

Tools for Understanding God's Word – Week 2

Summary from last week

Author's purpose tool:

Since the Bible is inspired, the author's purpose is God's purpose.

Sometimes explicit: John 20:30-31; Luke 1:1-4; 1 Jn 5:13

Otherwise, look for clues:

- Who is writing and to whom?
- What is the situation of the author and readers?
- Are we made aware of any problems that need to be addressed?
- Are there any repeated themes or a single idea that holds things together?
- What (and how many) details are included?

Example:

First read 1 Cor 13

Now read 1 Cor 1:10-12; 3:1-4; 6:1, 6-8; 11:17-18

How do these passages reveal the author's purpose? How does this change your view of 1 Cor 13?

Context tool:

Context matters! Passages are connected to what comes before and after.

Difference between reading an encyclopedia and a novel

Consider who is speaking, to whom, why, and in what context.

Consider different levels of context:

sentences, paragraph, section, chapter, book, whole Bible

Example: John 12:32 – how does v. 33 affect your reading of v. 32

Example: Exodus 20:3ff (The 10 commandments)

Exercise: Mark 8:22-26

First read the passage by itself – what does it tell you.

Now read vv 14-21 and 27-30. How might this change your view of the passage

Who am I? tool:

Who is the passage referring to relative to who I am? Who am I to identify with?

Beware of the "Moses-is-Me" syndrome—identifying with the central figure in each story.

Ways in which we might identify with them:

- their trust in God
- their experience of God's forgiveness
- as positive or negative role models

Example: John 14:26 – depending upon whom you identify with, your interpretation of the passage can be completely opposite.

Exercise: Read Mark 6:14-29 The beheading of John the Baptist. With whom would you identify? Now, put it in the context of 6:7-13. Does this change with whom you would identify?

This week

Structure tool:

Last week we discussed the importance of *context*.
Want to look at parts without losing sight of the whole.

Questions to ask:

1. How has the author broken down his material into sections?
2. How do those sections fit together?

Goal: Find the author's purpose.

Look for explicit clues.

Depends on type of literature:

- Narrative: time, place
- Letter: stages in an argument
- Poetry: repeated phrases

Different types of structure:

- Bookends
- Hinges, turning points
- Side-by-side comparisons
- Chiasm

Examples:

Bookends -- Rom 1:5 and Rom 16:26

Hinge/turning point – Book of Mark

Chiasm – Daniel Ch. 2-7

Group Exercise:

Read John 18:12-32

Identify the main scenes.

What point do you think John is making in the way he has structured the passage?

Exercise for home:

See if you can work out the chiasm in Jonah 1

Parallels tool:

In Hebrew poetry, parallelism is a major structural feature. One can use the parallelism to help interpret the meaning of a passage.

Examples: Ps 24:1-2 ; Is 55:6

Antithetical parallelism: Second part contrasts with the first.

Examples: Prov. 10:1 ; Proverbs 29:11

John 6:54 and 6:40

Repetition tool:

The author gets a reader's attention by repeating things.

Examples:

John 6:47-59

Group Exercise:

Read Daniel 3:1-7

- What repetition do you observe in this passage?
- What is the significance of Daniel repeating these words?

Repeated ideas:

Exercise: Is 53:54-6

What words/ideas are repeated and what is their significance.

Narrator's comment tool:

Sometimes the writer/narrator interrupts a narrative and makes a comment that helps interpret a passage.

Examples: Matt 2:13-15 ; John 2:18-22

Bible timeline tool:

Like the *Who am I tool*, the *Bible timeline tool* is a tool to help us properly apply a passage once we have understood its meaning.

Questions to ask:

- Where is the passage on the Bible timeline?
- Where am I on the Bible timeline?
- How do I read this in light of the things that have happened in between?

Example:

Leviticus 4:27-31

Where does this fall in the Bible timeline?

Where are we in the timeline?

In light of this, how do we interpret this passage?

See Heb. 10:1

When do you not need to use the Bible timeline tool?

When the passage concerns the character of God!

See Mal 3:6; James 1:17, Heb 13:8