Jerusalem in a similar way.

2. What began in the previous passage, continues in the one you wish to study

So, for example, the passage Isaiah 1:10-17 insists that Jerusalem's sins have reached the breaking point, so that its residents must either change or perish. The next passage, verses 18-23 continues to work for their reform by inviting them to the divine courtroom to work out the terms.

3. Some person, place, or thing in both passages is the same, similar, or related

So, for example, the passage 1:18-23 where the LORD acts as the prosecutor in a covenant lawsuit against Jerusalem. In the next passage, verses 24-26, the LORD transitions from prosecutor to judge, to finish what He started in v.18.

Once you have identified the connection, explore the link to see if it is:

1. **Historical**, tied to actual facts, people, places, or events—possibly in chronological order.
2. **Logical**, involved in a chain of reasoning, either based on what the writer or speaker said previously or as part of a developing argument.
3. **Theological**, developing some historical fact or circumstance along Christ-centered, church-oriented, or end-time lines.

4. **Psychological**, when the author or speaker seems to go off on a tangent for some inexplicable reason. Actually, something in the preceding text most likely triggered a somewhat different but related idea that interrupted the flow of thought. The result is usually the omission of linking words that normally connect words or phrases, a digression or explanation, or a sentence that breaks-off the original line of reasoning to launch into what at first seems to be out-of-place.

For example, more is at stake than Samson's personal fall in Judges 16. The angel of the Lord announced in 13:5 that Samson would begin to deliver his people—not just himself. So taking the larger context into account, we discover that God meant for Samson's individual Nazarite vows to commence the process of separating both him and Israel from a pagan Philistine environment.

God used the Hebrew strongman as a symbol of cultural differences to instigate division between His people and their oppressors. For instance, the Philistines relied on military prowess to give them the advantage over their neighbors. Archaeologists have uncovered evidence that the Philistines shaved their heads for hand-to-hand combat. Imagine how Samson's uncut locks stood out against a sea of Philistine "skinheads." So, Samson's final blow against the Dagon worshipers was more than an act of personal vindication; it was a blow toward Israel's freedom.

Interpreters need to recognize the real danger of bypassing the historical situation and reading the text as if God spoke directly to them and contemporary society. The opposite risk is also possible—that interpreters may get bogged down in the immediate situation, and draw the incorrect conclusion that God spoke only to Israel. As you try to understand your passage, stay in touch with the everlasting covenant, relate it to the way the Old or New Testament used it to develop or fulfill God's promises, and stick to what the writer of the book did with it. Explore how God's people related to your text from the Old Testament – before, during, and after the Babylonian exile, or from the New Testament – both before and after Christ's first coming. We'll show you what comes next when the time comes for you to analyze the text.



Conversing with God Through His Word

My favorite author used to say: *The word of the living God is not merely written, but spoken. The Bible is God's voice speaking to us, just as surely as though we could hear it with our ears. If we realized this, with what awe would we open God's word, and with what earnestness would we search its precepts! The reading and contemplation of the Scriptures would be regarded as an audience [or, a formal interview granted by and] with the Infinite One.*

Analyze the contents

Remember, God speaks Jesus, the only language in heaven. As the apostle John reminds us: "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God and the word was fully God" (1John 1:1). Another expression for God, then, "the word" was an attempt by God to communicate with creation. So, the writer of Hebrews states: "Long ago God spoke many times and in many ways to our ancestors through the prophets. But now in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son" (Hebrews 1:1-2). Although God spoke to His people through a long line of dedicated men and women, He finally sent His Son into the world to express Himself more clearly and distinctly than ever before. Unlike those imperfect prophets, "The Son radiates God's own glory and expresses the very character of God" (Hebrews 1:3). As Jesus explained to Philip, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). So, any attempt to make sense of the Bible apart from Christ must fail. The ancient Hebrews heard the Good News of Christ, but it didn't do them any good because they didn't accept him as their Savior (Hebrews 4:2). He has and always will be the only key to benefitting from scripture. So let's do what Jesus did for the disciples on the road to Emmaus: "Then Jesus took them through the writings of Moses and all the prophets, explaining from all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27).

The actual journey to truth begins with Analysis, a detailed examination of the elements and structure of a passage. It starts with separating the text into its constituent parts. Normally, students of the Word rely on grammar to probe scripture, dissecting it into eight official parts of speech: nouns, pronouns, adjectives, determiners, verbs, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, and interjections. Many further divide verbs into participles, infinitives, and gerunds, and even subdivide pronouns into nearly a dozen classes. That's well and good if you wish to wait until children master the whole system of language. But, we have a simpler way of taking the text apart to study it up close, one bit at a time: split up everything into five basic components: links, people, places, things, and empowering words. Children already know this terminology well enough to use it. And, with a little help from parents can use it to study the Bible side by side with them.

So, leaving grammar behind, let's get the whole family into the Bible, together. Start your conversation with God – through His Word!

How we got the Bible

Revelation and Inspiration

Before we can analyze the text for divine guidance, we must first confirm that the Bible has a right to enforce God's will. The people places, and things in it set examples for us only if it truly is sacred writing that commands unconditional respect. Two issues dominate discussions about the authority of the Bible: revelation and inspiration. Whether or not it sets the standard for Christians and society usually comes down to a debate over scripture's trustworthiness and reliability. This book assumes the authority of Scripture, confirms God as its source, and regards it as the only rule of faith and practice. Nevertheless, there is a critical bone of contention among Christians regarding its authenticity.

While most people of faith accept the Bible's original documents as genuine, they aren't quite as sure about versions of it handed down to them, since. Uncertainty over authenticity has triggered calls for accuracy bordering on obsession as well as excessive demands for absolute faithfulness to the autographs. So, instead of turning to God for answers, the church has tried to restore confidence in the Bible, itself. Though most admit scribes made errors copying ancient manuscripts for distribution, a sizable number believe that God still provided the Church with an error-free text in spite of their mistakes.

Concerns for perfection run so deep that infallibility freaks want a Bible that rules out virtually any human unreliable elements, insisting that God had to dictate the original Bible word-for-word or guarantee that its writers repeated exactly what he told them. Others see a partnership of faith with God in charge, supplying insights and guidance, and allowing the writers to use personal talents, backgrounds, and styles to relay his thoughts.

They realize that, despite the mortal desire for assurance about its text, God preserved the truth rather than the words of the Bible. While human efforts have been largely misdirected, God has already taken steps to rectify the problem. That's why He appointed the same Holy Spirit who superintended the writers to be our guide into all truth (John 16:13). As the divine link between writers and readers, the spirit that presided over the faithful reproduction of God's thoughts in writing, also oversees the Bible's responsible investigation. Because revelation isn't finished until the truths in Scripture make a home in our hearts, hearing the same still small voice that spoke to the writers completes the revelation process, so that the thoughts God shared with them end up in us. Consequently, those who depend on the Spirit by faith need no other guarantees when they study God's Word to tell truth from error.

Unfortunately, such questions over the Bible's accuracy also inflame the natural tendency to mistrust an authority if it isn't above suspicion. So, renowned devotional writer Oswald Chambers accused Israel of deliberately asking God to speak with Moses instead of them in order to inject doubts about Moses' authority to fully represent him. First, he asks: "Why are we so terrified for God to speak to us?" Then, he answers his own question for all of us: "It is because we know that when God speaks we must either do what He asks or tell Him we will not obey. But, if it is simply one of God's servants speaking to us, we feel obedience is optional, not imperative. We respond by saying: 'Well, that's only your own idea, even though I don't deny that what you said is probably God's truth'" (My Utmost for His Highest: Are We Listening to God?, February 12).

Regardless of our childish reservations, God knows we still need more information than meets the eye to fully grasp our eternal predicament. So, he shows the truth to us that we cannot see for ourselves, in a broad way via nature, and more specifically through the Bible. Though disclosures through creation are sufficient for God to hold everyone accountable for knowing Him (Romans 1:20), He has also provided us with a special exposé of reality: the Bible, to make the facts easier to comprehend.

Uncertain about translations? Do everything you can to investigate God's Word in its original languages! Unable to assemble a perfect replica of the originals from the documents available to you? Pull out all the stops to develop the closest possible relationship with God - to hear His still small voice through the text! As Jesus affirmed for the disciples: "He [the true Shepherd] walks ahead of His sheep and they follow Him because they know His voice" (John 10:4). The more intimately you know Jesus the better you can tell whether He (or, an imposter) speaks to you.

So, first and foremost, we call showing the truth about Himself, our fallen world, and its desperate situation: *revelation*. As for *inspiration*, it is the process by which God disclosed the truth and supervised its writing. We refer to the sacred writings in the Bible that record the truth revealed under divine supervision as *scripture*. Just as the Holy Spirit used the personalities and literary styles of its human writers to give us God's Word, so the same Spirit also enables those who study scripture to understand and live by it.

The Four Laws

As part of the process of inspiration, the Holy Spirit supervised the writers of Scripture to stay consistent with each other as He held them to the truth. Using literary principles to build their thoughts on one another, he synchronized their writings. That's why verses from one author can help you understand whole passages by another. Four of these literary laws make it easier to navigate the text, analyze their writings, and see their points, namely: Summary, Context, First Mention and Repetition. Recognize when Bible writers use them, and the text will explain itself to you.

1. The Law of **Summary**

Bible writers tend to summarize their thoughts, two ways:

- At the beginning of a passage, before they go into detail.

So, Moses summarizes the creation story, *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth"* (Genesis 1:1) before he goes into detail, *"Now, the earth was without form and void"* in the very next verse (Gen. 1:2).

- At the end of a passage, to sum up what they've said

Writers collect previous thoughts before moving on to the next. So, Paul, briefly recaps Romans 4, *"Jesus...was brought back to life so we could **receive God's approval**"* in 4:25 to build a bridge to Chapter 5 where the approval secured by Christ's resurrection in v.25 serves as the foundation for harmony with heaven: *"Now that we **have God's approval** by faith we have peace with God through what Christ has done for us"* (5:1).

2. The Law of **Context**

Everything in the Bible prepares the way for and leads into what comes after it

- Under the Holy Spirit's guidance, Bible writers created - out of their audiences' situations plus their own God-given concerns - a world called "context" for the words, people, places, and things in their writings.
- No interpretation of a verse can stand up to scrutiny unless you study it in its context--the world the writer developed for it. Taken in context, we grasp verses as writers intended; taken out of context, we may miss their point entirely.
- So, to capture the author's complete thought, study one passage at a time. To capture his flow of thought, study a passage together with the ones immediately before and after it. Drawing on the previous passage and heading into the next--will keep the passage in touch with the whole context from start to finish.

3. The Law of **Repetition**

Writers repeat what's important to them

- To make what's important to them, stand out

- To make it easier to understand what they repeat
 - About one-third of the Bible (75% of the Old Testament) is poetry; but instead of matching sounds, Bible writers normally rhyme thoughts. Every time Bible writers rhyme a thought, they repeat words, people, places, or things they have already mentioned:
 - ➡ When thoughts are identical, the writer rhymes (repeats) them with the same words
 - ➡ Same means exactly alike. For example, in Gen. 1:16, Moses reports: ***God made two great lights, the greater one to rule the day, and the lesser one to rule the night***
 - Notice he repeats the word “**rule**” to show that the lesser light, the moon directs the affairs at night, just as the greater light, the sun does during the day
 - ➡ Occasionally writers use substitutes to refer to the same person, place, or thing in the text.
 - In Ps. 110, for example, David calls the Lord of v.1, a priest in v.4. He wants us to know that the one installed at God’s right hand is more than a King. He is also a priest after the order of Melchizedek, sitting down because he has just offered the perfect and final sacrifice (cp. Heb. 10:11-14).
 - ➡ When thoughts resemble one another, the writer rhymes (repeats) them with similar words
 - ➡ Similar means items share some natural connection.
 - Take, for instance the rod and staff of Psalm 23:4; though obviously serving different functions, they are still similar because both are sticks of wood.
 - ➡ When different thoughts work together or teach by contrast, the writer rhymes (repeats) them with related words
 - ➡ Related means the writer used logic or some other form of reasoning to connect items that normally have nothing to do with each other.
 - So, “All the days of my life” and “forever” in Psalm 23 are related because both are time periods. Though the first refers to time in this world, and the second in the world to come, the Lord will care for David during both of them.
 - In the same way, “Walk,” “stand,” and “sit” in Psalm 1, normally have nothing to do with each other; but David uses all three to show the progressive stages of deterioration due to sin—from complete freedom to move (walk), to paralysis (sit).
 - As for “Walk” and “dwell” in Psalm 23, they normally have nothing to do with each other; but David uses both to describe the two phases of the Christian life: “walk” describes the believer’s journey through this world; while “dwell” tells what will happen when God’s flock arrives at its final destination.

4. 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 that previously mentioned term, consider the effect the repetitions have on its first mention.

So, for example, let's look at the repetitions in our sample passage, James 2:5-7:

		<input type="checkbox"/> Story <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Explanation	
Flow	Text: James 2:5-7	Notes	
<p>He does the same thing with "dressed" to show that rich or poor put on their clothes the same way</p> <p>He repeats "fancy clothes" with "expensive jewelry" to show the rich dress lavishly and are ostentatious</p> <p>"Can stand over there" away from the believer, and "or else sit on the floor" are degrading, related alternatives to "a good seat"</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">DISCRIMINATION</p> <p>2 For example, suppose someone comes into your meeting dressed in fancy clothes and expensive jewelry, and another comes in who is poor and dressed in dirty clothes.</p> <p>3 If you give special attention and a good seat to the rich person, but you say to the poor one, "You can stand over there, or else sit on the floor" -well,</p> <p>4 doesn't this discrimination show that your judgments are guided by evil motives?</p>	<p>James repeats "comes" with the same word, to show that rich or poor approach the church on equal terms</p> <p>The poor wear only "dirty clothes" to contrast their plain, unappealing appearance with rich overkill</p> <p>James repeats "a good seat" with a related opposite, "the floor" to show that such "special attention" is nothing less than "discrimination"</p>	
	<p style="text-align: center;">FAVORITISM</p> <p>5 Listen to me, dear brothers and sisters. Hasn't God chosen the poor in this world to be rich in faith? Aren't they the ones who will inherit the Kingdom he promised to those who love him?</p> <p>6 But you dishonor the poor! Isn't it the rich who oppress you and drag you into court?</p> <p>7 Aren't they the ones who slander Jesus Christ, whose noble name you bear?</p>	<p>"Evil motives" repeats and downgrades "judgments" to mere carnal impulses</p> <p>He repeats "love" with "oppress" to contrast the rich with the poor on spiritual grounds, especially in view of his fond regard for them: "dear brothers and sisters"</p> <p>He also repeats "drag" with "slander" and "bear" to show that favoring the rich enables them to disrespect believers, the poor, and the LORD</p>	
	<p style="text-align: center;">OBEDIENCE</p> <p>8 Yes indeed, it is good when you obey the royal law as found in the Scriptures: "Love your neighbor as yourself."</p> <p>9 But if you favor some people over others, you are committing a sin. You are guilty of breaking the law.</p>	<p>He also repeats "promised" with "drag" to contrast the way God treats the poor with the way the rich treat believers</p> <p>He repeats "committing" with "guilty of breaking" to equate favoritism of any kind with law breaking.</p>	
	<p>He repeats "chosen" with "promised" to upgrade God's intentions for the ones He prefers to a guarantee for their future</p> <p>He also repeats "promised" with "dishonor" to contrast God's word of honor with the disrespect shown by unfavorable, biased believers</p> <p>He repeats "love" with the same word to show believers that God's preference proves that the poor obey scripture and fulfill the Law.</p> <p>He repeats "chosen" with "favor" to show that believers are at odds with God when they prefer the rich and also break the law</p>		

So, the Law of First Mention not only validates the other three Laws, but it also keeps you in context, comparing or contrasting everything in the text as one continuous flow of thought - an unbroken, uninterrupted line of reasoning from start to finish. Prevented from straying, it will empower you to see the text from the writer's perspective and walk word by word, thought by thought in his inspired shoes!

Color-Code your passage

The path of truth in the text is paved with six types of cobblestone: links, persons, places, things, helpers, and empowering words. As you can see from the diagram above, we need something more vivid than bland black-and-white letters to make the parts of the text stand out so we can tell them apart from each other. Thank God there is a simple way to get effective impressions of any text – even kids can master!

Color-coding is the easiest way we know to display the five parts of the text using the graphic power of color. Originally used to let people know different messages with assorted color flags, colors help electricians tell apart wires, and pharmacists to distinguish pills from one another. Bible students rely on color to separate the text into its parts. To make it easier to analyze the text, break down the many types of words into five simple parts: linking words, persons, places, things and empowering words.

When it comes to Bible study, scholars have shared no end of color-codes. While these custom systems make sense to those who develop them, they make the text harder to understand for those who did not. Men and women find it difficult to grasp the text for themselves when they have to follow the line of reasoning behind someone else’s code.

Back in seminary, an African friend who mastered every other class, struggled in Hebrew. When I asked him why, he explained: “The teacher speaks English, but I think, Nigerian. So, to answer his questions, I have to translate Hebrew into my native language first, then back into his English.” Something similar happens when we try to follow someone else’s color code. Instead of translating the code into meaningful clues, we hit an unexpected obstacle: the custom system that makes perfect sense to its developer, acts like a language barrier to us – blocking our path to the goal. Unable to decipher its cryptic design, we reach a dead end. The same key that opens the text for its originator, only complicates things for the rest of us.

We need to cut out the middleman! To understand the text for ourselves as well as to share it with others, we must break everything down into simple groups, and use as few colors as possible – instead of different colors for the many different parts of the text. After 30 years of trial and error, here is a simple system that works:

BIBLE STUDY COLOR-CODES	
PARTS	COLORS
Links	RED
Godly Persons	ORANGE
Ungodly Persons	LIGHT GREEN
God	PURPLE
Places	GREEN
Things	BLUE
Helpers	DARK BLUE
Empowering Words	BROWN

While we picked different colors to separate **godly** from **ungodly** persons, and a specific one to identify **God**, you can always choose a lighter or darker shade of the same color to tell apart items in the same family or group. So, while Ezekiel and the remnant are both **godly**, we marked the prophet with a **darker shade** of orange.

We used to mark each grammatical part of the text with its own color, using up to twenty-four in a single passage depending on its composition. Separated into high-resolution rainbows passages told us all sorts of things, though the coding didn't help us one bit with any other. But, when we switched to the five general groups mentioned above, we and others could easily see how passages flow into one another, detected the patterns they share, and even heard them explain each other. As an added bonus, we also found that this simpler "one-size fits all" approach works for any passage in the Bible.

This plainer brand of coding is easily mastered. Just read the text to scan its parts. To help you tell one from another, we'll show how to recognize each type by sight and to look up questionable ones in a dictionary. Straightforward examples of each kind along with practical guidance for those situations that require special attention will simplify the identification process for you. Then, once you decide whether they are links, people, places, things, or empowering words, you may either underline, **fill them with the appropriate color**, or **both**. Before long you should classify the parts in any passage almost at a glance!

Find the links in your passage

Context

As we reported earlier, Bible writers joined passages and verses two chief ways: always by context, and/or with linking words when they wanted to enhance the connection. In both the Old and New Testaments, they chose certain words in particular forms to express what God showed them. Guided by an agenda, a storyline, or a set of circumstances they created a world for the people, places, and things in their writings.

Unless you become familiar with that world and learn its language - you probably won't understand anything in it. Since the writer's plan or the historical situation behind the text created a continuous flow of thought, what comes both before and after each word or verse helps to explain it.

Remember, **stories** develop by *adding something new, filling in what's missing, or bringing out something you could never see any other way*. As for **explanations**, they typically *start with what ended the previous passage, continue what began in, or repeat the same, similar, or related people, places, or things featured in it*. **Linking** words enhance the connection, sharply defining the relationship with what came earlier. But, when the writer relies entirely on **context**, the next line continues what began in the preceding one, repeating catchwords or phrases to connect with and explain, or build on it.

Take Ezekiel 7:3, 4, where the LORD says to the prophet: "**No hope remains, for I will unleash my anger against you. I will call you to account for all your detestable sins. I will turn my eyes away and show no pity. I will repay you for all your detestable sins. Then you will know that I am the LORD.**" The LORD deliberately repeats Himself using same, similar or related words. To start with, if you arrange these verses to show the flow of thought, they would look like this:

No hope remains, for I will unleash my anger against you.
I will call you to account for all your detestable sins.
I will turn my eyes away and show no pity.
I will repay you for all your detestable sins.
Then you will know that I am the LORD.

It's easy to see that the four lines, each beginning with the word "I" that personally refers to the LORD, all line up with each other. But, on closer inspection you should also notice that the LORD alternates ideas to get His point across. In other words, "**I will unleash my anger against you**" matches up with "**I will turn my eyes away and show no pity**". Both lines talk about all-out rage, the first mentioning unchecked anger, and the second describing a refusal to let suffering influence or move him to sympathy. In a similar way: "**I will call you to account for all your detestable sins**" also matches up with "**I will repay you for all your detestable sins**." To settle accounts for every sin is just another way of saying: the LORD will repay sinners for *all* the offenses on their record. The actual flow of thought, then looks more like this:

No hope remains, for I will unleash my anger against you.
I will call you to account for all your detestable sins.
I will turn my eyes away and show no pity.
I will repay you for all your detestable sins.
Then you will know that I am the LORD.

At the same time, each succeeding line does more than simply offer an alternative. In addition to repeating, "**unleash my anger against you**", "**turn my eyes away and show no pity**" explains how an outraged God acts and feels when He "unleashes" or, holds back none of His fury. To illustrate an outburst of violent anger without sympathy or leniency, the LORD says He will refuse to look at or take into account the pain caused by His anger, without feeling sorry for or softening His actions. The same applies to the expression "**will repay**" that takes the statement, "**call you to account**" to an unfavorable final outcome. Sin runs up debt only Christ can pay; everyone else earns death for their efforts. So, from a simple audit of their records in the preceding verse, "repay" assumes the sinners have run up a lethal tab with God. Unable to postpone collection any longer, He will pay them back in full for their disrespect and disobedience with unleashed anger and without pity, a biblical symbol for retaliation, or revenge!

Linking words

Any word or group of words that tie together or combine two or more passages, verses, parts of verses, persons, places, or things is a "link". Our purpose at this point is to provide a list that will help you recognize and identify linking words in the text. Details will come later when we explain the significance of the connections they create. For want of less stuffy labels, let's just say two types of linking words appear in the Bible: **conjunctions** and **transitions**. Though they handle the text differently, both accomplish the same thing.

Conjunctions create certain kinds of relationships between the items they link. Three kinds occur in the Bible: those that connect equals, those that come in pairs to link items that work together, and those that link unequals to team up items that need each other. Here is a list* of **conjunctions** and descriptions of what they do, to work from.

Conjunctions	
Equality <i>Link items of equal value or that function on the same level</i>	for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so
Comparison <i>Note similarity or dissimilarity between items they link</i>	like, as, as much as, whereas, than, rather than, whether
Concession <i>Allows for or admits something between items they link</i>	though, although, even though, while
Condition <i>Sets up what must exist or happen before something else is possible or permitted</i>	if, only if, unless, until, providing that, assuming that, even if, in case (that), lest
Pairs <i>Team up to show the relationship or connection between equal ideas</i>	as...as, just as...so, both...and, hardly...when, scarcely when, either...or, if...then, rather... than, no sooner...than, neither... nor, not...but, what with...and, whether...or, not only...but also
Time <i>When something has, is, or will happen</i>	after, as long as, as soon as, before, by the time, now that, once, since, till, until, when, whenever, while, then
Reason <i>Cause, explanation, or justification for an action or event</i>	because, since, so that, in order that, why, for
Manner <i>Way in which a thing is done or happens</i>	how, as if, as though
Place <i>Position, direction, realm, or location</i>	where, wherever
Reference <i>Mention, citation, or allusion to a person, place, or thing</i>	that, what, whatever, which, whichever
Description <i>Report, illustration, or portrayal of a person, place, or thing</i>	who, whoever, whom, whomever, whose
Logical <i>The course of action or line of reasoning that links items in the text</i>	also, besides, furthermore, likewise, moreover, however, nevertheless, nonetheless, still, thus, conversely, instead, otherwise, rather, accordingly, consequently, hence, meanwhile, therefore, so, then

Transitions are words or groups of words that join topics/concepts and describe the relationship between them. Building bridges between, “transitions” help the writer to progress smoothly from one thought to the next. Depending on the words involved, the connection can either become more apparent, clear, vivid, self-explanatory, definite, or to the contrary, more nebulous, vague, inexplicit, ambiguous, or obscure ([www. smart-words.org](http://www.smart-words.org)). Here is a list* of **transitions** to work from:

Transitions			
Agreement/	in the first place	by the same token	yes, too/indeed
Addition/	not only ... but also	again	moreover
Similarity	as a matter of fact	to	as well as
<i>These words and phrases add info, reinforce ideas, and express agreement with preceding material</i>	in like manner	and	together with
	in addition	also	of course
	coupled with	then	likewise
	in the same fashion / way	equally	comparatively
	first, second, third	identically	correspondingly
	in the light of	uniquely	similarly
	not to mention	like, or as	furthermore
	to say nothing of	equally important	additionally
Opposition/	although this may be true	in reality	although
Limitation/	in contrast	after all	instead
Contradiction	different from	but	whereas
<i>Show evidence to the contrary or point out alternatives, and thus introduce a change in the line of reasoning (contrast)</i>	of course ..., but	(and) still	despite
	on the other hand	unlike	conversely
	on the contrary	or, or else	otherwise
	at the same time	(and) yet	however
	in spite of	while	rather
	even so / though	albeit	nevertheless
	be that as it may	besides	nonetheless
	then again	as much as	regardless
Cause/	above all	even though	notwithstanding
	in the event that	seeing / being that	while
Condition/	granted (that)	in view of	lest
Purpose	as / so long as	If	in case
<i>These words and phrases present specific conditions or intentions</i>	on (the) condition (that)	... then	provided that
	for the purpose of	unless	given that
	with this intention	when	only / even if
	with this in mind	whenever	so that
	in the hope that	while	so as to
	to the end that	because of	owing to
	for fear that	as	inasmuch as
	in order to	since	due to

Examples/	in other words	on the negative/positive side	expressly
Support/	to put it differently	with this in mind	surprisingly
Emphasis	for one thing	notably	frequently
<i>Used to intro examples as support, to indicate importanc e, or as an illustration that cues up an idea to the reader</i>	as an illustration	including	significantly
	in this case	like	particularly
	for this reason	to be sure	in fact
	to put it another way	namely	in general
	that is to say	chiefly	in particular
	with attention to	truly	in detail
	by all means	indeed	for example
	important to realize	certainly	for instance
	another key point	surely	to demonstrate
	first thing to remember	markedly	to emphasize
	most compelling evidence	such as	to repeat
	must be remembered	especially	to clarify
	point often overlooked	explicitly	to explain
Effect/	to point out	specifically	to enumerate
	as a result	thus	therefore
Consequence/	under those circumstances	because the	thereupon
Result	in that case	then	forthwith
<i>Show what makes something happen as well as what occurs because of it</i>	for this reason	hence	accordingly
	in effect	consequently	henceforth
	for	so	well
	* thus, then, accordingly, consequently, therefore, henceforth are time words that show after a particular time there was a consequence or an effect		
	** for and because are placed before the cause/reason		
	*** The other members of this group are placed before the consequences or effects		
Conclusion/	as can be seen	in fact	usually
Summary/	generally speaking	in summary	by and large
Restatement	in the final analysis	in conclusion, so	to sum up
<i>Conclude, summarize and/or restate ideas, or indicate a final general statement.</i>	all things considered	in short	on the whole
	as shown above, therefore	in brief	in any event
	in the long run	in essence	in either case
	given these points	to summarize	all in all
	as has been noted, well	on balance	obviously

Effect words like therefore can be used to summarize	as has been noted, well	on balance	Obviously
	in a word	altogether	Ultimately
	for the most part	overall	Definitely
	after all	ordinarily	shortly
Time/	at the present time	finally	henceforth
Chronology/ Sequence	from time to time	after	whenever
	sooner or later	later	eventually
<i>Limit, restrict, define time - either alone or as part of an expression.</i> <i>Many of these words have other functions.</i> Numbers <i>add info or list examples.</i> <i>The rest add a meaning of time in conditions, qualifications, or reasons.</i> Further <i>adds space or time</i>	at the same time	last	meanwhile
	up to the present time	until	further
	to begin with	till	during
	in due time	since	shortly
	as soon as	then	in time
	as long as	before	prior to
	in the meantime	hence	forthwith
	in a moment	since	straightaway, at once
	without delay	when	by the time
	in the first place	once	whenever
	all of a sudden	about	until now
	at this instant	next	now that
	first, second	now	instantly
	immediately	formerly	presently
	quickly	suddenly	occasionally
Space/	in the middle	next	nearby
Location/	to the left/right	where	wherever
Place <i>As part of expressions, to restrict, limit, or qualify space. Those found on the Time list can also describe how a space is arranged or the way a space is referred to.</i>	in front of	from	around
	on this side	over	between
	in the distance	near	before
	here and there	above	alongside
	in the foreground	below	amid
	in the background	down	among
	in the center of	up	beneath
	adjacent to	under	beside
	opposite to	further	behind
	here, there	beyond	across

* Both lists were adapted from the www.smart-words.org website.

With the help of these lists, you can confidently spot linking words in any passage, then color-code and set them apart from the rest of the text. While you should wait until later in the study process to grasp the fuller significance of links, the chart above explains enough about them at this point to make sense of the text as you work from verse to verse. To see how this works, look at the following color-coded diagram of our sample text, James 2:5-7. Notice how highlighting the links in red makes them stand out from the rest of the text and enhances the connections between passages, verses, parts of verses, persons, places, and things. Side-notes repeat what the lists say about the linking words.

Here, for example, is the way linking words help to capture and explain the layout of our sample text, James 2:5-7:

		<div> <div>□ Story</div> <div>✕ Explanation</div> </div>	
Flow	Text: James 2:5-7	Notes	
Examples/Support/Emphasis, "for example" intros an example that illustrates v.1	<p style="text-align: center;">DISCRIMINATION</p> <p>2 <u>For example</u>, suppose someone comes into your meeting dressed in fancy clothes <u>and</u> expensive jewelry, and another comes in who is poor and dressed in dirty clothes.</p> <p>3 <u>If</u> you give special attention <u>and</u> a good seat to the rich person, <u>but</u> you say to the poor one, "You can stand over there, <u>or else</u> sit on the floor" –<u>well</u>,</p> <p>4 doesn't this discrimination show that your judgments are guided by evil motives?</p>	Agreement/Addition/ Similarity, "and" adds expensive jewelry to fancy clothes	
Cause/Condition/Purpose, "if" sets up a condition for discrimination		Agreement/Addition/ Similarity, "and" adds "a good seat" to "special attention"	
Opposition/Limitation/ Contradiction, "but" shows evidence to the contrary		Conclusion/Summary/ Restatement, "well" pauses to consider what's been said before drawing a conclusion	
Opposition/Limitation/ Contradiction, "or else" points out an alternative to standing			
	<p style="text-align: center;">FAVORITISM</p> <p>5 Listen to me, dear brothers <u>and</u> sisters. Hasn't God chosen the poor in this world to be rich in faith? Aren't they the ones who will inherit the Kingdom he promised to those who love him?</p> <p>6 <u>But</u> you dishonor the poor! Isn't it the rich who oppress you <u>and</u> drag you into court?</p> <p>7 Aren't they the ones who slander Jesus Christ, whose noble name you bear?</p>	Agreement/Addition/ Similarity, "and" adds or includes "sisters" with "brothers"	
Opposition/Limitation/ Contradiction, "but" shows evidence to the contrary		Agreement/Addition/ Similarity, "and" reinforces "oppress"	
Examples/Support/Emphasis, "indeed" reinforces agreement with previous material			
Agreement/Addition/ Similarity, "yes" agrees with previous material	<p style="text-align: center;">OBEDIENCE</p> <p>8 <u>Yes indeed</u>, it is good <u>when</u> you obey the royal law <u>as</u> found in the Scriptures: "Love your neighbor <u>as</u> yourself."</p> <p>9 <u>But if</u> you favor some people over others, you are committing a sin. You are guilty of breaking the law.</p>	Time/Chronology/ Sequence, "when" defines the time obedience is "good"	
Cause/Condition/Purpose "as" sets condition when obedience is good		Agreement/Addition/ Similarity, "as" expresses agreement between (equates) neighbor and yourself	
Opposition/Limitation/ Contradiction, "but" shows evidence to the contrary		Cause/Condition/Purpose, "if" sets up a condition for committing sin/guilt	

A word of caution. To keep the entire text in proper perspective while separating it into its components, you need to stay in touch with the writer's line of reasoning. Otherwise, dividing passages into six parts may cause you to lose sight of the overall context. Since linking words rely on the context to enhance connection in the text, we can't allow them to distract us from the writer's argument or storyline. So, before we go any further, let's pause to consider the writer's flow of thought in the text.

The writer's flow of thought

At the Logos Talksite on July 9, 2015, Todd Bishop commented on a very common mistake even sincere Christians make. Obviously disappointed and somewhat annoyed, He pointed out that, *"There are few things more frustrating than hearing Bible verses taken out of context, especially if you consider yourself a serious student of the Bible. You know what I'm talking about—some well-meaning Christian quotes a verse. He's uncovered a spiritual truth that perfectly addresses a personal challenge. The only problem? **He's completely ignored the surrounding context!** The New Testament wasn't written in isolated, versified chunks of unrelated texts. Each verse flows from a greater context. When we ignore the logical flow of a biblical passage or book, we risk misinterpretation. Understanding the flow of thought of a biblical passage is essential to good hermeneutics and sound application of biblical principles."*

If they aren't distracted by the parts of the text that attract them, pouncing on them at the expense of the rest, people *"ignore the logical flow of thought of a biblical passage"* for a variety of reasons. First and foremost, they don't even know it exists – either, for lack of training or because they have been schooled to disregard context. In an effort to guarantee reproduction of their beliefs, churches tend to indoctrinate rather than educate their members. I remember taking 3 1/2 years of dogmatic theology in college – and we never cracked a Bible. They teach people to memorize their beliefs without proper investigation.

Secondly, if churches do teach members to *"investigate,"* they either, lead them through verses strung together for them, or coach them to fill in the blanks of study guides – both intended to lead them to their conclusions. Convinced others must share their beliefs, they do anything to reproduce them in anyone who will listen. Brainwashing, drilling, deception – call it what you will, but this method does assume unfounded authority to dogmatically transplant pet deductions from scripture as if they are impeccably true. Shades of the often off base deductive Jewish commentators.

Logical flow describes how the text moves smoothly from item to item, one verse to the next, and one passage to another. Based on the efforts of the writers to communicate with their audiences, the text relies on context or linking words to transition from one event or thought to what comes after it in a way that readers can follow. As you trace the progress of a story or the development of an idea or argument, you take the same path the storyteller or expositor used to express himself, the only road that leads to the true meaning of the text. Gradually, everything falls into place. The whole passage makes

sense. You feel like you're getting somewhere. Fulfillment of your desire to learn awaits you at the end of the trail, at the finish line of your journey.

Normally, writers rely on the circumstances that make up the setting for an event, statement, or idea to create the flow of their thoughts. So, when you examine the next line in a story or explanation, it either shares a concept, a detail, a catchword or phrase with the one before it. For example:

- The prophet smoothly transitions from the idea of "kill your people" in Ezekiel 6:4 to 6:5 with the synonymous phrases "lay your corpses" and "scatter your bones"
- Ezekiel 6:2 leads directly into 6:3 with the identical phrase, "mountains of Israel" in both verses.
- He also creates a flow of thought by referring back to the expression "three equal parts" in Ezekiel 5:1 with the catchwords: "a third", "another third", and "the last third" in 5:2.

Occasionally, writers connect events or thoughts with linking words that make the association between events or thoughts more obvious than context alone.

- The word "justification" at the end of Romans 4:25 for instance flows into the word "justified" in the next verse, 5:1. But Paul uses the linking word "therefore" at the beginning of 5:1 to strengthen the connection. Emphasizing that 5:1 depends on and flows from what he said in 4:25 helps the reader to see the bond between them more clearly.

So, to chart the flow you must trace the way the writer joined verses and passages together with context, and/or powerful linking words. Then you can follow the writer's or speaker's continuous stream of thought as it unfolds from one line to the next and understand what he or she says.

STORIES unfold one event at a time, usually in the order they happen and proceed *three* ways: either, the next line in a story:

1. **Adds something new** to what came before

- So, Jonah 1:10 adds the sailors' reaction to Jonah's confession in 1:9 that he worships the Creator who has control over the wind and the sea.

2. **Fills in details missing** from what came before

- So, when Jonah admitted to running away from the Lord in 1:10, he also filled in something missing from 1:9--another answer to the sailors' questions in 1:8.

3. **Brings out something** you couldn't see before

- So, when Jonah concedes in 1:12 that he caused the storm, he reveals (or, brings out) why throwing him overboard will calm the sea.

IDEAS or **ARGUMENTS** unfold one thought at a time in the order the writer arranged them and also develop *three* ways. What comes next either:

1. **Agrees** with what came before

- Thus, they are on the same side, get along with each other, and work together. In synch and in tune with one another - they are buddies on the same wavelength with a friendly relationship. When this is the case:

- ▶ The second thought **builds on** the first, to continue it, make a comparison, add more information, or insert another step in a series

LOOK FOR THESE LINKING WORDS WHEN THE WRITER USES THEM TO MAKE AGREEMENT MORE OBVIOUS:

Too, also, as, just as, so also, likewise, besides, and, like, furthermore, in like manner, in the same way, moreover, neither, nor, or

OTHER CLUES TO LOOK FOR, WITH OR WITHOUT LINKING WORDS (WHEN THE WRITER RELIES ENTIRELY ON CONTEXT):

To *CONTINUE* the first *thought*, the second should keep it going, by:

- Expressing the same idea as the first
 - ▶ Ezekiel 4:4, "Now lie on your left side and **place the sins of Israel on yourself**. **You are to bear their sins** for the number of days you lie there on your side."
 - * Though the expression "**You are to bear their sins**" isn't exactly the same as "**place the sins of Israel on yourself**," it does express the same idea: pointing to Christ, Isaiah's "Suffering Servant", Ezekiel previews the way Jesus will shoulder the weight of Messianic Israel's/the remnant's sins - continuing the thought so the LORD can add a time factor to Ezekiel's symbolic drama: "for the number of days you lie there on your side".
- Repeating some of the same words as the first, or words related to it
 - ▶ Ezekiel 5:14 "So I will turn you into a ruin, **a mockery** in the eyes of the surrounding nations and to all who pass by.
 - ▶ Ezekiel 5:15 "You will become an object of **mockery** and taunting and horror."
 - * Verse 15 repeats the word "**mockery**" from v.14, but takes the attitude or opinion, "in the eyes of" to the next level. From a negative impression, Jerusalem will become "an object of" or target of "**mockery**" in the minds of its neighbors or passersby. So verse 15 continues the thought to show that more than a shell of its former self, the city and its citizens will also be the victim of vicious put-downs as well as a scary reminder of what it means to double-cross God.
- Rewording the first, without changing it
 - ▶ Ezekiel 6:2 "Son of man, turn and face **the mountains of Israel** and prophesy **against** them.
 - ▶ Ezekiel 6:3 Proclaim this message from the Sovereign LORD **against the mountains of Israel**.
 - * Verse 3 rewords "**the mountains of Israel** and prophesy **against** them", into "**against the mountains of Israel**" without changing its meaning. So continuing the thought, v.3 explains the word, "prophesy" as "Proclaim this message from the Sovereign LORD." While v.2 assigns a

task to Ezekiel, v.3 continues the thought to introduce "this message" he has been given to deliver.

To *MAKE A COMPARISON* with the first, the second thought should:

- *Resemble (or, have something in common with) the first*
 - ▶ Genesis 3:6 "So **she** took some of the fruit **and ate it**. Then she gave some to her husband, who was with her, **and he ate it, too**."
 - * The linking word, "**too**," implies that Adam did the same thing as Eve. According to the Life Application Study Bible: "One of the realities of sin is that its effects spread. After Eve sinned, she involved Adam in her wrongdoing. When we do something wrong, often we try to relieve our guilt by involving someone else."
- *Say something similar to the first*
 - ▶ Ezek. 4:10 **Ration this out** to yourself, **eight ounces of food for each day**, and eat it at set times.
 - ▶ Ezek. 4:11 Then **measure out a jar of water for each day**, and drink it at set times.
 - * During the Babylonian siege, Israel had to cut back on its diet to make supplies last. So, just as the rebels rationed food, they also limited themselves to a jar of water per day. As an extra precaution, they forbade eating or drinking between meals.

To *ADD MORE INFORMATION TO* the first, the second thought should:

- *Join new info to the first with a linking word*
 - ▶ So, Paul introduces himself to the Romans as "**a slave of Christ Jesus**," who is both "**chosen by God to be an apostle**," and "**sent out to preach his Good News**" (Romans 1:1).
- *Mix new info with the first, with or without a linking word*
 - ▶ "**Envied is the person who does not follow the advice of the wicked, or stands around with sinners, or joins in with mockers**" (Psalm 1:1)
 - * The Psalmist completes the description of the "**envied person**," attaching extra qualifications with the linking word, "**or**"
 - ▶ "**But not the wicked! They are like worthless chaff, scattered by the wind. They will be condemned at the time of judgment**" (Psalm 1:4, 5)
 - * He adds the second line in v.5 to the first in v.4 without a linking word to complete his description of "**the wicked**." The linking word "**But**" sets up a contrast between the two kinds of people who are opposites of each other.
- *Build up the thought of the first, with or without a linking word*
 - ▶ Psalm 1:1 also builds up the thought "**envied is the person**", by gradually increasing the contrast with those who want what he or she has. A series of words – **walk**, **stand**, and **sit** – progressively describes

the envious as those eventually immobilized by sin. From walking about, they stand still, and end up sitting down as the words intensify sin's crippling effects. No wonder they covet the freedom of those liberated from slavery to sin.

To *INSERT ANOTHER STEP IN A SERIES*, when the *first* thought is the previous step, the *second* thought should:

- *Resemble the first* to show a *relation* to it
 - ▶ **"And now, son of man, take a large clay brick and set it down in front of you. Then draw a map of the city of Jerusalem on it. Show the city under siege. Build a wall around it so no one can escape. Set up the enemy camp, and surround the city with siege ramps and battering rams."**
 - * The LORD tells Ezekiel to dramatize Babylon's siege of Jerusalem in a series of steps. First he needs to select a brick, on which he should draw a map of Jerusalem. Then, he should surround the city with a wall, the enemy army, and the weapons for a blockade – on the map.
- *Follow the first*, as the *next* phase or stage in a sequence of things, events, or matters
 - ▶ **"Go and walk through the land in every direction, for I am giving it to you." So Abram moved his camp to Hebron and settled near the oak grove belonging to Mamre. There he built another altar to the LORD."**
 - * The linking word **"so"** at the beginning of Genesis 13:18 starts a chain reaction to God's gift in v.17. After God told him to survey the land for the property of his choice, (1) Abram moved there, (2) settled in it, and (3) erected an altar on it.

- ▶ The second thought may **illustrate** the first

LOOK FOR THESE LINKING WORDS WHEN THE WRITER USES THEM TO MAKE ILLUSTRATION MORE OBVIOUS:

For example, for instance, thus

OTHER CLUES TO LOOK FOR, WITH OR WITHOUT LINKING WORDS (WHEN THE WRITER RELIES ENTIRELY ON CONTEXT):

To *ILLUSTRATE* the thought of the first, the second thought should:

- Explain or make it clear, by giving examples
 - ▶ **"And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted; and he said, For I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning. Thus his father wept for him" (Genesis 37:35)**
 - * The first line described what the second line makes clear, explaining: **"Thus,"** that is in the way just reported, **"his father [Jacob] wept for him [that is, Joseph]."**
- Serve to demonstrate it

- ▶ “But Moses protested, “If I go to the people of Israel and tell them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ they will ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what should I tell them? And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you” (Exodus 3:13, 14)
 - * The second line demonstrates how Moses should answer the people’s question: “**What is his name?**” from v.13. He is to say: “**I AM hath sent me unto you.**”
- ▶ The second thought may **explain** or **practically repeat** the first
LOOK FOR THESE LINKING WORDS WHEN THE WRITER USES THEM TO MAKE AN EXPLANATION MORE OBVIOUS:
 For, because, that is, namely, in other words, (or some kind of punctuation like a comma, a semi-colon, or a hyphen)
OTHER CLUES TO LOOK FOR, WITH OR WITHOUT LINKING WORDS (WHEN THE WRITER RELIES ENTIRELY ON CONTEXT):
 To *EXPLAIN* or *PRACTICALLY REPEAT* the *first thought*, the *second* should:
 - Tell about the *first* in a way that is easy to grasp
 - ▶ “Don’t lay a hand on the boy!” the angel said. “Do not hurt him in any way, for now I know that you truly fear God. You have not withheld from me even your son, your only son.”
 - * The angel of the LORD orders Abraham to stop short of killing his son, Isaac; then explains why: “for now I know that you truly fear God. You have not withheld from me even your son, your only son.” The old Patriarch had passed the test of loyalty to God, just as Jesus explained to the people of His day: “If you want to be my disciple, you must hate everyone else by comparison—your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even your own life. Otherwise, you cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26).
 - Practically repeat the *first*, changing just enough words to make it easier to grasp
 - ▶ “The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son” (Isaiah 7:14).
 - * The first line merely says that the virgin will become pregnant. But the second, substituting “give birth to a son” for “conceive a child”, makes it clear that she will carry the child to term and that it will be a boy!
 - Carefully go over the *first*, step by step, to lay it out for easier learning
 - ▶ “The king talked with them, and no one impressed him as much as Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. So they entered the royal service. Whenever the king consulted them in any matter requiring wisdom and balanced judgment, he found them ten times more capable than any of the magicians and enchanters in his entire kingdom” (Daniel 1:19, 20).

- * The first line gives us King Nebuchadnezzar's enthusiastic but unspecific assessment of Daniel and his three friends: **"no one impressed him as much as Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah"**. The following two lines go over v.1, step by step, to help us understand his favorable impression of the divinely trained teens. First, he thought enough of them to enlist them in his service. And, second, every time he sought their advice, they outclassed everyone else in his kingdom.
- *Show or describe how to carry out the first*
 - **"Show the city under siege. Build a wall around it so no one can escape. Set up the enemy camp, and surround the city with siege ramps and battering rams"** (Ezekiel 4:2)
 - * The first line briefly summarizes what Ezekiel must do: **"Show the city under siege"**. The next two lines spell out precisely how he should do that: **"Build a wall around it so no one can escape. Set up the enemy camp, and surround the city with siege ramps and battering rams"**.

2. **Disagrees** with what came before

- So, they are on *opposite* sides, *working against* each other as the *reverse* of one another. With *nothing in common*, they will *never see eye-to-eye* on *anything*. And forget *shaking hands*, because they will *duke it out* to the *end*. When such is the case:
 - The second thought usually **competes** with the first to **oppose** or **stand in contrast** to it
LOOK FOR THESE LINKING WORDS WHEN THE WRITER USES THEM TO MAKE DISAGREEMENT MORE OBVIOUS:
 But, even though, much more, yet, although, nevertheless, then, however, on the other hand, on the contrary, instead, rather, except, not only...but also
OTHER CLUES TO LOOK FOR, WITH OR WITHOUT LINKING WORDS (WHEN THE WRITER RELIES ENTIRELY ON CONTEXT):
 To *OPPOSE* the *first*, the *second* thought should:
 - *Be against the first*
 - **"You are following a different way that pretends to be the Good News, but is not the Good News at all"** (Galatians 1:6, 7)
 - * **"But"** introduces a second thought, **"not the Good News at all"** that completely opposes the first, **"be the Good News"**.
 - *Reject the first*
 - **"So Abraham said to God, "May Ishmael live under your special blessing!" But God replied, "No—Sarah, your wife, will give birth to a son for you. You will name him Isaac, and I will confirm my covenant with him and his descendants as an everlasting covenant"** (Genesis 17:18, 19).
 - * Still doubting God's promise, Abraham asked that Ishmael, his son from Hagar might inherit God's covenant support. In the second line, God

rejects Abraham's proposal, **"No"**, to reaffirm His original pledge that **"Sarah, your wife, will give birth to a son for you"**.

- *Contradict the first*
 - **"As for Ishmael, I will bless him also, just as you have asked. I will make him extremely fruitful and multiply his descendants. He will become the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. But my covenant will be confirmed with Isaac, who will be born to you and Sarah about this time next year"** (Genesis 17:20, 21).
 - * In the first thought, God agrees to **"bless [Ishmael] also, just as [Abraham] asked"**. **"But"** in the second, despite making him a great nation, God denies Ishmael the honor He has reserved for Sarah's son and asserts the opposite, namely that the covenant **"will [still] be confirmed with Isaac"**.
- *Argue the opposite of the first*
 - **"Caleb tried to quiet the people as they stood before Moses. "Let's go at once to take the land," he said. "We can certainly conquer it!" But the other men who had explored the land with him disagreed. "We can't go up against them! They are stronger than we are!"** (Numbers 13:30, 31)
 - * On the outskirts of the Promised Land, Caleb, one of the 12 spies urged the people to **"go at once to take the land"**, supremely confident **"we can certainly conquer it"**. But the rest of the spies argued the opposite, insisting, **"we can't go up against them [because] they are stronger than we are"**.
- *Confront the first*
 - **"Peter declared, "Even if everyone else deserts you, I will never desert you." Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, Peter—this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny three times that you even know me"** (Matthew 26:33-34)
 - * Peter asserts his unfailing loyalty as the authorities close in on Jesus, promising: **"Even if everyone else deserts you, I will never desert you"**. Without mincing words, Jesus confronts him with **"the truth...this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny three times that you even know me"**.

To *STAND IN CONTRAST TO* the *first*, the *second* thought should:

- *Be obviously different from the first*
 - **"A wise child brings joy to a father; but a foolish child brings grief to a mother"** (Proverbs 10:1).
 - * Anyone can see the difference between the two children mentioned here: one is **"wise"** and the other is **"foolish"**.
- *Emphasize its differences from the first*

- ▶ **"Tainted wealth has no lasting value, but right living can save your life"** (Proverbs 10:2).

* It is hard to see the contrast between **"tainted wealth"** and **"right living"** until Solomon emphasizes their differences. The first, he says, **"has no lasting value,"** but the second, **"can save your life."**

- ▶ The second thought may try to **replace** the first

LOOK FOR THESE LINKING WORDS WHEN THE WRITER USES THEM TO MAKE REPLACEMENT MORE OBVIOUS:

Or, either . . . or, neither . . . nor, else, otherwise, instead of, rather than, now

OTHER CLUES TO LOOK FOR, WITH OR WITHOUT LINKING WORDS (WHEN THE WRITER RELIES ENTIRELY ON CONTEXT):

To *OFFER AN ALTERNATIVE TO* the *first*, the *second* thought should:

- *Offer another possibility to the first*

- ▶ **"If his master gave him a wife while he was a slave and they had sons or daughters, then only the man will be free in the seventh year, but his wife and children will still belong to his master. But the slave may declare, 'I love my master, my wife, and my children. I don't want to go free.' If he does this, his master must present him before God. Then his master must take him to the door or doorpost and publicly pierce his ear with an awl. After that, the slave will serve his master for life"** (Exodus 21:4-6).

* *"Entrance ways are sacred and legally significant spots. When a slave chose to remain in slavery in order to preserve a family that he had established while in servitude, it would be appropriate to bring him to his master's doorway and then symbolically attach the slave to that place by driving an awl through his earlobe into the doorpost. It is possible that a ring was then placed on the ear to mark him as a perpetual slave"* (Life Application Study Bible). The word "or" offers the doorpost of a doorframe as another possibility to a simpler doorway without one.

- *Be different from the first*

- ▶ **"Instead of smelling of sweet perfume, she will stink. She will wear a rope for a sash, and her elegant hair will fall out. She will wear rough burlap instead of rich robes. Shame will replace her beauty"** (Isaiah 3:24)

* *"The women of Judah had placed their emphasis on clothing and jewelry rather than on God. They dressed to be noticed, to gain approval, and to be fashionable. Yet they ignored the real purpose for their lives. Instead of being concerned about the oppression around them (3:14, 15), they were self-serving and self-centered. People who abuse their possessions will end up with nothing [so, Isaiah says, **"Instead of smelling of sweet perfume, she will***

stink”]. These verses are not an indictment against clothing and jewelry, but a judgment on those who use them lavishly while remaining blind to the needs of others” (Life Application Study Bible).

- *Be able to serve as its substitute*
 - ▶ **“King Zedekiah the son of Josiah reigned instead of Coniah the son of Jehoiakim”** (Jeremiah 37:1).
 - * King Jehoiakim died on the way to Babylon (2 Chronicles 36:6). His son Jehoiachin came to the throne but was taken captive to Babylon three months later. Then, Nebuchadnezzar appointed Zedekiah as his vassal in Judah. The words **“instead of”** mean, **“in the place of”** so that Zedekiah substituted for Coniah on the throne of Judah.

3. Shares a **Cause and Effect** relationship with what came before

- On the same side, they *work together* as long as the *second works for* (or, *serves*) the *first*. The *first*, the *cause*, makes happen the *second*, its *result* (or, *effect*). The *second* needs the *first* to exist, while the *first* needs the *second* to express and fulfill itself. When thoughts relate to one another this way:

- ▶ The *second* thought usually **completes** the *first*:

LOOK FOR THESE LINKING WORDS WHEN THE WRITER USES THEM TO MAKE CAUSE AND EFFECT MORE OBVIOUS:

Wherefore, therefore, hence, thus, and so, so, consequently, accordingly, so that, as a result, for this reason, now

OTHER CLUES TO LOOK FOR WITH OR WITHOUT LINKING WORDS (WHEN THE WRITER RELIES ENTIRELY ON CONTEXT)

To DRAW A CONCLUSION FROM the first, the second thought should:

- *Bring the first to a logical end*
 - ▶ **“It is to have two shoulder pieces attached to two of its corners, so it can be joined together”** (Exodus 28:7)
 - * *“The ephod was a kind of apron elaborately embroidered with two pieces, back and front, joined at the shoulder with a band at the waist”* (Life Application Study Bible). The first line describes two junctions at the shoulders, that the second explains are intended for one purpose: joining the front and back pieces into a single garment.
- *Arrive at a logical judgment or form a sensible opinion based on the first*
 - ▶ **“So I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercies, to offer yourselves as a sacrifice, living and set apart for God. This will please him; it is the logical “Temple worship” for you”** (Romans 12:1)
 - * The opening line is an appeal based on everything God has done for us. The second then calls on us to reciprocate and dedicate ourselves

as a living sacrifice to Him, the only response to God's kindness that makes any sense.

- *Reach a decision about the first*
 - **"He also hoped that Paul would bribe him, so he sent for him quite often and talked with him"** (Acts 24:26)
 - * According to the first line, Felix, the Chief Finance Officer for the Roman province of Judea expected Paul to slip him some money under the table. In the second, he deliberately set a trap trying to corrupt his apostolic prisoner with multiple face-to-face opportunities to buy his freedom from him.

To *SERVE AS A CONSEQUENCE OF* the first, the *second* thought should:

- *Come after or follow the first*
 - **"So when all these things begin to happen, then stand and look up, for your salvation is near!"** (Luke 21:28)
 - * Jesus predicted various events would occur before his return. Line 1 envisions the day they start coming true, a signal in line 2 that the time has come to start looking toward heaven for deliverance. With each fulfillment, they count down to the day He will return to rescue his faithful followers from this doomed world.
- *Be the natural outcome of the first*
 - **"Do wedding guests mourn while celebrating with the groom? Of course not. But someday the groom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast"** (Matthew 9:15)
 - * The opening line states the obvious: wedding guests party while the groom is still with them. Naturally then, the party's over after he leaves (line 2). In his absence, they will miss him like dieters missing meals.
- *Be the inescapable result of the first*
 - **"For false messiahs and false prophets will rise up and perform great signs and wonders so as to deceive, if possible, even God's chosen ones...So if someone tells you, 'Look, the Messiah is out in the desert,' don't bother to go and look. Or, 'Look, he is hiding here,' don't believe it!"** (Matthew 24:24, 26)
 - * Since phonies will impersonate Messiah before he meets his people in the air (line 1), disciples should know better than to check out rumors or accept wild claims that Messiah has already arrived on earth (line 2).

Find the persons, places, and things in your passage

Now that we've shown how much linking words rely on context to connect or tie persons, places, or things together, you can safely find, mark, and separate the text into its other four parts. As the basic components of the text, the writer sprinkles persons, places, and things where they are needed in the text so that they are inseparable from a passage's

situation or circumstances. Key players in the stories Bible writers tell, they are also the building blocks of biblical ideas and arguments. Following the script in the context, empowering words either supply them with the power to act or the qualities they need to play their part in it. In a nutshell:

PERSONS, PLACES, AND THINGS	
PERSONS	Divine (Father, Son, Holy Spirit, other references); Human (godly, ungodly/by name/other references)
PLACES	Physical (geographic locations, places); Abstract (realms, directions, positions, destinations)
THINGS	Both animate and inanimate objects, actions, events, facts, details

It isn't enough just to find the people, places, and things in your text. You must locate them again to explore who, what, and where they are to make the most of your study. To get the impression the writer wanted to create for you, you must see the whole text, including who or what is in it, who or what stands out, and who or what is missing from it. Nothing does this better than a color-coded diagram of the entire passage that enables you to spot changes, trace the flow of thought, and explore its parts at will. The absence of parts may signal a shift in emphasis to the rest. And, a change in frequency as well as which parts are in the text may indicate further developments. As for the colors, like a genetic code, they stamp the text with a writer's unmistakable DNA. The different hues and shades, like the spectra of distant starlight tell us what's in a passage. Like designs in a tapestry, the combination of colors exposes a unique pattern from a passage's parts - as distinctive as any signature. Decipher the code and it will unlock the secrets of the text just as a genetic code identifies a host, as well as his or her copyrighted characteristics. Here's how to find and mark these crucial parts:

Persons

Bible books mention **authors**, their **audiences** and **those they write about** to them. Though many let us know who they are, a fair number of both Old and New Testament writers do not. But don't let that stop you. Based on writing styles, what they wrote about, and parallels with other writings, the Christian community has handed down a list of those they believe composed the so-called "anonymous" books of the Bible. Though none of the Gospels, for instance include the actual names of their writers in the text, there is still plenty of evidence to support Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John as their originators.

The Author: Who wrote the book

Bible writers normally identify themselves at the beginning of their books, like Isaiah did in Isaiah 1:1, calling himself, "Isaiah, the son of Amoz". In the New Testament, authors routinely signed letters in the opening lines rather than at the end. Thus, Paul starts all of his letters with the signature: "From Paul" in verse 1.

Here is a list of books plus authors and support for their authorship: either internal (within the Bible) or external (according to tradition) in the order they appear in Protestant Bibles:

Bible Book	Who wrote it	Internal Evidence	External Support
Genesis-Deuteronomy	Moses	Exodus 24:3, 4	Tradition
Joshua	Joshua	Joshua 8:2; 24:26	
Judges	Samuel (Nathan, Gad)	1Chronicles 29:29	Tradition
Ruth	Samuel		Tradition
1, 2 Samuel	Samuel (Nathan, Gad)	Mentions himself often	Tradition
1, 2 Kings	Jeremiah	2Kings 25; Jeremiah 25, 52	Jewish Tradition
1, 2 Chronicles	Ezra	2Chronicles 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-2	Jewish Tradition
Ezra	Ezra	Ezra 7:27-29; 8; 9	Jewish Tradition
Nehemiah	Ezra, Nehemiah		Tradition: Masoretes held 3:22 middle of one joint book, Ezra-Nehemiah
Esther	Mordecai	A main character	Tradition
Job	Moses	Patriarchal setting	Tradition
Psalms	David, Moses, Solomon, Asaph, sons of Korah, Heman, Ethan, anonymous	Psalms headings and parallels supported by 1Chronicles 16; Matthew 22:43; Acts 2:25-29, 34; 4:25-26; Romans 4:6-8; 11:9-10; Hebrews 4:7	Tradition attests to the authenticity of the so-called "anonymous" psalms
Proverbs	Solomon, Agur, King Lemuel, wise men, copied by King Hezekiah's men	Proverbs 1:1; 30; 31:1-9; 22:17, 24:23; 25:1	
Ecclesiastes	Solomon	1:1, 12, 16; 2:7, 9	Tradition
Song of Songs	Solomon		Tradition
Isaiah	Isaiah, son of Amoz	Isaiah 1:1	
Jeremiah	Jeremiah, son of Hilkiah	Jeremiah 1:1	
Lamentations	Jeremiah, son of Hilkiah	Parallels with Jeremiah	Tradition
Ezekiel	Ezekiel, son of Buzi	Ezekiel 1:1-3	
Daniel	Daniel	Daniel 7:15; 8:15, 27; 9:2; 10:2, 7; 12:5	
Hosea	Hosea, son of Beer	Hosea 1:1, 2	
Joel	Joel, son of Pethuel	Joel 1:1	
Amos	Amos	Amos 1:1	
Obadiah	Obadiah	Obadiah 1:1	
Jonah	Jonah, son of Amittai	Jonah 1:1	
Micah	Micah the Morasthite	Micah 1:1	

Bible Book	Who wrote it	Internal Evidence	External Support
Nahum	Nahum the Elkoshite	Nahum 1:1	
Habakkuk	Habakkuk the prophet	Habakkuk 1:1	
Zephaniah	Zephaniah, son of Cushi	Zephaniah 1:1	
Haggai	Haggai the prophet	Haggai 1:1	
Zechariah	Zechariah, son of Berechiah	Zechariah 1:1	
Malachi	Malachi	Malachi 1:1	
Matthew	Matthew		Tradition
Mark	John Mark		Tradition
Luke	Luke		Tradition
John	John, son of Zebedee		Tradition
Acts	Luke, beloved physician		Tradition
Romans	Paul	Romans 1:1	
1, 2 Corinthians	Paul	1Cor. 1:1; 2Cor. 1:1	
Galatians	Paul	Galatians 1:1	
Ephesians	Paul	Ephesians 1:1	
Philippians	Paul	Philippians 1:1	
Colossians	Paul	Colossians 1:1	
1, 2 Thessalonians	Paul	1Thess. 1:1; 2Thess. 1:1	
1, 2 Timothy	Paul	1Timothy 1:1; 2Timothy 1:1	
Titus	Paul	Titus 1:1	
Philemon	Paul	Philemon 1:1	
Hebrews	Paul	Hebrews 13:23	Tradition
James	James, the LORD'S brother	James 1:1	
1, 2 Peter	Peter	1Peter 1:1; 2Peter 1:1	
1, 2, 3 John	John, son of Zebedee		Tradition
Jude	Jude, brother of James	Jude 1:1	
Revelation	John, son of Zebedee	Revelation 1:1	Tradition

Writers usually start by referring to themselves by name and typically refer back to themselves with either words like *me, my, I, etc.* or relevant descriptions. So, for example, in 1Timothy 1:1:

Paul begins by identifying himself as "**Paul**", then renames himself, "**an apostle**" to claim and stress his authority

1 This letter is from Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, appointed by the command of God our Savior and Christ Jesus, who gives us hope.

To identify with his audience, Paul uses "**our**" and "**us**" that refers to him and them at the same time.

Use this example as a model for finding and color-coding authors in any Bible passage.

Digging Deeper

Looking up the author, audience, and third-parties of the book in your Study Bible (or, some other reference) to get the Book Context, you recorded simple answers to the 5W questions: "Who wrote the book," "Who did he write to," and "Who did he write about to them." Though this identified the persons in the book, you now have an opportunity to explore its "historical setting" and add details from the text. Searching for the persons, places, and things in the text should tell you:

- What the author says about himself, his audience, other persons in the text
- Where he, the audience, the others are
- Why he, the audience, the others are in each scene
- What's happening in each scene
- How something happens
- When scenes take place
- Why scenes occur

As the text answers the 5W's for itself, you will get a fuller picture of what God wants you to know, enriching your grasp of the context as it sharpens your view of its participants, events, and lessons. But, instead of hunting for what you hope to find, simply read the text and let it bring each item to your attention. "As you can read, look only at the things that are obvious. If you focus on the obvious, ultimately those things that are obscure will come into focus." Now is the time to observe the text – to let the passage tell you what's in it so you can gain information. Wait till all the facts are in before you try to interpret what's there.

The Audience: Recipients of the book

Under divine supervision, Bible writers directed their words at specific individuals or groups of people. But just as Jesus permitted others to eavesdrop on Him and the Twelve at the Sermon on the Mount, so God also intended for everyone to overhear the Bible writers speaking to their target-groups. From His perspective, since we all sin, warnings, instructions, or commendations specific to one group ultimately speak to everyone in general. So, the original or specific audience of each book stands at the forefront of all those who need to consider its words.

Case in point: the Book of Isaiah. While the prophet speaks to the people of Judah, condemning them for their lawless ways, he also addresses the surrounding nations by name for crimes similar to their own. He does this for effect, to let his main audience overhear his arguments against the others. Bundling Judeans together with people they expect God to condemn, implies He will also judge them by the same standard. Then, he introduces them to the Suffering Servant who must die in their place to save them because they are not good enough to save themselves. Facing the same end as pagans, he hoped they would welcome God's stunning offer of salvation through faith in the Servant (Isaiah 53) for any who repent of their sins and turn to Him.

Audiences come in all shapes and sizes, from individual men and ladies to entire nations. Sometimes authors mention them by name, as Paul does in Romans 1:7 addressing the book: ***“to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people.”*** In fact, after identifying himself by name, Paul addresses all his letters “to (or, unto)...[his audience]” in either the same, next or neighboring verses (Romans 1:7, 1Corinthians 1:2, 2Corinthians 1:1, Galatians 1:2, Ephesians 1:1, Philippians 1:1, Colossians 1:2, 1Thessalonians 1:2, 2Thessalonians 1:1, 1Timothy 1:2, 2Timothy 1:2, Titus 1:4, Philemon 1:1).

On other occasions, you have to deduce the actual audience from the text, as we did in Ezekiel. God tells the prophet, ***“I am sending you to the nation of Israel, a rebellious nation that has rebelled against me”*** (2:3). Then, He clarifies who they are, adding: ***“go to your people in exile and say to them”*** (3:11). So, Ezekiel addresses his messages to the captives in Babylon rather than the folks back in Jerusalem or Judah. Then there are books like Genesis - Deuteronomy obviously written, though they never state it, to the people of Israel. As are also the books of the prophets, God’s official spokespersons to the covenant people. And finally, some books like the Gospels, divulge their audiences to us by the messages they deliver. So, according to the Life Application Study Bible, Matthew was probably written to a Jewish audience, Mark to the Christians at Rome where it was written, Luke to a Greek-named Gentile, Theophilus (“One who loves God”), and John, to new Christians and searching non-Christians. *Regardless of the original audience, the LORD intended for everyone to hear the Gospels and the entire Bible.*

Here is a list of books plus audiences, either deduced from context or specifically mentioned in the text, according to the Life Application Study Bible (unless, otherwise noted):

Bible Book Who the author wrote to	
Genesis	The people of Israel
Exodus	The Israelite people at Mt. Sinai. The original hearers were the children of Israel living on the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land (HISB*)
Leviticus	The Israelite people at Mt. Sinai. The original hearers were the Israelites camped around Mt. Sinai (HISB)
Numbers	The people of Israel
Deuteronomy	Israel (the new generation entering the Promised Land)
Joshua	Israelite people after they settled in Canaan, before kingship was established. (HISB)
Judges	Israelite people after they settled in Canaan, before kingship was established. (HISB)
Ruth	Israelites living some time after David came to power (HISB)
1, 2 Samuel	Israelites living in their land during the monarchy (HISB)
1, 2 Kings	Probably the Israelites living in Babylonian exile (HISB)
1, 2 Chronicles	All Israel
Ezra	Israelites in Jerusalem after they returned from exile (HISB)

Bible Book Who the author wrote to	
Nehemiah	Israelites in Jerusalem after they returned from exile (HISB)
Esther	Jewish exiles living in Persia (HISB)
Job	The Israelite people
Psalms	The Israelite people living in their own land (HISB)
Proverbs	The Israelite people living in their own land (HISB)
Ecclesiastes	The Israelite people living in their own land (HISB)
Song of Songs	The Israelite people living in their own land (HISB)
Isaiah	The people of Judah living during Isaiah's lifetime (HISB)
Jeremiah	Judah (the Southern Kingdom) and its capital city, Jerusalem
Lamentations	Jewish witnesses to Jerusalem's fall (HISB)
Ezekiel	The Jews in captivity in Babylon, and God's people everywhere
Daniel	The other captives in Babylon, and God's people everywhere
Hosea	Israel (the Northern Kingdom), and God's people everywhere
Joel	The people of Judah, the Southern Kingdom, and God's people everywhere
Amos	Israel the Northern Kingdom, and God's people everywhere
Obadiah	The Edomites, the Jews in Judah, and God's people everywhere
Jonah	Israel, and God's people everywhere
Micah	The people of Israel (the Northern Kingdom) and of Judah (the Southern Kingdom)
Nahum	The people of Nineveh and Judah
Habakkuk	Judah (the Southern Kingdom), and God's people everywhere
Zephaniah	Judah and all nations
Haggai	The people living in Jerusalem and those who had returned from exile
Zechariah	The Jews in Jerusalem who had returned from exile and God's people everywhere
Malachi	The Jews in Jerusalem and God's people everywhere
Matthew	Especially to the Jews
Mark	The Christians in Rome
Luke	Theophilus ("One who loves God"), Gentiles, and people everywhere
John	New Christians and searching non-Christians
Acts	Theophilus and all lovers of God
Romans	The Christians in Rome and believers everywhere
1, 2 Corinthians	The church in Corinth and Christians everywhere
Galatians	The churches in southern Galatia founded on Paul's first missionary Journey (including Iconium, Lystra, Derbe) and Christians everywhere

Bible Book Who the author wrote to	
Ephesians	The church at Ephesus, then circulated to neighboring local churches
Philippians	The Christians at Philippi
Colossians	The church at Colosse, a city in Asia Minor
1, 2 Thessalonians	The church at Thessalonica
1, 2 Timothy	Timothy, Paul's son in the faith
Titus	Titus, a Greek, probably converted to Christ through Paul's ministry (he had become Paul's special representative to the island of Crete)
Philemon	Philemon, who was probably a wealthy member of the Colossian church
Hebrews	Hebrew Christians (perhaps second-generation Christians, see 2:3) who may have been considering a return to Judaism, perhaps because of immaturity, stemming from a lack of understanding of biblical truths [and persecution, hinted at in 12:4]
James	First-century Jewish Christians residing in Gentile communities outside Palestine
1 Peter	Jewish Christians driven out of Jerusalem and scattered throughout Asia Minor
2 Peter	The church at large
1 John	The letter is untitled and was written to no particular church. It was sent as a pastoral letter to several Gentile congregations
2 John	To "the chosen lady" and her children—or possibly to a local church
3 John	Gaius, a prominent Christian in one of the churches known to John
Jude	Jewish Christians
Revelation	The seven churches in Asia and all believers everywhere

* HISB = Holman Illustrated Study Bible

After calling the audience by name or implying who it is, writers refer to it with words like *you*, if it is *a single person or a group that acts as a unit*, or *they, them, etc.* if he emphasizes *the members of a group as individuals*. Case in point: 1Timothy 1:2.

After identifying himself by name and claiming authority as an apostle in v.1, Paul refers to himself as "I."

2 I am writing to Timothy, my true son in the faith. May God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord give you grace, mercy, and peace.

He calls his audience by name: "Timothy," then refers to him as "my true son in the faith" to claim him as a spiritual-child/convert

Use this example as a model for finding and color-coding audiences in Bible passages. With a few modifications to fit the text at hand, what we have done here will work for any book in the Old or New Testament.



Digging Deeper

The passage should make more sense now that you have the facts about its audience. Learning everything you can from the text about those whom the writer intended to reach with his message helps to explain:

- the words he chose to communicate with it
- the expressions he used to get his ideas across to them
- the way he illustrated his thoughts
- why he excluded some things and included others

At first, the facts you collected from the text seemed unrelated and disconnected. But as details filled in the gaps, they also started to connect the dots – joining thoughts and piecing parts together into a clear, crisp whole. The audience is the key that unlocks the mind of the writer as it also opens the path to understanding the passage.

Third Parties: Key people authors wrote about to their audiences

Bible authors write about three persons or groups: **themselves**, **their audiences**, and **others**. The last category are normally called “third-parties” and subdivides into two groups: major and minor characters. Major characters are people central to a story or crucial to the writer’s argument or explanation of the ideas in the text. That’s why scholars often refer to them as “Key People”. Minor characters also have a place in stories, arguments, or explanations, but of lesser importance or significance. bibleblender.com offers “a complete (concise) list of major or minor characters in the Bible” at: <http://bibleblender.com/2014/biblical-lessons/biblical-history/complete-list-of-major-minor-characters-in-bible>.

In terms of reputation and importance to the overall story of redemption, here is a list of major characters according to the Starting Point Study Bible, unless otherwise noted, in the order their books appear in Protestant Bibles:

Bible Book Who the author wrote about	
Genesis	Abraham, Adam, Eve, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and his brothers, Leah, Noah, Rachel, Rebekah, Sarah
Exodus	Aaron, Miriam, Moses, Pharaoh
Leviticus	Aaron, Moses
Numbers	Aaron, Balaam, Korah, Miriam, Moses
Deuteronomy	Joshua, Moses, the people of Israel
Joshua	Caleb, the Israelites, Joshua, Rahab
Judges	Abimelech, Barak, Caleb, Deborah, Ehud, Gideon, Jephthah, Othniel, Samson
Ruth	Boaz, Naomi, Ruth
1 Samuel	Abigail, Abner, David, Eli, Hannah, Jonathan, Samuel, Saul
2 Samuel	Abner, Absalom, Bathsheba, David, Joab, Nathan
1 Kings	Ahab, Ahijah, David, Elijah, Jehoshaphat, Jeroboam, Jezebel, Rehoboam, Solomon
2 Kings	Elijah, Elisha, Hezekiah, Jehoiachin, Jehu, Joash, Josiah, Naaman, Nebuchadnezzar
1 Chronicles	David, Saul

Bible Book Who the author wrote about	
2 Chronicles	Solomon, various kings of Judah
Ezra	Ezra, Joshua, Persian kings, Tattenai and other opponents of Ezra, Zerubbabel
Nehemiah	King Artaxerxes, Eliashib the high priest, Ezra, Geshem, Sanballat, Tobiah, Nehemiah
Esther	Esther, Haman, Mordecai, King Xerxes
Job	Job, Job's friends, Job's wife, Satan
Psalms	David (LASB*)
Proverbs	Too numerous to mention
Ecclesiastes	The preacher, God
Song of Songs	King Solomon the Shulammite woman, and friends (LASB)
Isaiah	Ahaz, Hezekiah, Isaiah
Jeremiah	Baruch the scribe, Gedaliah the governor, Jeremiah, King Zedekiah
Lamentations	Jeremiah, the people of Jerusalem (LASB)
Ezekiel	Ezekiel, Israel's leaders, Ezekiel's wife, Nebuchadnezzar, "the prince" (LASB)
Daniel	King Belshazzar, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah, King Darius, Gabriel, King Nebuchadnezzar
Hosea	Hosea, Gomer, their children (LASB)
Joel	Joel, the people of Judah (LASB)
Amos	Amos, Amaziah, Jeroboam II (LASB)
Obadiah	The Edomites (LASB)
Jonah	Jonah, King of Nineveh, Ninevites, Sailors
Micah	The people of Samaria and Jerusalem (LASB)
Nahum	The LORD, Nineveh
Habakkuk	Habakkuk, the Babylonians (LASB)
Zephaniah	Judah, Jerusalem, the nations
Haggai	Haggai, Zerubbabel, Joshua (LASB)
Zechariah	Zerubbabel, Joshua
Malachi	Malachi, the priests (LASB)
Matthew	Disciples, Jesus, John the baptizer, Joseph, Mary, the Pharisees, Pilate
Mark	Chief priests, Disciples, Jesus, John the baptizer, Pharisees, Pilate, Teachers of the Law
Luke	Disciples, Elizabeth, Joseph, Jesus, John the baptizer, Mary, Pharisees, Pilate, Zechariah
John	Caiaphas the high priest, Jesus, John, John the baptizer, Martha, Mary, Jesus' mother, Mary, Martha's sister, Mary Magdalene, Nicodemus, Peter, Pharisees, Philip, Thomas
Acts	Barnabas, John Mark, Paul, Peter, Priscilla and Aquila, Silas, Stephen, Timothy

Bible Book Who the author wrote about	
Romans	Paul, Phoebe
1 Corinthians	Paul, Timothy, members of Chloe's household
2 Corinthians	Paul, Timothy, Titus, false teachers (LASB)
Galatians	Paul, Peter, Barnabas, Timothy, Abraham, false teachers (LASB)
Ephesians	Paul, Tychicus (LASB)
Philippians	Paul, Timothy, Epaphroditus, Euodia and Syntyche (LASB)
Colossians	Paul, Timothy, Tychicus, Onesimus, Aristarchus, Mark, Epaphras (LASB)
1, 2 Thessalonians	Paul, Timothy, Silas (LASB)
1 Timothy	Paul, Timothy (LASB)
2 Timothy	Paul, Timothy, Luke, Mark, and others (LASB)
Titus	Paul, Titus (LASB)
Philemon	Paul, Philemon, Onesimus (LASB)
Hebrews	Hebrew Christians, Moses, Aaron, Joshua, Old Testament men and women of faith (LASB)
James	James, the rich oppressors, the swindled poor
1 Peter	Peter, Silas, Mark (LASB)
2 Peter	Peter, Paul (LASB)
1 John	John, Jesus (LASB)
2 John	John, the chosen lady, and her children (NASB)
3 John	John, Gaius, Diotrephes, Demetrius (LASB)
Jude	Jude, James, Jesus (LASB)
Revelation	The Bride, God, Jesus Christ, John, the Lamb, the nations, New Jerusalem, Satan

* LASB = Life Application Study Bible

After calling the third-party by name or implying who it is, writers refer to it with words like *him, her, he, she, or it*, if it is *a single person or a group that acts as a unit*, or *they, them, etc.* if they emphasize *the members of a group as individuals*. Case in point: Luke 13:31-32.

After referring to Jesus as "you", the Pharisees call Herod Antipas by name.	<p>31 "Get away from here if you want to live! Herod Antipas wants to kill you!"</p> <p>32 Jesus replied, "Go tell that fox..."</p> <p>Jesus knows the Pharisees don't care about His safety. To show them He has seen through this veiled attempt to derail Him from reaching their Jerusalem stronghold, He calls their skulk-mate a name that matches his and their corrupt, dishonest character.</p>	Jesus refers to "Herod" as " that fox " to describe him as someone who preys on defenseless victims
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At this point in the study simply locate and color-code the persons in the text, so you can find them again, later when the time comes to explore who and what they are. Then you will dig into their past and character to determine their significance at the time they

play a part in the text. This, in turn, will lay a foundation for any future references to them in the remaining verses of the passage or book.

Places

After identifying the persons in your text, explore its locations. This is not the same as answering the 5W question “Where?” we asked to capture the Book Context (see, p.48). Our goal at the time was more historical, concerned with the origins or sources of the book. We wanted to know, “Where did the author write it?” and “Where do its events take place?” to uncover the reasons for its writing. Knowing whether the writer writes from his home base or on the road to places he has or hasn’t visited makes it easier to see his overall plan and purpose for the book. But, now is the time to get more practical. zeroing in on the immediate context, the setting for the passage derived directly from its own words. While the Bible, Testament, and Section contexts supply a framework for the passage so it will fit into the overall scheme of God’s Word, the Immediate Context exposes its basic units – the people, places, and things – that act out its situation, conditions, or circumstances.

Places may be either real, physical locations or mental, abstract destinations, directions, positions, or realms.

Real, geographical locations:

- Sometimes the writer calls a physical place by name, like “Jerusalem,” an actual city.
- On other occasions, writers associate physical places with actual locations, like “the entire hill country **of** Judah and Israel” (Josh. 11:21) referring to a particular region on a map known as “the hill country of [or, in and around] Judah and Israel.” The same can be said for “Sodom and Gomorrah and **their** neighboring towns” (Jude 7) where the “towns” *neighbor on, situated next to or near* Sodom and Gomorrah. Though nameless, Jude clearly refers to certain suburbs or, outlying districts of those infamous twin cities.

Real, physical places:

- While the word “temple” normally refers to a thing, the expression “**the** Temple” directs our attention to a specific place in the city of Jerusalem – the one and only building for worship erected atop Mt. Zion. The word “the” makes a person, place, or thing unique. In this case, it singles out that dazzling white building as something that is common knowledge, and a prominent part of the city’s landscape.

Mental, abstract destinations:

- A **destination** is a place to which someone or something is headed or being sent, like the “village of Emmaus”, a physical location **to** which two of Jesus’ disciples traveled in Luke 24:13.
- Occasionally, however, the **destination** is a goal, an object or desired result like the finish line Paul wanted to “**reach**” so he could “receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us” (Phil. 3:14).

- Then, there are times when writers aim their words at audiences – men, women, or children – making them the **destination** for what they say. So, Jude says: “I am writing **to** all who have been called by God the Father” (Jude 1), because his book is “destined” for that specific group.

Mental, abstract directions:

- A **direction** may be several things starting with the path to a destination. So, Peter explained: “The Lord is not slow concerning his promise, as some regard slowness, but is being patient **toward** you, because he does not wish for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (2Peter 3:9). God patiently waits for us to hate our sins like He does and so, give them up.
- A **direction** may also be a point to or from which a person or thing travels. So, the wise men journeyed “**from** the east **to** Jerusalem” (Matthew 2:1) to see “the one who has been born king of the Jews” (Matthew 2:2). And Daniel explains the rise of the so-called “Little Horn” from the four horns that replaced Alexander the Great, saying: “**Out of one of them came a little horn which grew extremely big in the directions of the south and east, and in the direction of the Glory**” (Daniel 8:9), “engaging in a vigorous policy of expansion which reaches to Palestine” (IVP NB Commentary), the earthly location of God’s glory.

Mental abstract positions:

- A position is a place where someone or something is located or has been put. So, for example, Moses explains that when God began creating the earth, “**the Spirit hovered** [poised for action, directly] **over** [or, above] **the surface of the** [primordial] **waters**” (Genesis 1:2). Moses also tells us that God “**put a mark on Cain** [in response to his prayer in verses 13, 14 that reminded him of his sin at the same time it also assured him of divine protection from potential enemies] **to warn anyone who might try to kill him**” (Genesis 4:15). As the IVP NB Commentary observes: “even hardened sinners like Cain may pray for mercy and receive it.”
- A position can also describe physical contact or support by someone or something as Moses reports in Exodus 17:12 when Aaron and Hur “**held up** [or, supported] **his hands**” to keep the staff of God overhead during a battle with the Amalekite army so Israel would overpower and defeat them. In a similar way, following the flood, “**the ark rested in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, upon the mountains of Ararat**” (Genesis 8:4).
- Occasionally a situation or set of circumstances puts a person in either a position of favor or disfavor: so, Jesus “**will place the sheep at** [or, on] **his right hand and the goats at** [or, on] **his left**” in Matthew 25:33, to separate the righteous from the wicked. Or they may put a person in a position that affects his or her power to act: like the time “**the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon** [Samson], **and he ripped the lion’s jaws apart with his bare hands**” (Judges 14:6). The opposite occurred when “**the Spirit of God came upon** [Balaam, who enraged King Balak because he had]...”**called**

[Balaam] **to curse** [his] **enemies! Instead, [Balaam] blessed them three times**" (Numbers 24:2, 10). So, the same Spirit that empowered Samson to succeed, also programmed Balaam to fail.

Mental abstract realms:

- A domain is a field, domain, sphere, area, or territory of activity or interest. So, for example, when Jesus tells the woman at the well: **"God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth,"** He insists that worshipers must share to a certain extent, but not altogether or completely the nature of the One they worship. True worship occurs in a different realm (or, domain) from the world, so real worshipers must enter that realm and worship a spiritual God in a spiritual way, on spiritual terms. Genuine worship refers more to attitude than location or any other worldly concerns.
- Do you remember what happened when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden? Driven by guilt to cover up themselves and their sins, "they hid themselves [from God] among the trees" (Genesis 3:7, 8). Retreating to the forest area of the garden, they surrounded themselves with all that lumber to prevent God from seeing and confronting them about what they had done.
- Moses told God's people: **"you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands that I am giving you today. Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up"** (Deuteronomy 6:6, 7). According to heartofwisdom.com, virtually repeating what we have said for years: "The family home was set apart for something special. The Hebrew word *me'at* (meh-atr') (Strong's 4592) means "little" (Ezekiel 11:16). God made the home the "little sanctuary." The home was a house of prayer, worship, and study (all study—academic and spiritual). Today's Christians have it backwards. The primary **sphere** (piece of the world, section of society, or aspect of life for) religious activity should be in the home, not the Church. The dinner table was a place to gather, not just for food (Deuteronomy 8:3), but also to study God's Word, to pray, to praise, and to worship. The home was more important than the synagogue. The center of all training—religious, academic, and family—was the home." Only parents, whether at home, on the road, from start of the day till it ends at night, should help their children see "all their lives revolving around our King, including their reading, writing, daily routine, studies, experiments, and friendships. The Hebrew word for parent is similar to teacher. It is *horeh*, which is from the root word *yarah*, meaning "to cast, throw or shoot." The Bible commands the father, the priest of his little sanctuary, to instruct the children (Deuteronomy 6). The father is to diligently impart wisdom and knowledge to his children."

A word of caution. While real, physical locations are easy to find, mental, abstract ones often escape our notice. So, as you search the text for its locations, start with "locators," words that point to, utilize, or embrace the places in your text. Grammarians call them,

“prepositions” because they come before, or pre-position persons, places, or things to which they refer. Here is a comprehensive list of “locators” that explains their contribution to the text when they have something to do with location.

Locator What it does in the text	
aboard	on, into, unto
about	movement or location in a particular place; different sides or views of something from a certain angle
above	directly overhead, on top of, or higher than but not touching
across	opposite from; moves or reaches from one side to the other
against	opposite, next to, or in physical contact to support or collide with someone or something
ahead	further forward
ahead of	in front of or before
alongside	close to, or by the side of
amid, amidst	surrounded by, within, among, in the middle of, or against a background of
among, amongst	surrounded by; in the company of
around	surrounded by, located or situated on every side
astride	across, on both sides, extending over both sides, with a leg on each side of
at	general position or location; more precise with “on”, “over”, “by”, or “under”
athwart	from side to side of; across; opposite
atop	on the top of
away	to or at a (specific) distance from a particular place, person, or thing; toward a lower level; downward
away from	movement in the opposite direction; at a distance
before	in front of
behind	at or to the far side, following further back, in or going to the back or rear
below	positioned beneath or lower than
beneath	at a lower level; directly underneath
beside	at the side of; alongside; next to
between	at, into, or across the space separating two objects or regions
beyond	at or to the further or other side of
by	beside or close to
close to	near
down	toward or in a lower place or position; at or to a specified distance below or lower
far from	at a large distance

Locator What it does in the text	
from	the starting point either for a source or separation; out of or away
in	within or inside; enclosed or surrounded by something else
in front of	in a position just ahead or at the front part of someone or something else: facing someone or something
inside	inner part or interior of someone or something
inside of	within
into	movement or action that ends up inside, in the midst of, or in contact with someone or something; entry
near	at or moving to a short distance away; nearby
next	nearest; directly beside
next to	in or moving into a position directly to one side of; beside; close to
off	away from a place or at a distance; situated or leading in a direction away from; removed or separated from
on	physically in contact with or supported by; located somewhere in the general surface area of
on top of	on the highest point or uppermost surface of
onto	moving to a location on the surface of
opposite	on the other side; facing
out	away from a place; removed from somewhere
out from	some distance away from something
out of	the source or root; from
outside	situated or moving beyond the boundaries or confines of
outside of	beyond the boundaries of; apart from
over	directly above; resting on the top or the upper surface of something with a space in between
past	to or on the further side of; in front or ahead of; beyond
round	surrounded by; located or situated on every side
throughout	in every part of; from beginning to end or top to bottom
to	pointing in a direction, to a destination, or at a position
toward, towards	pointing in a direction, to a destination, or at a position; getting close or closer to a goal
under	below, beneath, or lower than
underneath	below or beneath another thing and may be covered or even hidden by it
unto	to (a destination) or up to the point of (a goal)
up, upward	from a lower to a higher point; to a higher part of

Locator What it does in the text	
upon	more formal term for on, especially in abstract senses
via	traveling through (a place) on the way to a destination; by way of; through; by means of
within	inside an area or a boundary; the interior or interior part surrounded by something else
without	outside

Definitions in the above chart only apply when locations are involved. Since many “locator” words also have other senses, look them up in a sound dictionary when the idea of “location” doesn’t seem to fit the context. For instance, quoting Jerusalem, Jeremiah reports: **“The LORD is right, for I rebelled against him”** (Lamentations 1:18). Instead of referring to a direction, position, destination, or realm, **“against him”** describes the people’s resistance to God’s authority. Remember, “locators” only refer to places *when they are followed by persons, places, or things that can function as locations, places, directions, positions, destinations, or realms*. Followed by an action word, “locators” become part of the action and can’t locate anything or anyone.

So, take for example, the various locations in Ezekiel 10:7 where the prophet reports:

One of the two mighty angels supporting God’s throne extends a hand to take a coal out of the fire that burns between them.

7 Then one of the cherubim reached out his hand and took some live coals from the fire burning among them. He put the coals into the hands of the man in linen clothing, and the man took them and went out.

Equipped with coals taken out of the incense altar that stood between the cherubim, the divine scribe left to spread them over Jerusalem – not to wipe out everyone – but to purge the city of those who did not detest their sins and leave behind a purified remnant.

That angel took the coals that started in the fire and placed them inside the hands of the man wearing or wrapped in garments of a priest or divine messenger.

Sometimes words refer to either a person, place, or thing, like **“the other side of the Lake,”** in Mark 5:1. You could mark **“the other side of the lake,”** as a place, because it is part of **“the,”** not just any **“lake,”** or as a thing, emphasizing the opposite shore and **“the lake,”** as a place. Besides the lessons you draw from the line-by-line references to both physical and abstract places in the text, you should also explore the deeper implications of a passage’s geography. Use the information you gathered from the 5W questions, “Where did the author write the book,” and “Where does the book take place,” to pin down where the writer composed the passage and where the audience plays its part in it.

The writings of both the Old and New Testaments tell stories “enacted on the stage of history. Real people and real places involve [among other things] geography, so that eventually readers will need to consult maps” (Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, p. xlii). The location(s) of the writer, his audience, and the key people he writes about is the key to the culture that shapes our understanding of any passage. “The Bible writers were more than mere collectors or dispensers of facts. They did not

write simply to preserve or report what had happened. They were “witnesses” who testified to others, either as history-makers themselves or as Spirit-led chroniclers of people, places, and things who made history” (Lee Gugliotto, *Handbook for Bible Study*, p. 73). Starting with their location at the time of writing and when the text occurred, the Bible student may reconstruct the original setting of a passage. “If we want to understand why they [the writers] drew on certain experiences and said the things they did to a particular audience, we have to study their words in [both their historical and literary] context” (Ibid, p. 73).

Use the following examples as models of how location helps to dig into the background of **Bible writers** and their books to understand them better:

- **Did the writer grow up in the same region or place where his audience lives or will reside, or has he at least visited it?** So, for example, as a law-abiding Jew, Jesus traveled three times annually to Jerusalem for the Feasts of Unleavened Bread, Weeks, and Tabernacles (Deuteronomy 16:16) to see both religious pilgrims and citizens of the holy city for Himself. Thus, He could talk about Jerusalem from firsthand experience with all the awe of a dazzled tourist.
- **Does he recall memories or rely on secondhand sources of information?** How, for instance, does Jude know that, “*certain [ungodly] people have slipped in unnoticed*” among his Jewish Christian audience” (Jude 1:4)? Was he there to see this for himself, repeating what eyewitnesses have reported to him, or recalling the apostolic warning: “in the last times there will be scoffers whose purpose in life is to satisfy their ungodly desires. These people are the ones who are creating divisions among you. They follow their natural instincts because they do not have God’s Spirit in them” (Jude 1:18, 19). Obviously Jude took what the apostles said as a prophecy that had come true in his day.
- **Is the writer simply applying patterns of behavior or thought for people in general, or is he bringing out the way natives born and raised there think or act?** Consider Paul’s opinion of people from the island of Crete in Titus 1:12: “Even one of their own men, a prophet from Crete, has said about them, ‘The people of Crete are all liars, cruel animals, and lazy gluttons.’” According to the Life Application Study Bible: “Paul is quoting a line from a poem by Epimenides, a poet and philosopher who had lived in Crete 600 years earlier. Some Cretans had a bad reputation and were known for lying. Paul used this familiar phrase to make the point that Titus’ ministry and leadership were very much needed.”
- **Does the writer share supernatural knowledge supplied exclusively by God?** Case in point: Ezekiel’s description of abominations in Jerusalem. Taken there in vision by the Holy Spirit, the prophet saw up close and for himself what was happening in Jerusalem (Ezekiel 8:3).

Use the following examples as models of how location helps to dig into the background of **audiences** and understand them better:

- **Did the audience grow up where it is located at the time of writing?** Take, for instance, the Jewish exiles that Jeremiah urged to make a home for themselves in Babylon. God had ulterior motives for the exile beyond punishing National Israel for its sins. More than merely accepting defeat, the Lord wanted them to adapt to life in an unbelieving world so they could witness more effectively for Him. Sprinkled among Gentiles instead of walled off from them in Jerusalem, they were supposed to: ***"Build homes, and plan to stay. Plant gardens, and eat the food they produce. Marry and have children. Then find spouses for them so that you may have many grandchildren. Multiply! Do not dwindle away! And work for the peace and prosperity of the city where I sent you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it"*** (Jeremiah 29:5-7). Pointing to Messiah's church – the Israel of God – that will resume National Israel's failed mission (Genesis 12:1-3) and bless all the families of the earth (Ephesians 2:11-22), God explained that the exiles' new neighbor's ***"welfare will determine your welfare"*** to end any previous prejudice against foreigners. Humbly putting the needs of the (Babylonian) community ahead of their own, as Paul urged the Philippians to do in their day (Philippians 2:3, 4), the Creator wanted them to love their new Gentile neighbors at least as much as themselves (Leviticus 19:18) and so fulfill His royal law (James 2:8). Sharing love from God despite losing their former privileges would enable the exiles to draw Gentiles away from the world and back to Him (cf. the apostolic church after Pentecost in Acts 2:42-47).
- **Does the audience share local customs, etc. with the writer?** Paul admitted to the Corinthians: ***"When I was with the Jews, I lived like a Jew to bring the Jews to Christ. When I was with those who follow the Jewish law, I too lived under that law"*** (1Corinthians 9:20). So, Paul took a cross-cultural approach, adjusting to local customs for the flexibility to fit in better, and so reach anyone with the Gospel.

Things

Thousands of years removed from the persons and situation in the text makes Bible study a lot like visiting a foreign country. Unless you acquaint yourself with the language, customs, and places of its people, you will never understand it, and your trip will be far less enjoyable and meaningful than it could have been. As renowned professor of biblical interpretation A. Berkeley Mickelson and his wife Alvera M. Mickelson observe in their joint-effort study aid, *Understanding Scripture*: "No event occurs in a vacuum. Every person lives within a cultural and historical situation and is strongly influenced by it. Every biblical event and teaching arose from and is part of a particular history and culture....Most portions of the Bible are more readily understood when we set them against their own historical and cultural situations. Only then can we begin to understand why people thought and acted as they did. Only then are we ready to move to the next step of understanding the meaning of Bible events and teachings of our day" (pp. 53, 54). It's one thing to read the text and try to make heads or tails of it, and quite another to dig into the background of its circumstances, people and their ways to interpret it.

Bible students must familiarize themselves with the “ways, methods, manners, tools, institutions, and literature” (Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, p. 96) of the Bible writers and key people in the text because any attempt to understand them without factoring in the history and culture behind their words and actions will fail. After all, “the Bible was not written to introduce us to an ancient people with seemingly strange ways. It was written to introduce us to the ways of God Himself. But we live so far away from the people in the Bible, both in distance and in time, that we are puzzled and confused by certain elements that were neither puzzling nor confusing to the writers themselves or to their earliest readers” (Miller, *Harper’s Encyclopedia of Bible Life*, p. 1).

So in order to understand what the authors meant, make every effort to get a feel for “how they lived, what values they stressed, and why they did or did not prosper” (Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible*, p. 160). Norval F. Pease once said: “Horrible blunders have been made by preachers who neglected to acquaint themselves with the contextual and historical background” (“Preaching and Biblical Interpretation,” in *A Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 259).

Things come in all shapes and sizes. The following chart offers some examples of things you may find in the text:

Types of Things Examples	
personal belongings	shoes, sandals, boots, jewelry (rings, necklaces, bracelets, etc.), brushes, combs, books, money pouches, money, shekels, silver, gold, bronze, gifts, etc.
clothing	tunics, cloaks, socks, garments, hats, breastplates, sackcloth, robes, ephods, belts, etc.
objects	seeds, tables, chairs, stairs, lamps, lamp stands, ovens, altars, chains, wagons, tents, bread, food, wine, oil, spices, idols, gods, bricks, swords, curtains, sacks, wineskins, torches, goat’s hair, wool, cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, lyres, tambourines, sistrums, cymbals, loaves, cakes, stones, logs, sacrifices, incense, burnt offerings, fellowship offerings, sin offerings, peace offerings, blocks, timber, poltices, letters, onyx, turquoise, stones, marble, sapphires, jasper, chrysolite, lapis lazuli, scrolls, floors, rainbows, clouds, lakes, rivers, seas, etc.
body parts	head, forehead, mind, neck, chest, loins, thighs, arms, hands, fingers, legs, feet, toes, bones, carcasses, etc.
equipment	hammers, plows, threshing floors, rods, staffs, axes, axe-heads, files, sickles, yokes, bridles, quivers, bows, spindles, spinning wheels, wood, chariots, looms, spears, daggers, sheaths, poles, armor, basins, shackles, etc.
utensils	pots, pans, cutlery, tongs, cups, bowls, dishes, plates, knives, ox-goads, baskets, jars, pitchers, cauldrons, etc.
living creatures	oxen, bears, rams, goats, lions, sheep, goats, quails, angels, cherubim, seraphim, snakes, wings, jaws, etc.
plants	fruit, vegetables, figs, olives, barley, wheat, straw, grain, hyssop, trees, bushes, vines, grapes, raisins, flour, cedars of Lebanon, ears of corn, etc.
actions	handshakes, rides, fights, races, contests, praise, worship, etc.

Types of Things Examples	
activities	meals, talks, conversations, walks, interviews, sieges, meetings, etc.
events	weddings, feasts, services, temple rituals, parades, banquets, dedications, circumcisions, baptisms, meals, etc.
thoughts	terror, fear, ideas, opinions, what's on the mind, deductions, conclusions, etc.
circumstances	innocence, guilt, danger, deception, situations, persecution, etc.
conditions	the weather (e.g., storms, lightning, rain, etc.), famine, drought, tumult, poor, rich, times of trouble, times of refreshing (revival), times of restitution (the seven year jubilee), times of ignorance (when the audience has no idea of what it needs to know), seasons, ages, etc.
abstract entities	<p>visions, breath, prayers, emotions, anger, rage, motives, endurance, special attention, this, these, that, those, what, etc. These last five words: this, these, that, those, and what act in different ways, depending on the context. On certain occasions, they are abstract entities – when they refer to a thing or things. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is what you are to do (Judges 21:11). The word “is” acts like an equal sign to tell us that “this” equals, or is the same as “what you are to do,” a thing. So, “this” is also a thing. • Now these are the generations (Genesis 10:1). The word “are” acts like an equal sign to tell us that “these” equals, or is the same as “the generations,” the ways Noah, Ham, Shem, and Japheth started their families. Since ways are things, “these” are things, too. • So every tree that does not produce good fruit (Matthew 7:19). The word “that” refers back to “every tree,” a thing. So, “that” is also a thing. • They made a calf in “those” days (Acts 7:41). The word “those” refers to the “days [when the Israelites made a golden] calf,” things. Since days are things, “those” are things, too. • What have you done? (Genesis 3:13). The word “what” asks for information about “you,” wanting to know about something “you” already did. So, “what” is also a thing. <p>There are also times when they may refer to persons, or places. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This man is a Roman citizen (Acts 22:26). The word “this” refers to the “man [who] is a Roman citizen,” a person. So “this” is also a person. • These are the clan leaders (Genesis 36:18). The word “are” acts like an equal sign to tell us that “these” equals, or is the same as “the clan leaders,” people. So, “these” are also people. • You are permitting that woman, Jezebel (Revelation 2:20). The word “that” points to the “woman, Jezebel,” a person. So, “that” is a person, too. • Unlike those other high priests (Hebrews 7:27). The word “those” points to “high priests” or, people other than Jesus. So, “those” are also people. • What house will you build me (Acts 7:49). The word “what” asks for information about a house, the one the people thought they had built for God. In this verse, “what” means “what kind of,” because God was hinting at the people making a home for Him in their hearts, while they thought the Temple was God’s house. Since the Temple is a building, or thing, “what” is a thing, too.

Types of Things Examples	
abstract qualities	compassion, love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, etc.
abstract concepts	hope, happiness, sadness, gladness, pleasure, trust, confidence, grace, mercy, discrimination, to name a few. In addition to <i>abstract entities</i> the word “ that ” may also refer to <i>abstract concepts</i> , as it does in Genesis 1:4 where Moses says: “And God saw the light, that it was good,” where “it” refers back to the light, while “ that ” points to God’s opinion, “it (the light) was good.”

A [meeting](#) is an activity or event, while [fancy clothes](#) and [expensive jewelry](#) are personal belongings.

2 For example, “suppose someone comes into your **meeting** dressed in **fancy clothes** and **expensive jewelry**, and another comes in who is **poor** and dressed in **dirty [plain, cheap, shabby] clothes**.

3 If you give **special attention** and **awhile good seat** to the rich person, but you say to the poor one, “You can stand over there, or else sit on **the floor**” – well,
 4 doesn’t **this discrimination** show **that** your **decisions** are guided by **evil motives**?”

[Special attention](#) can be either an activity or an abstract entity, but [a good seat](#) is an inanimate material object. [The floor](#) is an object while [this discrimination](#), [decisions](#), [that](#), and [evil motives](#) are either abstract entities or concepts.

[Poor](#) is a condition, but [dirty](#) [plain, cheap, shabby] clothes are just that: [clothing](#).

While the chart above will help you to analyze the *things* you find in the Bible so you can understand them better, here is a simple “rule of thumb” for finding *things* in the passages you study. Follow this one guideline to easily identify the *things* in any Bible text: **whether real or abstract, things are either lifeless or not human.** So, *personal belongings, clothing, objects, body parts, equipment, utensils, actions, activities, events, thoughts, circumstances, conditions, abstract entities, qualities, or concepts* are *things* because they cannot move or breathe on their own. On the other hand, though *plants* and *living creatures* are alive, they are still *things* because they aren’t people like you or me. God put human beings in a class by themselves; the rest of creation – in heaven and on earth – are all *things*.

Now that you have marked the persons, places, and things of the passage, it’s time to “empower” them to fulfill their role in it. Unless they are equipped with the power to act and do what they’re supposed to, or supplied with qualities or characteristics to play their part, persons, places, or things are unable to bring the text to life. Fortunately, writers always include “empowering words” that animate and activate their stories or explanations.

Find the empowering words in your passage

Empowering words come in two flavors: *equippers* and *suppliers*. Equippers like *send*, *build*, or *speak* – endow persons, places, and things with action; while suppliers like *be*, *is*, *am*, *are*, *was*, or *were* – often accompanied by other descriptive words – bestow them with qualities.

So, for example, in the sentence:

*"The priest **pronounced** the leper, clean"* – the action word "pronounced" equips "the priest" for action, endowing him with the ability to declare the leper free from his disease that formerly prevented him from freely associating with the rest of Israel.

Suppliers link people, places, and things to words that describe their state, condition, or character. Although they serve as a sort of equal sign, "suppliers" don't always equate the subject with what it tells us about it. For example, 1 John 4:8 says that *"God **is** love."* This doesn't mean that "love" captures everything there is to know about God, but it does tell us that God has a loving nature, that love is a regular feature of His unchanging character.

While there are many words that can transfer their action, only six qualify to link others with traits they need: *am, are, is, was, were* and any combination of *be* with the helping words – *can, could, may, might, must, shall, should, will, or would*. Occasionally, the action words: *act, appear, become, come, feel, get, grow, look, prove, remain, seem, smell, sound, stay, taste, or turn* do the same thing.

So, for example:

- *Let us not **grow** weary* (Galatians 6:9) suggests that "us", that is, Paul and the Galatians, have the potential to wear out from doing good. They could end up too tired to benefit others. *Equipper*
- *He has **become** great* (Genesis 24:35) describes the effect the LORD'S blessing has had on Abraham, magnifying him from a simple shepherd to celebrity status among his peers. *Supplier*
- *Our brother, whom we have often **proved** diligent* (2Corinthians 8:22) describes the zeal of one of the three men Paul is sending to Corinth to supervise the collection of funds from Gentiles to help the Jerusalem church. *Supplier*

Whatever form they take, empowering words make an enormous difference to the text. Watch for and mark them; then take the trouble to see how they activate the persons, places, and things in your passage and bring its message to life. Just remember that empowering words do not travel alone. Besides *can, could* and the rest of that family of helping words, other companions like "locators" assist them with their task.

Helpers

Sometimes other words, like *locators*, appear with empowering words to say something valuable about the persons, places, and things in the text. From identifying the person, thing, or action that brings about a result, to showing how the past, present, and future relate to who or what is in your passage, *helpers* work together with *equippers* and *suppliers* to energize everyone and everything in the text. Too numerous to name one by one, we'll break them down by category, then list them individually. The following chart shows how *helpers* influence our understanding of the words they help to empower as well as the other words around them:

Categories	Helpers	What they do
Agency/Mean <i>a thing, person, action, or system/method that produces a particular effect</i>	by	through or using someone or something
	by means of	with the help of, using, or through someone/thing
	via	by way of, or through someone or something
Agreement <i>harmony/accordance in opinion or feeling</i>	aboard	on the same side or share the same way of thinking
Alternative/Substitution <i>another possibility or replacement</i>	instead of	in place of
Association <i>physical or mental link/connection between persons, groups, ideas, or things</i>	alongside	next to; together and in cooperation with
	among, amongst	surrounded by; in the company of
	plus	added to; in addition to; as well as; together with
	with	accompanied by; escorted by; in the company of
Cause <i>a person or thing that makes something happen</i>	according to	as specified or stated by; in compliance with
	as per	as specified or stated by; in compliance with
	because of	on account of; for the reason that
	due to	caused by; because of; owing to
	for the sake of	for the purpose of; in the interest of; out of consideration for
	given	in view of; taking into account or consideration
	in accordance with	in agreement with; in line with; in the spirit of
	on account of	because of; due to; owing to; as a consequence of
	out of	from
	owing to	because of; on account of
	pursuant to	in accordance with
	thanks to	as a result of; due to
Comparison <i>similarities or differences between two or more things or people</i>	as	in the same way that; like
	like	similar to; the same as; identical to; in the same manner
	than	introduces a comparison, exception, or contrast
	unlike	different from; in contrast to; not typical of
Composition <i>ingredients, constituents or mixture</i>	of	belong to; part of
	out of	made from
	that of	singles out someone or something and tells us something about he, she, or it
Concession	despite	without being affected by; in spite of; even though

Categories	Helpers	What they do
<i>admission or allowance</i>	in spite of	without being affected by
Dis/advantage	against	in opposition to
<i>favorable or unfavorable condition, circumstance or opportunity</i>	contrary to	conflicting with; counter to
	for	in support of; in favor of
	on behalf of	in the interests of; in support of; for the benefit of; in the name of; in place of; for the sake of
	regardless of	without regard or consideration for
	unlike	different from; in contrast to; not typical of
	versus	against; as opposed to; in contrast to
	without	in the absence of; not having the use or benefit of
Extent	as far as	for as great a distance as; to the extent of
<i>the area covered by something</i>	as well as	and also; and in addition to
	astride	on each side of; extending across
	beyond	at or on the further side of; further away than; past
	in addition to	as well as, over and above, plus
	per	for each
	qua	in the capacity of; as being
	sans	without
	than	introduces the second item in a comparison
	throughout	in every parts of; from beginning to end
	times	multiplied by
	until	up to
Instrument	by means of	with the help of; through
<i>object by which something is done</i>	with	indicates what is used to do something, accomplish a purpose, or reach a goal
Measure/Degree	about	approximately
<i>size, amount, or level of something, or that something happens</i>	as per	in accordance with
	circa	approximately; around; roughly
	in addition to	on top of; beyond; extra
	per	for each
	that of	singles out someone or something and tells us something about he, she, or it
	times	multiplied by
	worth	amounting to

Categories	Helpers	What they do
Reference/Respect	about	on the subject of; regarding; concerning
<i>mention, suggest or call attention to someone or something</i>	as regards, regarding	concerning; with respect to
	concerning	on the subject of, or in connection with; about
	for	on behalf of, in the interest of, for the purpose of
	in regard to	as concerns; with respect to
Restriction	with regard to	as concerns; with respect to
	with respect to	as regards; with reference to
	barring	except for; if not for
	but	except; apart from, other than
<i>a limiting condition or measure</i>	except, except for	not including; forms an exception – a person or thing excluded from the general or does not follow a rule
	excluding	apart from; except
	failing	in the absence of
	inside of	within; in less than
Separation	save	except for
	aside, aside from	apart from; out of the way; in reserve
	besides	apart from; in addition to; as well
	from	starting point; beginning (source; origin)
Time	outside of	apart from; beyond the boundaries of
	after	following; next; later (on)
	(once) again	one more or another time
	ahead of	in front of; before; earlier
<i>past, present, future periods, points, moments, or intervals</i>	along	beside; after a while
	as of	since
	at	the time when
	before, prior to	prior to; previous to; earlier than
	circa	approximately; around; roughly
	during	throughout; in the course of
	following	come after; next
	on	to continue without getting involved
	past	previous; former; earlier; bygone
	since	meanwhile; later
	subsequent to	following; after

Categories	Helpers	What they do
	until	up to

So, take for example, the helping words in Galatians 5:17:

Two forces are at work inside believers – our sinful self and God’s Spirit – incompatible and at odds – with each other.	<p>For our sinful self wants what is against the Spirit, and the Spirit wants what is against our sinful self. For the two are contrary to each other, so you cannot do just what you please or, want.</p> <p>The Spirit shows us what God wants, but the flesh wants to do the opposite. As each one tries to cancel the other, we cannot simply do as we please. Regardless of what we want, we always feel a tug the other way making it difficult to carry out our plans.</p>	Contrary to each other, they are in constant conflict , though we naturally side with the sinful self, our human weakness.
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Bible Writers and the word “of”

The little word “of,” packs a big punch. Arguably the most meaningful piece of language in the Bible, it deserves far more attention than you might think. The following chart shows its various functions so you can better interpret any text that uses it.

What “of” does	What “of” means
Description	“The armor of [<i>characterized by/described by</i>] light ” (Roman 3:12)
Agency	“They shall all be taught of [<i>by/through</i>] the LORD ” (Isaiah 54:13)
Means/Instrument	“Death of [<i>by/by means of</i>] the cross” (Philippians 2:8)
Possession	“The slave of [<i>belonging to/possessed by</i>] the high priest ” (Matthew 26:51)
Relationship	“Simon [<i>descendant of/son</i>] of John ” (John 21:15)
Divides into parts	“[Some/a part of] of the branches ” (Romans 11:17)
Source/Origin	“The comfort of [<i>out of/derived from/dependent on/traced back to</i>] the scriptures” (Romans 15:4)
Quality	“The body of sin [= the <i>sinful</i> body]” (Romans 6:6)
Composition	“A patch [<i>made out/consisting</i>] of unshrunk cloth ” (Mark 2:21)
Content	“The net [full] of [<i>or, containing</i>] fish” (John 21:8)
Rename	“The temple of his body ” [= the temple, that is his body] (John 2:21)
Subordination	“The prince of [<i>over</i>] the devils” (Matthew 9:34)
Separation	“Shake the dust of [<i>out of/away from/from</i>] your feet ” (Matthew 10:14)
Comparison	“The Father is greater of [<i>than</i>] me” (John 14:28)
Time	“This man came to Jesus of [<i>within/during</i>] the night” (John 3:2)
Association	“Joint-heirs of [<i>in association with/together with, with</i>] Christ” (Romans 8:17)

To interpret the way the text uses the word “of,” compare it with the examples in the chart until you find the one that fits the text.

So, for example, the expression “righteousness **of** faith” in Galatians 5:5 describes

- righteousness *by*, or that comes *through* faith – emphasizing faith as the agent through which Christ makes people right with God

We now have a way of identifying and labeling all the parts of the text so they will stand out from each other and sets the stage for their further inspection. To see what this looks like, let’s color-code our specimen text, James 2:5-7.

	<div> <div><input type="checkbox"/></div> <div>Story</div> </div> <div> <div><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></div> <div>Explanation</div> </div>	
Flow	Text: James 2:5-7	Notes
	<div>DISCRIMINATION</div> <div> <div>2</div> <div>For example, suppose someone comes into your meeting dressed in fancy clothes and expensive jewelry, and another comes in who is poor and dressed in dirty clothes.</div> </div> <div> <div>3</div> <div>If you give special attention and a good seat to the rich person, but you say to the poor one, "You can stand over there, or else sit on the floor" –well,</div> </div> <div> <div>4</div> <div>doesn't this discrimination show that your judgments are guided by evil motives?</div> </div> <div>FAVORITISM</div> <div> <div>5</div> <div>Listen to me, dear brothers and sisters. Hasn't God chosen the poor in this world to be rich in faith? Aren't they the ones who will inherit the Kingdom he promised to those who love him?</div> </div> <div> <div>6</div> <div>But you dishonor the poor! Isn't it the rich who oppress you and drag you into court?</div> </div> <div> <div>7</div> <div>Aren't they the ones who slander Jesus Christ, whose noble name you bear?</div> </div> <div>OBEDIENCE</div> <div> <div>8</div> <div>Yes indeed, it is good when you obey the royal law as found in the Scriptures: "Love your neighbor as yourself."</div> </div> <div> <div>9</div> <div>But if you favor some people over others, you are committing a sin. You are guilty of breaking the law.</div> </div>	

Key to the Code

Here is how and why we decided to mark the words in the text the way we did.

V.	Words in the text	How we marked them
2	For example	Links what follows as a sample of the ungodly favoritism identified in v.1
	suppose	Sets up a hypothetical case
	someone	Anyone, both good and bad

V.	Words in the text	How we marked them
	comes	Empowers “someone” to approach
	into	Locator, tracks entrance of visitor
	your	Persons, the audience of believers
	meeting	Thing, a generic gathering of believers
	dressed	Empowers visitors to wear clothes
	in	Locator, enclosed by, wrapped around
	fancy clothes	Things, flamboyant duds visitors wear
	and	Links, clothes with what follows
	expensive jewelry	Things, high-priced personal ornaments
	and	Links, what follows to the hypothetical case to set up another
	another	Person, of a different kind from the fancy dresser
	comes	Empowers this other kind of visitor to approach, too
	in	Locator, tracks person to the meeting
	who	Person, refers to this other kind of visitor
	is	Empowers, description of this visitor
	poor	Thing, describes the state of a less fortunate person than the former
	and	Links, adds to the description
	dressed	Empowers, this visitor to wear clothes
	in	Locator, enclosed by, wrapped around
	dirty clothes	Things, rags contrast with fancy duds
3	If	Link, sets up an “if – then” proposition
	you	Person, the believer
	give	Empowers, believer to furnish or bestow what follows
	special attention	Thing, beyond normal care
	and	Links what follows as a plus
	a good seat	Thing, favorable place to sit
	to	Locator, points at first visitor
	the rich person	Person, who is better off
	but	Link, sets up a contrast
	you	Person, a believer
	say	Empowers, believer to speak
	to	Locator, aims words at other visitor
	the poor one	Person, opposite of first visitor
	You	Person, the poor one

V.	Words in the text	How we marked them
	can stand	Empowers believer to allow second visitor to stay on his or her feet
	over there	Locator, points to a place away from the believer
	or else	Link, offers an alternative, usually in a negative way
	sit	Empowers the poor one to get off his or for feet and rest
	on	Locator, identifies where to rest
	the floor	Thing, contrast with 'a good seat'
	well	Links, calls for conclusion to if-then
4	doesn't	Empowers to ask rhetorical question for effect rather than information
	this discrimination	Thing, refers to if-then proposition
	show	Empowers, example for scrutiny
	that	Thing, what the example shows
	your	Person. the believers
	judgments	Things, decisions
	are guided	Empowers, steering for decisions
	by	Agency, through or using
	evil motives	Things, ungodly carnal impulses
5	Listen	Empowers James to call for attention
	to	Locator, points believers at James
	me,	Person, James, the believers focus
	dear brothers	Persons, male believers
	and	Links, into a single group
	sisters.	Persons, female believers
	Hasn't	Empowers, expects "Yes" answer
	God	Person, the Heavenly Father
	chosen	Empowers, God to show a preference
	the poor	Persons, the less fortunate
	in	Locator, tells where to find them
	this world	Place, where they are located
	to be	Empowers, poor to have a future
	rich	Thing, a better state for the poor
	in	Locator, where to find better future
	faith?	Thing, better realm, contrast to world
	Aren't	Empowers, expects "Yes" answer
	they the ones who	Person, clearly identifies the poor

V.	Words in the text	How we marked them
	will inherit	Empowers poor to receive by law
	the Kingdom	Thing, the world to come
	he	Person, God, who chose the poor
	promised	Empowers God to guarantee this
	to	Locator, points/aims to the heirs
	those who	Person, whoever
	love	Empowers, heirs to show affection
	him?	Person, He who loved them first
6	But	Link, sets up opposition
	you	Persons, believers
	dishonor	Empowers, to deny what is deserved
	the poor!	Persons, the less fortunate
	Isn't	Empowers, expects "Yes" answer
	it	Thing, refers to situation with rich
	the rich who	Persons, identifies the well off
	oppress	Empowers them to persecute/abuse
	you	Persons, the believers
	and	Link, adds what follows to oppress
	drag	Empowers to force against will
	you	Persons, the believers
	into	Locator, sets up a transition
	court?	Thing, playground for lawyers
7	Aren't	Empowers, expects "Yes" answer
	they the ones who	Persons, specifies the rich
	slander	Empowers to make false statements
	Jesus Christ, whose	Person, identifies target of slurs
	noble name	Thing, a royal title
	you	Persons, the believers
	bear?	Empowers to wear or carry
8	Yes indeed,	Link, what follows affirms before
	it	Thing, sums up what follows
	is	Empowers "it" to affirm before
	good	Thing, "it" is beneficial
	when	Link, ties "good" to "obey"

V.	Words in the text	How we marked them
	you	Person, the believer
	obey	Empowers "you" to carry out
	the royal law	Thing, title for "Love your...etc."
	as	Links "royal law" to place where it officially exists
	found	Empowers, royal law to be located
	in	Locator, shows where to find law
	the Scriptures:	Thing, title of location
	Love	Empowers, believers to obey Law
	your	Person, the believer
	neighbor	Thing, whom believer should love
	as	Link, compares neighbor to believer
	yourself	Person, the believer
9	But if	Link, sets up an "if - then" proposition
	you	Person, the believer
	favor	Empowers believer to prefer
	some people	Persons, generic group of favorites
	over	Locator, elevates to a higher rank
	others	Persons, generic group ranked lower
	you	Person, the believer
	are committing	Empowers, to carry out preference
	a sin.	Thing, a violation of royal law
	You	Person, the believer
	are guilty of breaking	Empowers, take blame for breach
	the law	Thing, title of what is violated

Some interpreters of this passage have applied it to our day without considering its historical context. Leaping irresponsibly into the present, they equate the terms "rich" and "poor" in James' day with socio-economic classes that use the same labels in modern times. While these expressions still refer to the well-off and the less fortunate in the normal sense, they do not reflect tensions that feed the class warfare of our time.

More than a century before James penned this letter in A.D. 49, just before the Jerusalem Council of A.D. 50, the Roman general Pompey invaded Judea and ran off many Jewish peasants from their land. After Queen Salome died in 67 BC, her sons Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus, both tried to claim the throne of Judea. When Aristobulus ousted his brother, Antipater the Idumean advised Hyrcanus to enlist the aid of King Arestas III of Nabatea who besieged Aristobulus in Jerusalem in 64 BC. Bribed by Aristobulus, Aemilius Scaurus -

Pompey's chief general in Syria ordered Arestas to withdraw and crushed the retreating Nabatean army in Papyron. At this point Pompey came to Damascus to assess the claims of both brothers, firsthand. Unwilling to wait for his decision, Aristobulus provoked the Roman leader who besieged Jerusalem in 63 BC. Pompey proceeded to capture the city, slaughter 12,000 Jewish troops, and essentially annexed the major parts of the Hasmonean or Jewish kingdom – Judea, Samaria, Galilee, Iturea, Perea, and Idumea – established under Judas Maccabeaus for Rome.

Essentially client kingdoms of Rome, the region underwent official reorganization to destabilize the Jewish nation and discourage popular resistance to Roman rule. Antipater, the pseudo-Jew from Idumea, the former land of Edom/Esau took control – backed by Rome – and laid the seeds for the Herodian dynasty that worked with the nobility at the rank-and-file Israelite's expense. The Bible shows how oppressive Herod and his sons were to the Jewish people.

God gave each Israelite a piece of Canaan as a share of the inheritance promised to Abraham – so losing a homestead meant deprivation of God's promises. Herod the Great added to the misery by taxing more small farmers out of business. Ignoring the Law of the Jubilee that ordered the return of property at the end of seven years, the upper class used its influence and wealth to permanently secure the vacated properties.

So, by the first century, many former landowners worked as tenants on feudal estates [in some instances, the very same lands they used to own], while others worked day jobs in the marketplace waiting for harvest season – to reap crops for the aristocrats who confiscated their ancestral farms. As the IVP Bible Background Commentary observes: *“Resentment against aristocratic landlords ran high in many parts of the empire...[inflamed by the brutality of]...hit squads of hired assassins to deal with uncooperative tenants. When the aristocratic priests began to withhold tithe income from the poorer priests, their only means of support, economic tensions began to climax.”* Seething with bitterness, the poor's (that is, dispossessed landowner's) desires for retaliation ripened into calls for revenge against rich aristocrats disguised as a war against Rome.

While the Jerusalem aristocracy achieved detente with hated Rome incurring the wrath of the dispossessed, the Zealots sought revenge, fanning the flames of anti-Roman sentiment and bitterness directed against the upper-class that prevailed in Judea just before the war. A groundswell of revolutionary violence progressively led to the revolt in A.D. 66, “followed by a massacre of priests and the Roman garrison on the Temple Mount. Aristocratic and working-class patriots clashed inside the city as Roman armies surrounded it, and in A.D. 70 Jerusalem fell and its temple was destroyed. The final resistance stronghold at Masada fell [via mass suicide] in A.D. 73” [IVP Bible Background Commentary].

So, rather than victims of social injustice, the “poor” in James were mostly former landowners swindled out of their rightful property. While the “rich” in James ultimately used their economic and political influence to keep the “poor,” impoverished and subjugated, race was never an issue. James dealt with a situation generated by classic

pride and greed. And, in an effort to keep Jewish converts out of the conflict with Rome, James urged Christians to pursue peace instead of war, and to treat everyone the same regardless of advantages or lack of them.

It is interesting to note that the “poor” who participated in the war with Rome slew both aristocrats and Romans, alike. In a similar way, those who fan the flames of resentment today also incite the very misguided violence that James worked so hard to check in his day. Commenting on Matthew 5:9, **“God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God,”** the Life Application Study Bible says: *“With Jesus’ announcement that the Kingdom was near (4:17), people were naturally asking, “How do I qualify to be in God’s Kingdom?” Jesus said that God’s Kingdom is organized differently from worldly kingdoms. In the Kingdom of Heaven, wealth and power and authority are unimportant. Kingdom people seek different blessings and benefits, and they have different attitudes.”*

So, Paul urged the Philippians: **“Don’t be selfish; don’t try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don’t look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges...”** (Php. 2:3-7a). Instead of disguising efforts to satisfy self as a campaign for equality and fairness, Paul hoped believers would “think of others better than themselves,” to prepare to do and place the needs of others ahead of their own. That’s what Jesus did, dying on the cross. That’s what we should do, carrying our cross every day.

Now that you have transformed your text from lifeless black and white letters to dynamic technicolor parts, it’s time to start your analysis.

Thought Diagrams

Though you have already marked its parts with different colors to tell apart and examine them in detail, there is still one more thing you can do to prepare the text for more efficient inspection: create a Thought Diagram. *Just go through the text, word for word and line up – persons, places, things, helpers, and empowering words under each other – as you get to them. Put linking words directly between who- or whatever they connect.* Here, for example, is a Thought Diagram of James 2:2:

Verse	Linking Word	Person	Empowering Word	Locator/Helper	Place/Thing
2	For example,		suppose		
		someone	comes	into	meeting
		your			fancy clothes
			dressed	in	and
					expensive jewelry,
		and			
		another	comes	in	
		who	is		poor
			and		
			dressed	in	dirty clothes.

Thought Diagrams naturally divide any stream of cryptic words into user-friendly expressions like these:

- suppose
- someone comes into your meeting
- dressed in fancy clothes and expensive jewelry
- another comes in
- who is poor
- and dressed in dirty clothes

Without changing their order, the words in the text now appear as thoughts – groups of words that make sense together – understandable to anyone who can read them. The diagram does this by shifting our attention from *content* (the words) to *context* (the big picture). Forcing us to work with larger units of text, thought diagrams take the focus off individual parts so we can appreciate the text as a whole.

The Oxford-American Dictionary defines “context” as: *the parts of something written or spoken that immediately precede and follow a word or passage and clarify its meaning.* Thought diagrams concentrate on context two ways. First, they unite words with what comes after them into single expressions – groups of words that work together with one goal. Just read the words in the order they appear until they make sense. For example starting with someone, you run into the words – comes into your meeting. Taken together with someone – presto, they form the thought: someone comes into your meeting that makes sense out of every part involved! Our CuppaJ(esus) broadcasts used to jump from color-coding to interpretation because we divided the text into workable units for those who attended. They used to ask, “How do you know where to break up the text?”. Now you know.

Second, diagrams also automatically list thoughts in the order they flow so you can easily compare the ones before any part with those that follow. Just apply the Four Literary Laws to what you see and – ta da – the Holy Spirit will smoothly join the individual thoughts into a continuous whole, with no apparent gaps or spaces between one part and the next. So, for example, the next thought on the list, dressed in fancy clothes and expensive jewelry continues to describe someone, adding important personal details to the circumstantial statement: comes into your meeting.

Check out these additional examples from the diagram above:

- attaching comes into your meeting to someone may not identify who someone is, but it does tell us which or what kind of someone the text talks about: **a visitor**
- more than just saying someone wears clothes, the thought: in fancy clothes and expensive jewelry describes the extravagant way someone dresses, suggesting that he or she **is rich**
- updating another comes in with the next thought: who is poor reveals that this second visitor differs from someone, because he or she is **hard up** rather than **wealthy**
- the next thought dressed in dirty clothes illustrates another way this second visitor is different from the first: while someone looks **elegant**, the poor one appears **shabby**

- comparing **dressed in fancy clothes and expensive jewelry** with **dressed in dirty clothes** shows that unlike the first visitor, the second does not have **jewelry**, implying he or she – unlike **elegant someone** – is **basic, simple, and plain**

Many people find Thought Diagrams helpful because they lack the language skills to divide the text into grammatical parts. Instead of separating subjects from verbs, objects, etc. based on complicated grammar, Thought Diagrams keep things simple, by lining up:

- **persons** with **persons** [**someone, your, another, and who**]
- **places** with **places** [**into, in, in, and in**]
- **things** with **things** [**meeting, fancy clothes, expensive jewelry, poor, and dirty clothes**]
- **empowering words** with **empowering words** [**comes, dressed, comes, is, dressed**]
- **linking words** with what they connect or attach to each other:
 - **for example**, at the beginning of the verse to show it attaches v.2 to v.1
 - **and**, between **fancy clothes and expensive jewelry**
 - **and**, between **someone and another**
 - **and**, between **poor and dirty clothes**

Even a child with fundamental reading skills can recognize these parts and place them under one another. But that's only half the problem facing those who want to study the Bible in-depth. Besides trouble dividing it into grammatical parts, average people also find it difficult to grasp the text. As they read it, words pile up, their minds trip over them, and they lose track of the writer's meaning. Unable to keep pace with his flow of thought, they miss what the writer or speaker tries to say. That's when most give up and either look up the text in a commentary or ask "experts" to tell them what it means. But a *thought diagram* bundles the writer's words into thoughts – bite-size expressions – that virtually anyone can digest and understand. Grouped together by what they *naturally* are rather than what they *grammatically* do, the author's words pull the truth out of each other and the text begins to make sense. So, while others reach a dead end, unable to get any more from its words, the Spirit can still use the diagram to take you thought by thought deeper into the mind of God.

A closer look, for example, at the previous diagram of James 2:2 will usually detect bigger things first. So, after a while, you should see that the verse divides into two large natural parts:

someone	comes	into	
your			meeting
	dressed	in	fancy clothes
			and
			expensive jewelry,

and [links, or adds the second as an equal partner to the first]

another	comes	in	
who	is		poor
	and		
	dressed	in	dirty clothes.

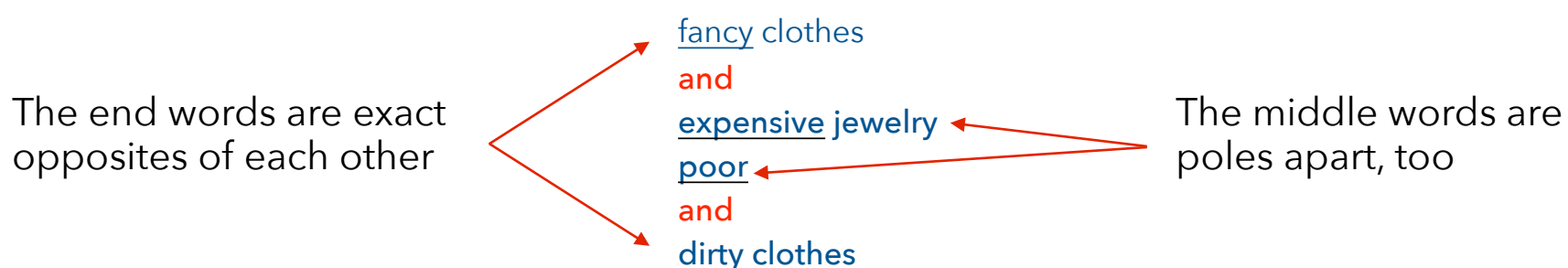
Once we make out the larger things, our minds begin to detect smaller ones. So, on further inspection you'll probably notice that the word **suppose** sets up an imaginary case rather than a real situation, divided into the two parts you've already noticed.

After that, it won't take long before you recognize that the verse describes two make-believe people:

The first is about —————→ **someone**

While the second discusses —————→ **another**

A few more moments ought to make something else obvious: the second person is totally different from the first. All you have to do is observe the way James lays out his words. He deliberately chose conflicting words and arranged them so any reader could tell he was talking about two absolutely opposite types of people:



You may not notice these things at first, because most of us don't know how to observe the text. As Ben Keyes of the L'Abri Fellowships originally founded by Francis and Edith Shaeffer, admits: "It is always fruitful to slow down and study a small passage of scripture in depth. In my own experience, many texts have come to life for the first time as I began to understand the historical context... **Reading large continuous swaths of scripture is a way of stepping back and contemplating the whole story of scripture that transcends but includes every individual text.** The first result...was the realization that **the scriptures, while written by many different people, in different places, in different genres and over many hundreds of years, really is ONE STORY.** The troubling texts that I had 'cherry-picked' from the Bible for most of my life, were no longer free standing 'problems'. They could be read as twists and turns in the one story: a story of God pursuing His rebellious people throughout a range of fallen circumstances. Secondly, the consistency of God's character showed forth...I was able to see that His wrath, while real, was always in the context of his holiness and love. **The overarching picture of God was one of incredible patience and forbearance.** He is a Holy God who is continually staying his hand from judgment on a people who provoke Him every day. Thirdly, I saw **a connection between the Old and New Testaments**, which bolstered my faith. By reading the OT quickly, I could sense a rising tension that could only be resolved in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ."

You can always tell the art lover from the admirer: the admirer stands too close to the painting, right on top of its details while the art lover stands back to take in the picture as a whole. From this broader perspective, art lovers get a more complete impression of a painting and a better grasp of its artist's message. Likewise, Bible passages always offer a better view of what the writer says than isolated verses, and a thought by thought survey of

their context tells us more than any word for word analysis of their content. To paraphrase newspaper editor Tess Flanders: a picture of the text is worth more than a thousand words. So, if you “**step back and contemplate the whole story**” embedded in James 2:2, the Thought Diagram should eventually lead you to the conclusion that, though the parts are equal, they are strikingly different. In contrast to each other, they present James’ readers with two conflicting situations meant to test their potential reactions, first to a rich, then to a poor visitor at a church meeting.

Armed with basic reading skills, even a child can understand the Bible through the use of Thought Diagrams. Just step back to see the forest before you focus on its trees – lining up the parts as we did above and prayerfully eyeballing the diagramed text before you put each one under a microscope. So, once the overall picture comes into view, list the thoughts you see in the text:

V. Thoughts

- 2 suppose
someone comes into your meeting
dressed in fancy clothes and expensive jewelry
another comes in
who is poor
and dressed in dirty clothes

The text can now explain itself to you thought by thought – the safest way to explore its individual parts.

Exploring your discoveries

While the diagram divides the text into understandable units of thought, you still need to get in touch with each of its parts before you can accurately interpret it. That means you must:

- Analyze its Linking Words to get the overall flow of the passage
- Scan each thought in the list and keep a record of what you see
- Research Biographies for each person
- Compile Geographies of each location
- Compose Profiles for each thing
- Consider the contributions of context, locators, and helpers

Then let the parts work together until they explain the thought they share.

Step 1: Starting with a Thought Diagram of the passage, explore the text – thought for thought – one part a time:

Thought Diagram of James 2:5-7					
Verse	Linking Word	Person	Empowering Word	Locator/Helper	Place/Thing
5		me, dear brothers and	Listen	to	

		sisters.	Hasn't		
		God	chosen		
		the poor		in	this world
			to be		rich
				in	faith?
			Aren't		
		they			
		the ones who	will inherit		the Kingdom
		he	promised	to	
		those who	love		
		him?			
6	But	you	dishonor		
		the poor!	Isn't		it
		the rich who	oppress		
		you	and		
			drag		
		you		into	court?
7			Aren't		
		they			
		the ones who	slander		
		Jesus Christ,			
		whose			noble name
		you	bear?		

Step 2: Next, list the thoughts you see in the diagram, in the order they appear in the text:

V. Thoughts

- 5 Listen to me, agreement (explain/add)
 dear brothers and sisters.
 Hasn't God chosen the poor in this world
 to be rich in faith?
 Aren't they the ones who will inherit the Kingdom
 he promised to those who love him?
- 6 But
 you dishonor the poor!
 Isn't it the rich who oppress you
 and drag you into court?
- 7 Aren't they the ones who slander Jesus Christ,
 whose noble name you bear?

Step 3: Next, analyze its linking words to get the overall flow of the passage

- V. 5 connects this passage, verses 5-7 to the previous one, verses 2-4 – by context
 - The word “and” shows that brothers and sisters are equally dear to James and that he wants both men and women to hear what he has to say
 - Context connects line 2 to line 1 so that line 2 is a continuation of what began in line 1. Line 2 starts the message he wants his audience to hear.
 - Context connects line 3 to line 2 so that line 3 is a continuation of what began in line 2. Line 3 deals with the poor from line 2.
- V. 6 sets up a contrast to v.5 with the word “but”
 - God honors the poor, you dishonor them
 - Context connects line 2 to line 1 so that line 2 is a continuation of what began in line 1. Your mistreatment of the poor is only hurting yourselves.

- The word “**and**” shows that the rich not only **oppress** the audience, but also **drag** men and women into courts they probably influence and use to make things look legal
- **V. 7** connects with v.6 by context and continues what began in v.6. Mistreatment of the poor ultimately insults Jesus.

Step 4: Scan each thought in the list and keep a record of what you see:

- Do you see **agreement** where the second part or thought:
 - Builds on the first, by
 - Continuing the first
 - Comparing with the first
 - Adding more info to the first
 - Inserting another step in a series
 - Illustrates the first
 - Explains or practically repeats the first
- Do you see **disagreement** where the second part or thought:
 - Competes with the first, either:
 - Opposing the first, or
 - Standing in contrast to the first
 - Replaces the first, either:
 - Substituting for the first, or
 - Offering an alternative to the first
- Do you see **cause and effect** where the second part or thought:
 - Completes the first, either:
 - Drawing a conclusion from the first, or
 - Serving as a consequence of the first

Step 5: Research **biographies** for each person, compile **geographies** of each location, prepare **profiles** for each thing, and work up **word studies** for key words

Step 6: Consider other contributions of context, locators, and helpers

Step 7: Write out what each thought means using the insights and information from your journey through the text

Bring in the rest of the Bible

Timeless truths and ageless applications

Kids