



## **UNDERSTAND THEIR HOME**

### **What Does It Mean?**

#### **Consider their context**

So, we have thought about our context. We are going to dive in to their context. The context, that which goes with the text, that surrounds any text that we study. Consider their context. The way we read and interpret the Bible, we have got to get this, has to honor the way God, the time in which God chose to communicate. Never forget that Scripture was God's Word to other people before it become God's Word to us. So, this book wasn't written just for us. It was written for God's people throughout history, and it was God's Word to them before it was God's Word to us.

That means two things: number one, God cared deeply about them to give them His Word. I know I have mentioned the Middle East a couple of different times. It is just my recent time out of the country, and it was so awesome being in a couple of those countries where so much Old Testament history is taking place, and to remember that this is the place that God chose to reveal Himself in that time period. It was just a picture of God's love for that region of the world. It is not just about them though. God cares deeply about us, and He wants us to see the meaning of this Word that He originally revealed to them.

There are all different facets of contexts. First, literary contexts. Literary contexts, and the first part of that is just thinking about literature genre. A genre is, basically, different genres of literature or different kinds of biblical text. When you read through this book, you will find all different kinds of genres. You will find stories. You will find speeches. You will find poetry. You will find prophetic oracles. You will find all kinds of different forms of literature, and what we have in this one book is a multiplicity of forms.

What we need to think about here when it comes to genres, we need to know the rules involved with different genres. I say rules, and I want to picture it like this. You have basketball, and you have football. If you try to play basketball with the rules of football, it is not going to work out very well. Things are not going to go well when one person comes in and thinks it is the rules of football at work, and everyone else is dribbling around a basketball. That is the same thing in basketball trying to apply to football. It is almost looking at different genres like looking at different games, and each one of them has different rules so to speak.

We have practical examples of this. In one day this past week, you might have read a newspaper, looked up a number in a phone book, ordered from a menu, read a poem, read a letter, waded through instructions on how to build something, or meditated on a devotional book. Now, those are all different genres, and, obviously, you are not going to read a phone book the same way you read a love letter, and you are not going to order off, read a menu the same way you read a newspaper. These things are going to be different.

On a side note, this is the possible potential danger with topical preaching and topical study of the Bible that just kind of jumps around from this text to this text. It is like bringing

something from a menu, something from a love letter, and something from a phonebook together and trying to figure out how they all relate to each other. That is very difficult to do. That doesn't mean that it can't be done, but it is difficult to do. You are not going to study Galatians and Song of Solomon the same. You are not going to study those books the same. They have different rules, so to speak, that help us understand what they mean. You are not going to take the parables and do exhaustive word studies like you might do in the book of Galatians with "The Parable of the Good Samaritan." So, we are going to use different rules with different types of genres.

What you have, and what we are going to talk about in the second half are these types of genres. These are pretty general, but in the Old Testament you have Narrative, or stories, Law, Poetry, the Prophets and Wisdom. They overlap some. Sometimes they overlap, but those are the main genres. Then in the New Testament, you have the Letters, the Gospels which include parables but are kind of a different breed in and of themselves. Then, the book of Acts, and you have Revelation, which all to itself is a genre. So, you have these different genres you have to take into account.

Second in literary context is the grammar. Grammar. Individual words, phrases, clauses, all those affect the meaning, and in the surroundings. We have to realize that the Bible is not just a bunch of parts that exist separate from one another. The Bible contains an integrated message in which the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

I have some concentric circles there in your notes. What you have is an inner circle, which is the text you are studying. It may be a verse. It may be a paragraph. It may be a chapter. So, you have that text. Then, you have the immediate context in which it is found. Then, beyond that, you have a whole segment that many times they are contained in. Then, you have the rest of that Bible book that it is contained in. Last, you have the rest of the Bible. So, and this is why I study the Bible, it is going to take time, i.e., years to really dive into the depths of the Word, because we are going to begin to learn more about these different circles that are going to help to understand the Word, and all of those circles are key.

You look at a text like Matthew 18:20. "*For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.*" How many times have we heard it quoted? Somebody comes up on stage and says, "Church, where two or three are gathered together, there I am with them. So, praise God, He is with us," and that is good. Yes, God is with us. The only problem is the poor guy over here was thinking, "Well, I was having a quiet time this morning by myself. Does that mean that God was not with me then? What do you mean two or three have gathered?" What we have done, we have taken that passage, that verse, and we have ripped it out of its context. You go back to that passage, and what you will find is Jesus is talking about conflict in the church, conflict between brothers and going to your brother and addressing him. Basically, a church discipline picture, and it is a promise that Jesus gives that, when the church goes through very difficult times and when the church goes through conflict, I want to remind you that right when you gather together, I want to remind you that I am with you in the middle of the conflict. Now it is an incredible verse, but if we rip it out of its context, we miss the point.

Revelation 3:20-21. Remember, this is God speaking to the Church at Laodicea, and He says, "*Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.*" Then, you have verse 21 that is listed there, and many times we use that to say, "I want to invite you to come to Christ. Jesus is standing at the door of your heart and He is knocking." The only problem is that it rips that verse out of its context. The Bible is actually speaking to the church there, and it is a picture of Jesus saying to the church, "I am outside this picture. Standing at the door and

knocking. Open the door and let's experience the unity that was designed for the Church." We have to know those different facets of context. Literary context.

Then, second, historical-cultural context. Remember, we talked about how we bring our culture to the table. Well, they bring their culture to the table. The historical-cultural context. If our interpretation of the Bible is going to be valid, it has got to take into account the history, the culture of that day. We have to know that. This is why we did "Old Testament Secret Church" and "New Testament Secret Church" before this Secret Church because understanding the background of each of those books is key for understanding how to interpret those books. So, they go together.

We have got to get to know the author. Get to know the author. Use your notes from Old Testament or New Testament Secret Church. When was Hosea writing? What is the background behind that? You can tell from the tone of Galatians. I think we mentioned it a couple of times. What is going on the situation there from Paul? What kind of relationship did Jonah have with the Ninevites? Why does Luke not include this or that in his story in the book of Acts? Why does he not tell us exactly what happened to Paul at the end? Why did he kind of leave it hanging there? We have to understand what Luke is doing as an author in order to answer those questions. Get to know the author.

What we are going to do, I have John 21:24 listed there. I want us to take John 4 as an example here, which is Jesus' conversation with the woman at the well. I was trying to use one that is familiar to many of us, and I want us to think about the historical-cultural context that is needed there. Well, we need to know is who wrote this book, and that is why I have John 21:24 listed there. *"This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true."* You have John who wrote this. Now, we get to know the author.

Second, get to know the audience. Every biblical book is written to specific people for a specific purpose. When you read the Gospel of Mark, Mark is writing to a bunch of believers who are facing persecution. So, that affects the way that we interpret the book of Mark. You get to John 20:31. This is a passage that we read earlier. Why did he write this book? He wants us to *"...believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and...have life in his name."* So, we have the author and the audience.

Then, get to know the geographic conditions. When you read John 4:3-4, and it says, *"When the Lord learned of this, he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee. Now he had to go through Samaria."* At that point, you see this geographic stuff coming on. You go, and you look at a map and see this path leaving Judea and going back to Galilee. The most common path for people to take in that day because of the deep hatred for Samaritans was to go around Samaria, but John 4:4 says Jesus *"had to go through Samaria."* It is a picture of Jesus going, really, in a sense, outside of the norm because He was pursuing the people that no one else cared about, that everyone else ignored. That is the picture we have been geographically given.

Get to know the social conditions. John 4:7. When we read that, *"When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, 'Will you give me a drink?'"* Socially, this is way out of bounds, a man talking to a woman in public. Not only a man talking to a woman, but a Jew talking to a Samaritan. This is way out of bounds socially. We don't feel that unless we know the historical-cultural context there.

Get to know the religious conditions. *"The Samaritan woman said to him, 'You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?' (For Jews do not associate*

*with Samaritans.*)” You know the religious divide that goes all the way back to the Old Testament, where the Samaritans accept the first five books of the Old Testament but kind of check out after that, and the Jewish people didn’t. The divide is there as a result of that. We need to know the religious conditions in John 4.

Get to know the economic conditions. *“Sir,’ the woman said, ‘you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?’”* (John 4:11-12). We need to know that economically this woman would have to come out repeatedly to this well to get water. Most of the time you would come out with others, but she is coming out alone which says something about her. There are economic conditions at work here.

Political conditions. At the end of their conversation, *“The woman said, ‘I know that Messiah’ (called Christ) ‘is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.’”* (John 4:25-26). They were looking for a political Messiah. That was the picture, and it helps to understand the expectations of Messiah for how Jesus is being revealed in the Gospels.

All those different facets of context. You see how, in just one passage, you see geography, history, politics, economics. This is where a Bible handbook is really helpful, but if we don’t have that, then we need to really look for clues that help us understand the different divides there are, the different issues that are being raised.

We have literary context, historical-cultural context, and then, the theological context. Every passage we study in Scripture fits into the overall picture of Scripture. This is another reason why we did Old Testament and New Testament Secret Church first. Each of those times we did Old Testament and New Testament, the second half of those evenings we walked through a theological overview to see what was going on in the Old Testament and New Testament. If you were here, you know we walked through the whole patterns that were being developed in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, how the New Testament carried those through. So, take that picture and think about where each passage that we are studying fits into those pictures.

I love this quote from J. I. Packer. He said,

The Bible appears like a symphony orchestra, with the Holy Ghost as its Toscanini, each instrument has been brought willingly, spontaneously, creatively, to play his notes just as the great conductor desired, though none of them could ever hear the music as a whole...The point of each part only becomes fully clear when seen in relation to all the rest.

We don’t read different texts in isolation from one another. We read them in their theological context, how they fit in to the overall message of the Bible. Those different contexts that they bring, that we bring, to the table, we need to be aware of.

### **Basic Principles for Bible Interpretation**

We summarize it this way: basic principles for Bible interpretation. Number one: remember the context rules. Context rules. Never take a Scripture out of context to make it say something that you think would be good for it to say. That is an abuse of the Bible, and sometimes, we do it because we want it to speak to a certain situation, or we want it to say something to encourage somebody else, but we don’t help people by misinterpreting Scripture to try to help their situation. That does not help people. Remember the context rules. The ultimate author is God, and we don’t need to add to his meaning.

Always seek the full counsel of the Word of God. We have seen how the more we study Scripture, the more we will understand the whole picture. We will more easily understand how this fits in to the whole picture. When we face difficult texts, texts that are difficult to interpret, to understand, it is going to help us to have an overall picture so that we don't start twisting this and twisting this, and, all of a sudden, this whole picture gets jumbled. Always seek the full counsel of the Word of God.

Remember that Scripture will never contradict Scripture. Scripture will never contradict Scripture. Compare Scripture with Scripture...use cross-references. This is a big part of Bible study. If your Bible does have little notes, little letters, cross-references that are in your Bible use those cross-references. You are studying verses, and you see a word that sticks out, it will often have a little letter there with a verse of where else Paul has used that word, and it will help you. Cross-references are big so compare Scripture with Scripture.

The best interpreter of Scripture is Scripture. The best interpreter of Scripture is Scripture. So, when you are struggling, let other parts of Scripture help you understand that. "Now Dave, you said Scripture will never contradict Scripture. When I look in Scripture, I see the responsibility of man talked about, and I see the sovereignty of God talked about. How do these two go together?" This is that point where we realize there is tension and mystery to the Word of God. There is tension and mystery. That doesn't mean that they contradict. It does mean that we study them as the text that we have and not be frustrated with the fact that sometimes it doesn't all just become crystal clear together. There is a bit of mystery to that. I think, sometimes, when we get frustrated, if I look at them and say, "You know I am the pastor, but I can't explain the whole Bible to you," I hope that is not discouraging to you. I hope it is not discouraging that someone with a finite mind would not be able to understand an infinite mind. Let's not get too downhearted about that, and it leads to this next thing.

Avoid basing your doctrine on an obscure passage of Scripture. Avoid basing your doctrine on an obscure passage of Scripture. There are some texts that we come to, and they just don't seem to add up. They don't seem to make sense, and we can't figure it out. We can get tied up in knots. I love this verse from 2 Peter 3:16. This is what Peter said about Paul's writings. Listen to what Peter himself, Peter the apostle, said about Paul's writings.

*He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.*

I find encouragement that Peter had a hard time with some of the things that Paul wrote. So, find encouragement in that. It is okay. Don't twist them, but know some of them are hard to understand. Find confidence, though, in the fact that the things God wants us to understand most, He has made more than clear. The things that God wants us to understand most, He has made very clear.

Interpret Scripture plainly. What I mean by this is avoiding that spiritual meaning. Trying to find what is that deep meaning that is even further than what it looks like on the front, on the face of it. Interpret Scripture plainly. Now, here is the deal. There are some times when the Bible does use figurative language, or the Bible is showing us a meaning that is a lot deeper than the text may show. Here are some guidelines, and I am just going to run through these. Guidelines you can go back to when you start to think, "Is there a deeper meaning here?" Use these guidelines.

Number one: use the literal sense unless there is a good reason not to. Literal, plain sense unless there is a good reason not to.

Number two: use a figurative interpretation when the passage tells you to do so. Remember the passage that we looked at about the slave owner and the free woman? It said look at this figuratively. That is a good sign. So, look at it figuratively. So, if it says do it, then do it.

Third, use the figurative sense if the expression is an obvious figure of speech. "*As the deer pants for streams water, so my soul pants for you*" (Psalm 42:1). Okay? That is an obvious figure of speech.

Number four: use the figurative sense if a literal interpretation goes contrary to the context of the passage, the context of the book, or the purpose of the author. So, we want to see the unity here. Use the figurative sense if the literal interpretation involves the contradiction of other Scripture. That is somewhat similar to that. Then, finally, use the figurative interpretation if a literal meaning is impossible, absurd, or immoral. So, just remember that. If it is impossible, absurd or immoral for that to be the case, then, obviously, there is a figurative sense intended. That is what I mean to interpret Scripture plainly.

Finally, conclude the process of interpretation by describing the author's intended meaning in the passage. Summarize the text. What I want to encourage you to do, and this is a part of what is on this sheet right here, the major question you want to ask is, "What is the point?" What is the point? When you have done all this observation, it says at the bottom of this sheet, this half-sheet, taking into account literary, historical, culture and theological context which we just talked about, identify in one or two sentences the primary meaning of this text for its original readers. What is the point? In one or two sentences, you want to sum up the point. Whether it is a verse, a passage, or a longer segment of Scripture, what is the point? You want to be able to lay that out in a verse or two at the bottom of this page.

Be responsible with this. Remember, it is not what does the text mean for me, it is what does the text mean, what did it mean to its original readers? A text cannot mean what it never meant. Be concise. You don't have to make this more difficult than it is. So, be simple and be specific. Be specific. Don't write down, as you are coming to a conclusion, don't write down "God is good." He is. He is very good, but write down what Paul said this to these people to show that God is good. You want to be specific in how you write that down.

Then, the final step on interpreting Scripture is to check your conclusions by leaning on the church. By leaning on the church. Here is what I mean by that. Be very wary if you study a passage of Scripture, and you find an interpretation in that Scripture that nobody else in 2,000 years has found. I am not saying the Holy Spirit is still not speaking to people. However, I am guessing that you are not going to come on the scene, and I am not going to come on the scene, and, finally, somebody is here that the Holy Spirit can actually reveal this truth that He has been waiting to reveal to you. It is not the way it works. So, if you find something that nobody else has, if you were to look in a commentary on this or that, and nobody else in the world has come up with this, then, at least be wary of that. Okay? At least move very cautiously from that point.

### **Interpretation in action...**

Interpretation in action. If you were to come to Acts 1:8, and, remember, we have talked about how you would have a list full of things, you would have stuff written all over this page when it comes to observing Acts 1:8, and you come to the interpretation part, what does it mean? You might write down here a sentence. I am going to give you a sentence

that might be similar if you have some blank space there. You don't have to write down these exact words. "*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.*" Maybe the point. You say, "What is the point of Acts 1:8?" Jesus encouraged His disciples by promising them He would send the Holy Spirit to enable them to take the gospel to the whole world. That is kind of the point. Jesus encouraged His disciples by promising them He would send the Holy Spirit to enable them to take the gospel to the whole world. That is the point. You bring it down to it, okay? You have scribble all over here for what you have observed.

Then you have to summarize. What does it mean? What is the point? Jesus encouraged His disciples by promising that He would send the Holy Spirit to enable them to take the gospel to the whole world. Okay. That is the first two parts on the front of this sheet. Again, I am using this as an illustration. If you want to walk away tonight and use this as a Bible study guide, then I want you to have something practical like that. Maybe you don't use this. Maybe you use something like that, or you develop or adapt this. You do whatever works best for how you can best accomplish this.

### **BRING IT BACK HOME: How Does It Relate?**

Then, you would turn it over, and we have two steps on the back. Bring it back home and apply it in your home. So, let's think about bring it back home. How does it relate? This is the shortest step, but in some ways, it is the most challenging step. Remember, this is how the text travels. We are sitting on the plane now. We have been in here in Acts 1. We have observed all these things in Acts 1. We have figured out what the point was for the original readers. Now, we are getting on the plane, and we are thinking, "How does this travel to the twenty-first century? Bring it back home. How does it relate?"

#### **The goal...**

The goal here is to identify the timeless truth. Not just truth, maybe truths. Maybe there are a couple of different truths, but you are looking for the truths, the principles that are in this passage that are timeless, that travel across cultures. This is the theological principle that applies to all people of all times. Now, we are still not to application. We are going to get there in just a minute, but we are thinking through a timeless truth. All right? We have this picture. Jesus encouraged His disciples to wait for the Holy Spirit to enable them to take the gospel to the whole earth.

#### **The guidelines...**

Now, let's think through some timeless truths. Here are the guidelines. The timeless truths. Five characteristics when you think of a timeless truth. Number one: timeless truth is biblical. Hopefully that goes without saying, but it should be reflected in the text, and not just in that text, but, second, the timeless truth is compatible (with the rest of Scripture). It is biblical and compatible. In other words, a truth in Acts 1:8 that is timeless should not contradict a truth in Nehemiah 1. They wouldn't contradict each other. If they did, then one of them would not be truth. Okay? A timeless truth is biblical, second, compatible with the rest of Scripture, and, third, the timeless truth is eternal. That is why it is called timeless. It is not tied to a specific situation. This is not just what was going on in Acts, this is what happens to all people of all times. Eternal.

Fourth, the timeless truth is cross-cultural. This is where we separate what is going on in this specific cultural context to what the truth is behind how that affects all cultures. Traveling across the ocean, cross-cultural. Fifth, the timeless truth is applicable. It is applicable in Acts 1:8, and it is applicable in the twenty-first century. It is applicable here and there. Timeless truth: biblical, compatible, eternal, cross-cultural, and applicable.

### **Implication in action...**

Now, let me give you some examples of what I mean by that. What are the timeless truths in Acts 1:8? I have four listed here. Really sum up these five components of timeless truth. Okay. If you were to back away from Acts 1:8, what are some timeless truths that are here? One timeless truth: the Holy Spirit comes upon the people of God personally. The Holy Spirit comes upon the people of God personally. Okay? Maybe a second one: the effect or the result of the Holy Spirit in believers' lives is witness to Christ. The effect or the result of the Holy Spirit in believers' lives is witness to Christ. I know it is tough to write all this down as you think through it, but I want you to get the gist. If you can get it all written down that is great, but get the gist. Maybe a third one: the Holy Spirit empowers followers of Christ. That is just a timeless truth. The Holy Spirit empowers Christ-followers, and maybe a fourth one: the Holy Spirit wants the world for Christ. The Holy Spirit wants the world for Christ. It is a timeless truth. It was there in Acts 1, and it is here tonight. The Holy Spirit wants the world for Christ. The Holy Spirit empowers Christ-followers. The effect or result of the Holy Spirit in believers' lives is witness to Christ. Anybody who has the Holy Spirit, the effect of the Holy Spirit in us is witness to Christ. The Holy Spirit of God comes upon the people personally. These are timeless truths that apply to the first century, second century, third century, all the way to the twenty-first century. Biblical, compatible, eternal, cross-cultural, and applicable. Okay.

Now, based on those timeless truths, and it is key, what you have on the back of this sheet, it says identify the timeless truths that relate to the original readers and to us. Now, on here, it says studying an Old Testament passage filtered theological principles to the New Testament. We will talk about that later in just a little while.

## **APPLY IT IN YOUR HOME: What Do I Do?**

### **The differences between interpretation and application...**

The last step we make, then, is apply it in your home. Now we are to application. We haven't started there, we are ending there. Apply it in your home. Now, I want us to think about the differences between interpreting the Bible and applying the Bible. What are the differences here? Interpretation focuses on meaning. What does the text mean? Application focuses on action. What am I going to do as a result of what the text means? Application focuses on action. Interpretation has a singular meaning. Remember, we are looking for what the Holy Spirit means in a text. Some of you, when I said, "Don't say what does the passage mean to me," you thought, "Doesn't it mean different things to each one of us?" No. It means this, but it applies in different ways to many us. So, interpretation focuses on a singular meaning. Application involves multiple actions, multiple actions, different specific scenarios where this text applies. Interpretation is the same for all Christians. Application is different for specific life situations. These are the differences between interpretation and application. Interpretation involves getting into the Word. Application involves the Word getting into us. That is how the Word is going to play out in us. Finally, interpretation asks, this goes back to that question, interpretation asks, "What does this text mean?" Application



asks, "How does this meaning apply to my life?" So, what we have done is we have observed, understood, and related this text.

### **Three steps to responsible, biblical application...**

Now, we are thinking, "Okay. What does this mean for my life?" Three steps to responsible, biblical application. Number one: meditate on the timeless truths. By meditate, I mean just let it soak in. You look at those timeless truths we just listed, and you let them soak in.

Then, second, relate the timeless truths to today. Now, in order to do that, what we have to do is a couple of different things. First, we have to see the timeless truth in its original situation. How does that timeless truth apply in that day? We look for the people, the places, relationships, ideas that were affected in that original situation by this timeless truth. Now, stick with me here, and I am going to give you an example even beyond Acts 1:8 to think through. How did this timeless truth apply to those people in that time in that place?

Then, identify a contemporary situation, a twenty-first century situation that parallels the original situation. It is the same, and look for key elements, the people or places that might parallel over here.

Now, let me give you an example. Let's take a quintessential, misapplied verse of Scripture, Philippians 4:13. "*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*" Okay. Now, what we are going to do, we are going to look at that verse. Now, how did that verse apply? We are going to look, okay, what are the timeless truths here? Well, let's even back up a little further than that. We have Philippians. Paul is in prison, and he is writing this letter. He has gone through very difficult times. He is writing this letter to a group of people, and he is challenging them to stay firm in the faith. They have been an encouragement to him. At times, they have given to him, and so, he has a close relationship with them.

In Philippians 4:10-13, he is talking about the support and relationships he has had with them, and it is in the context here, when we were doing these first two steps on the front side of this page, it is Paul talking about contentment. He says, "*I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation.*" He has talked about how he has known what it is like to be in want and need and knows what it is like to have plenty. He knows what it is like to have enough and to not to have enough, and that is what leads into this verse, "*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*" So, maybe the timeless truth would be something like, "Believers can be content, followers of Christ can be content in a variety of circumstances because Christ gives strength no matter what those circumstances are." Something like that. That is kind of the timeless truth.

Now, as we think about how to apply that, we are going to meditate on that timeless truth, and we have to relate it to today, a contemporary situation. Look at the key factors that are involved in Philippians 4. You have a Christian, Paul. We are Christians, too. You have a period of difficulty, suffering, they are going through because of their relationship with Christ, and you have Christ who gives strength in the middle of that. Okay. So, you identify those key elements there.

Then, you come over here to a contemporary situation, the twenty-first century, and you think of a situation that has all those characteristics. What we need to find is a contemporary situation that matches the original situation. If it doesn't match the original situation of those key elements, we are going to misapply the Bible. Let me give you an

example. Two football teams go on to the field tomorrow. You have a Christian on one side saying, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. We can win this game." Only problem is there is probably a Christian on the other side who has the same verse written on his wristband. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Both of them have the same pep talk. "We can do it. I can do it. We can. This team can win this game." Now, either they have a problem, or God has got a problem when it comes to this game tomorrow, because, obviously, you have two teams that are using Scripture to say that they are going to have the strength to win this game.

Now, the missing element here, maybe you have a Christian on each team here, and maybe you have Christ who gives strength, but the missing element is someone who is in a period of suffering because of their relationship with Christ. Therefore, to take this passage over here and apply it to mean that we are going to win this game, obviously, rips this passage out of its context. Obviously, we realize that. I mean the reality is if you really were to apply this in context, you may get mutilated in that game, and the whole purpose of that verse is to teach you that you are going to be okay in the middle of getting mauled on the football field. When it is 72 to zero, and you sit there and say, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" now, that is getting a little more, not quite parallel, but it is getting closer. Okay? So, maybe you don't want to write that on your wristband. Okay?

So, maybe we take another situation. Maybe there is a single mom who, when she came to faith in Christ, her husband completely deserted her. He has left her there with three kids, hardly any finances to meet their needs, struggling through the battles of being a single mom and finding herself in financial straits and sometimes alone. Now, here you have a Christian, you have a Christ who gives strength, and you have somebody who is going through a time where they are in want or in need. You have a parallel situation here. So, you say to a single mom, or you say as a single mom, "I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength." Now the Bible is being applied rightly. You look for the parallel, and when there are differences, you have to note those because they are going to affect the way the Bible is applied. That is what I mean by identifying the original, seeing the timeless truth in its original situation. Identify a contemporary situation that parallels the original situation. We misapply the Bible when there are not parallels there. Then, relate the timeless truths, specifically, to that contemporary situation like we just did.

So you meditate on it, you relate this thing, then you practice the timeless truth. You practice it, you obey the timeless truth. You put it into practice.

2 Timothy 3:14-4:2. We won't read all through it, but we quoted this earlier, this picture of Scripture being God breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, training and righteousness. I want to encourage you, and this is on the back of these sheets, I believe when we read Scripture there are five primary questions we need to ask. The first question is this: based on this text, let me even, before I go into those, let me say that every text doesn't necessarily answer every single one of these questions, but if the only question that we ask when we come to a text of Scripture is, "Okay. What am I supposed to do based on this?" then we may miss some of the applications. So, the first question to ask is: Who should I be? Who should I be? Christianity is not primarily a religion about doing; it is a religion about being. It is about Christ in us. How does my character need to change based on this text of Scripture?

Second question: how should I think? How should I think? We need to learn from the Word how to think "Christianly." This is where correcting in righteousness, this picture of being able to discern truth from error based on what we study here. Christ affects the way we

think. How do I think “Christianly?” How does this text affect the way I think and the way I perceive things?

Third, what should I do? What should I do? That is where we might go through a list like this: a sin to avoid, a verse that I need to memorize. Is there a promise that I need to claim, a prayer that I need to pray, a command to obey, a condition for me to meet, a challenge to face? What do I do? Don’t be hearers of the Word, be doers of the Word.

Then, where should I go? Where should I go? The reason that I say ask this is because this is the question that I don’t think we ask when we study Scripture. Well, one of the two questions that we don’t ask very much. All of Scripture, I believe, is intended to be read in the context of mission. When you read the New Testament, this is the people that are going to the nations with the gospel. If the text does not propel us to go, if the text propels us to sit back in our Christian lives and not do anything to affect the cause of Christ in the world, then we may be missing the point of the text. Where should I go? Where does this text cause me to go make disciples, and that leads to this last question.

Who will I teach? The Word was not intended just for you. Is the Word going to stop with you or spread through you? The best way, write this down, the best way to learn the Bible is to teach the Bible. When you are teaching this Word, you will have to know it. Now, I am not just saying it, teaching it to a group of 2,000 people or teaching it to a group of 200 or 20 people. It could be teaching it one person, but I think we need to ask this question whenever we study the text and realize that whatever God is teaching us is not just intended for us. It is the whole picture of 2 Corinthians 1:3-7. Whatever Christ does in me is intended to flow through me. His comfort in me is intended to comfort others. That is the picture. It is the picture with the Word. When Christ teaches us, then we have to say, “How can I teach this to somebody else?” It doesn’t mean that you have to sit down and have 45-minute Bible studies with them. That would be great in some circumstances, but the truth of how it applies to your life is to look for opportunities to reproduce that, to teach it to others.

I want you to imagine with me a church that walks out every Sunday asking, based on what we saw in the Word, “Who am I going to be? How am I going to think? What am I going to do? Where am I going to go? Who am I going to teach this to?” Just imagine, imagine 4,000 people from Brook Hills walking out of here every single Sunday asking those questions. Maybe even deeper though, imagine a whole congregation of people asking those questions by studying the Bible every single day, and asking, “Who am I going to be based on this text? How I am I going to think? What am I going to do? Where am I going to go? Who am I going to teach?” That is multiplication of the Word of Christ to the nations right there. If we will do it, if we will apply the Word.

### **Application in Action**

So, “application in action.” Go back to Acts 1:8. We did this with Philippians 4:13. Identify key elements involving timeless truth in Acts 1:8. We have Jesus there. You have the Holy Spirit there. You have these places: Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth. You have those certain places, and then you have followers of Christ, but don’t forget there is a small difference here. These are followers of Christ without the Holy Spirit before the Holy Spirit had come, pre-Holy Spirit. They are waiting for the Holy Spirit. Those are the key elements in Acts 1:8.

Now, identify any situations, real-world scenarios so to speak. Imagine a picture that has those key elements. You think of that tonight in this room. Followers of Christ, but notice the difference. Notice the difference. It was future with them. It is present with us. Okay? We are not waiting on the Holy Spirit tonight. We have the Holy Spirit, those of us who are

following Christ. Christ, you have Christ, the Holy Spirit, followers of Christ, and we have, obviously, we are not in Jerusalem. We are not in Judea and Samaria, but we are in the ends of the earth. So, you have those key elements that are parallel.

Now, write out how those timeless truths that we saw, some of those we listed, how do they affect this particular real-world scenario, say us tonight? I would say the primary application is this: believers in Christ, this is what I would write there, believers in Christ today, tonight, right here, can know that the Holy Spirit is in us. Christ-followers can know the Holy Spirit is in us to enable us to reach the ends of the earth as witnesses to Christ. The Holy Spirit is in you, tonight, to enable you to reach the ends of the earth as witnesses to Christ.

That is Acts 1:8 applied to this group tonight, and so, we would ask these questions. I am going to give answers to each of the questions. You might not answer, like I said, every single question based on every text, but ask this question: "Who should I be?" I should be filled with the Spirit, walking in his power on a daily basis. Christ is in me. The Spirit of Christ in me, filling me, empowering me.

"How should I think?" I should think of myself as a witness to the glory of Christ. That is who I am. I am a witness, and I need to think of myself as a witness. I should think with no geographic boundaries in my life. The Holy Spirit doesn't see any geographic boundaries in my life, and, therefore, I shouldn't either. The Holy Spirit is in me to reach the ends of the earth.

"What should I do?" I should trust the Spirit of God to use me to accomplish His purpose in the world. That is why He is in me, to use me to accomplish His purpose in the world.

"Where should I go?" I think we have no other option, based on Acts 1:8, than to go to the ends of the earth. This verse leaves us no other option. I go to the ends of the earth.

"Who will I teach?" It may be I teach my small group. For me, it means I teach the faith family on Sunday. I teach my wife, I teach my husband, I teach my kids, I teach my co-workers, I look for opportunities to pass this Word on. Now, that is the picture that is represented on the back of this page. At the top, bring it back home, how does it relate, identify these timeless truths, and then apply it in your home. What do I do? Walk through those five questions.

That is the overview of this page, and what I want us to do. That is the foundation. That is the key take away. What I want us to do, though, is the rest of our time together, and like I said, we may not get to it all. Maybe we will pull a Minor Prophets deal from the Old Testament Secret Church, if you were here for that. Minor Prophets just got left out completely, but what I want us to do is I want us to think about this process: observe – what do it see in a text? Understand – what does it mean? Then, relate – how does this text relate to me? How does the text travel, and then apply it, bring it back home and apply it in our home. What am I going to do?

## **JOURNEYING THROUGH DIFFERENT GENRES**

### **The Unique Challenges of Various Types of Literature in the Bible**

Now, I don't want to underscore the importance of this stuff. This is all stuff that I think we need. What I want us to do is dive into these different genres, and we are going to dive into a couple, and then we will take a break, but I want us to dive into these different genres, and I want us to look at them like different games, different sports, and we have to figure out what the rule is for each game. What the rules are for how to interpret this or that.

So, you come to that next picture. It is almost like, even go back to the mission trip analogy, we are going in to different countries. You are going to look for different things in the Middle East than you do in Indonesia or China or South America. So, we are going into different countries, going to spend different amounts of time in there, because some of these areas are easier to interpret than others. I want us to journey through different genres, and what we are going to do, is look at four things.

First, I just want us to, real briefly, talk about some of the difficulties in certain genres. Second, we are looking at some general guidelines, and, then third, I want us to walk through, just real quickly, (a practical process for reading certain genres) and we are going to fly through on some of these, the observe, the understand, the bring it back home and the apply. Walk through those four steps in each genre, and then look at an example, but we really won't have time to do examples. So, we just won't have time to do it. Yeah. Okay. Here we go.

## **JOURNEYING INTO THE NEW TESTAMENT**

### **The Letters**

#### **Difficulties involved in reading the letters...**

Jump into the letters, the New Testament letters. I want to start here because they are probably the easiest. Journey into the New Testament and think about the letters, known as the Epistles. We have some difficulties here. There are some things in the letters that we walk away saying, "What in the world does that mean?" Paul says that "*(if) there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them?*" (1 Corinthians 15:29) Apparently, people were getting baptized for the dead, and we really don't know a lot about why or what. What in the world is going on there?

So, what in the world are we supposed to do? Let me give you an example from just one book, letter to the Romans. It says in Romans 12:10, "*Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.*" Okay. Easy enough. That is easy to apply. Now, the second one. Romans 13:1: "*Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.*" Now, what does that mean when you are living in a persecuted country, and the authorities say, "Don't gather together for worship."

All right, maybe that is a little harder. Then, you get to Romans 16:16: "*Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ send greetings.*" Now is that what we are going to do? Well, we said in Romans 12:10 "*be devoted to one another in brotherly love.*" Of course we do that. Romans 13? Well, maybe. I am not sure how that looks. We get to Romans 16,

and it is talking about kissing each other, and we are thinking, "What in the world has happened in the book of Romans? How do you know which one to do and which one not to do?"

I remember walking through the book of Romans, and there were two guys I was discipling in college, and we were studying Romans. We got to the end, and he said, "Why don't we do this?" He was real introspective guy and real serious, and he was very serious, and he said, "We do what it says here and here and here. Why don't we do this?" Then, I said, "Well, I mean there are a lot of reasons," and I started, you know, going into all the description and this and that, and this is why you need to know how to study the Bible because you want to be able to answer questions like that. So, he was not convinced by all the answers that I gave, and it was so funny. It was so funny. We got to the end, and I was just exasperated, and finally I said, "Listen man. If you think this is something that you are convicted you need to do, then I am fine if we do this greeting with a holy kiss, like on the cheek, but greeting with a holy kiss if you think we need to do this," and he was kind of, "All right," and so, we kind of left it at that. Then, he was leaving later that night, and the passage talks about greeting. I don't know why it was awkward leaving, but it was still funny, because it was something that they would do in that culture when they left as well. So, we had talked about that, and so, he was leaving the apartment there in college and...These are things maybe a pastor shouldn't share, but he is leaving and our eyes kind of lock, and we are both thinking it. This felt like it was a first date, and he was about five or ten feet away from me, and all of a sudden, he comes toward me, and I just kind of freeze, and he gives me a kiss on the cheek and just runs out of the apartment. Let me assure you that this was the only time we applied Romans 16:16 like that. So, those are difficulties, and we need to know on how to interpret the Bible. Okay? How to apply the Bible just for so many reasons. Okay.

### **General guidelines for reading the letters...**

General guidelines for reading the letters. Okay. New Testament letters. (I had really not planned on sharing that. And what is interesting is when that is translated into other languages, that won't seem odd at all. We were in the Middle East, and we got to know guys, and it just became the deal. Billy was there. He was the first one to go for it, and he did it, and since he had done it, it was like, "Now, I have to do it," but it is a picture of honor, respect. Anyway.)

General guidelines for reading the letters. New Testament letters are occasional documents. Now, here is what I mean by that. They are written to a specific audience, at a specific time, to address a specific situation.

New Testament letters are addressing specific situations. We are going to go fast with this stuff, so just get ready to keep turning. There were some circumstances that caused these letters to be written in all these instances. Maybe there were behaviors that needed to be corrected. We need to realize that, oftentimes, when we see Paul talking about husbands and wives, wives submit to your husbands, husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church, it is not just this isolated teaching that is out there. He is addressing something that is going on there in Ephesians, and he is addressing something that is going on there in Colossians. So, we need to know there was a specific occasion that was bringing this about, behaviors that need to be corrected, doctrines that need to be straightened out. Paul is not just writing a systematic theology here, he is straightening out some false teaching, misunderstandings that need to be clarified.

Now, here is the problem. This makes it difficult because, a lot of the time, we have the answers, but we don't know the questions. You see how that causes problems? It is like

listening to one side of a telephone conversation when we read a New Testament letter. There is something going on here, and there are some assumptions, even, that are shared with these two groups - the writer and the audience that we are kind of out of. So, we have to get into that. That creates a lot of difficulties.

We have to be careful. We are careful not to conclude, then, too much from only one letter, only one letter. We have to put these letters together to see the overall picture. In order to understand the conversation better, we have to get into all these different letters. You look at 1 Corinthians 15:29, which I mentioned just a second ago, talking about being baptized for the dead. When you look at that Scripture, you have to realize there are like 40 different guesses that good Bible scholars have about what in the world is going on in 1 Corinthians 15:29. So, let's not get too hung up on this. Let's put it together with some of the other letters, and I think some of those things will be minimized a little bit.

We are confident that God has clearly communicated to us what is most important. We have talked about that. We can be confident that God has clearly communicated to us what is most important. So, there are occasional documents.

Second, New Testament letters are not, they are not, theological treatises. This is not a theology book. Even a picture of justification, when I picture that picture of being justified before God, it is Paul. Paul talked about that a lot, but actually, when you look at it, he uses that word 15 times in Romans, and I think six or eight times in Galatians, but he uses it only two times in all of his other letters. He is not trying to give us a theological treatise on justification. That was something important to be addressed in that particular situation. Any time we see theology, it is theology addressed to a particular situation, and what we have to realize when we think about our theological ideas, and maybe even some of the problems we have, questions we have theologically, we have to realize, the answers, theological answers that are being given in the New Testament letters, are answers to their questions not ours. Does that make sense? This is key. We sometimes go to the New Testament letters trying to get answers for our theological questions when those were not questions back then that they were wrestling with, that were being addressed there. So, when we go to New Testament letters looking for an answer on abortion or an answer on remarriage or an answer on infant baptism, some of these things were not a problem at that point, so they weren't addressing some of those things. So, we may be asking questions that the text is not intending to answer in the first place. That is key.

Overall, New Testament letters have a common form. They start with an introduction, usually an identification of the author. I wish Hebrews would have given us that, but it doesn't so. Not all letters have all of these things, but usually they start with an introduction of the author. These letters are representations of the people that are behind them. That is what a first century letter would do. It is like an authoritative substitute. It is like I told you about letters that I get from Heather that she would write to me. I mean that, this was like an authoritative substitute. You know, if she is not here and we spend a summer apart, I have at least got her letters. That is kind of the picture.

Then, we go on to an identification of the audience, a greeting, a prayer or thanksgiving, Sometimes this turns into a whole doxology, and we have to realize that those are not in every one. Hebrews doesn't have a lot of that. 1 John doesn't have those formal elements. Some letters have some and some don't. Introduction. In the body there is really no set format to the body of the New Testament letter, but it is the bulk of it. Then, the conclusion. Sometimes it is the final greeting. You look at Romans 15-16, and it almost looks like an introduction. Then, you have a farewell, and these various elements that are listed there. You see a holy kiss on there, autograph, prayer requests, greetings, all those different

things that area listed there. Here is the deal. I have mentioned a couple of times that some of these letters have these and some letters don't. Differences in form are often clues to meaning. Differences in form are often clues to the meaning. What I mean by that, when you go to Galatians, and you don't see at the very beginning the strong thanksgiving, you see him go directly into a rebuke, you realize that there is something going on between Paul and the Church in Galatia that is being addressed here. He doesn't even spend time doing the nice thank you or nice prayer of thanksgiving. Instead he says, "Why are you deserting the gospel" from the very beginning. So, that gives us a clue as to what is going on right there.

### **A practical process for reading the letters...**

A practical process for reading the letters. Now, this is going to be the same in each one of these things we look at. We are going to look at observe, understand, bring it back home, and apply it back home.

Observe their home: What do I see? Two things to think about. Number one: read. By that, I mean begin reading the letter aloud through in one setting. Read it. These letters, they would be delivered, and someone would stand there or sit there and read the letter from beginning to end out loud to an entire congregation of people. Now, that was the setting that letters came in. How do you and I read letters? We read them, most often, silently, little parts here or there, to ourselves alone. Spend some time with your family and read out loud Philippians from cover to cover. Spend some time with a group of people and just read aloud a letter from cover to cover. You get a picture of the scope that is going on in a way that you don't get by just reading it by yourself. It is like taking one of those letters from Heather, say she has written me a five or six page letter, and it is a doozy. I am not going to start when I get the letter, and the first day that I get this letter read page three, and the next day, read half of page four, and then the next day, a couple of days later, read half of page two. That would not be the way you would read a love letter, obviously. Well, that is oftentimes how we read New Testament Letters, and we don't realize that this paragraph right here was really dependent upon what was said in this paragraph back here. You see how these things are important for letters.

Read and then, second, reconstruct. You have to get into the original situation behind the letter. Ask all those questions that we talked about asking. You have to reconstruct the situation. So, that is your observation.

Now, you are understanding, understanding their home: What does it mean? I want to encourage you, when you read letters, to think paragraphs. Think paragraphs. For each paragraph and series of paragraphs, write down in one sentence or two sentences the answer to the overall question, "What is the point?" What is the point? You want to write that down. Think about paragraphs. Now, it doesn't mean that you don't study individual verses. There are some individual verses that are packed with meaning. Think paragraphs. What is the point of this paragraph? How does that relate to the point of this paragraph? What is the flow of all these paragraphs together?

Then bring it back home: How does it relate? Look for, I am just going to split these up, the biblical and compatible. Remember that which is aligned to the text there and with all of Scripture. Focus on truths that are central to the message of the text and all of the Bible. Here is what I mean by that. When you read the letters, and you see it talk about the sinfulness of man, the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, these are key, these are central truths. When you see the letters talking about, for example, the holy kiss and women's head coverings, or this or that which are not central to the meaning of the whole Bible, then put a little less emphasis there when it comes to these timeless truths that we



are identifying. Look for the eternal and cross-cultural. Focus on truths that are consistently taught in Scripture. Remember, because you have these different settings, sometimes Scripture may say something in one setting that might look differently in another setting. So, when you have thoughts on the political situation in Rome in one instance, and another instance when you have thoughts on eating this kind of food that maybe is a little different from this letter to that letter, don't camp out too long on that, but look for that which is consistently what is taught. For example, things like sexual immorality, homosexuality. These are things that are spoken clearly, consistently, about in all these letters put together. So, camp out on that which is central, not on that which is more peripheral.

Finally, look for the applicable. Focus on truths that are inherently true in all situations. True in all situations. Just like I mentioned, Paul's sin list. All the sexual sin lists. They all start with avoid sexual immorality. Those things are inherently true. They are inherently immoral, but—foot washing, this kind of food or that kind of food, exchanging the holy kiss, Paul's personal preference for celibacy—those things are not inherently true in all situations. So, write out the timeless truth or truths using present tense verbs. "God is doing this," "God does this," "Jesus does this," whatever it looks like in different paragraphs, passages that we are studying.

Then, apply it in your home: What do I do? Meditate on the truth, remember, and then relate the timeless truth to today. Remember, we walked through how to do that. Maybe an example like Philippians 4 and taking the original situation, put it next to parallel situations, and then looking at how we can apply those things. Relate the timeless truth, specifically, to contemporary situations. Ask the five questions.

### **An example of reading the letters...**

Let me give you an example. I think you have it there. Do you have Hebrews 12:1-3? We will break right after this. You look at Hebrews 12:1-3. You remember this passage?

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

You have that picture in Hebrews 12:1-3. What I wrote down was a list of things that you would write down. Your overall context: Why was Hebrews written? "Therefore," at the beginning of Hebrews 12:1, why is that there? This instruction to persevere and discipline, that is what Hebrews 12 is writing about. The imagery here. "Let us." That verb is mentioned three times. Throw off two things. There is a list: everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. Run with endurance. That is a theme that we see throughout Hebrews. Fix our eyes on Jesus because He has gone ahead of us. He endured. Why? For joy, for the joy that is set before me, He endured the cross. All these different things. Then, you have the purpose statement in Hebrews 12:2-3. So, you list all those things out.

Then, understand their home. What does it mean? I kind of concluded and said the author of Hebrews encouraged these Jewish Christians to endure in their faith despite opposition. He reminded them that the only way they can endure is focusing on Jesus Himself. Now, hopefully, that is responsible. It is simple, but it is specific. It is what is going on in that context, and then, you turn it over and look at the second part.

Bring it back home: How does it relate? The Christian life, now these are the timeless truths, the Christian life is like a race that requires effort and endurance. The saints who have gone before us provided valuable examples of endurance that encourage and inspire us. To run the race successfully, the Christians need to reject the things that hinder their progress and focus completely on their relationship with Jesus. Those are timeless truths.

Then, we take those, and we ask these questions about application. I won't read through each of those, but you see the picture I wanted to give you. We did Acts 1:8, a picture of how that might look with a New Testament letter.

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