

- The Journey and *Grasping God's Word*:

Unit 1 – Learn how to observe and read carefully

Unit 2 – Contexts: Now and Then

Unit 3 – Meaning and Application

Unit 4 – Journey through the New Testament

Unit 5 – Journey through the Old Testament

# Unit 1

## How to Read the Book Basic Tools

1. The Interpretive Journey
2. How to Read the Book—Sentences
3. How to Read the Book—Paragraphs
4. How to Read the Book—Discourses

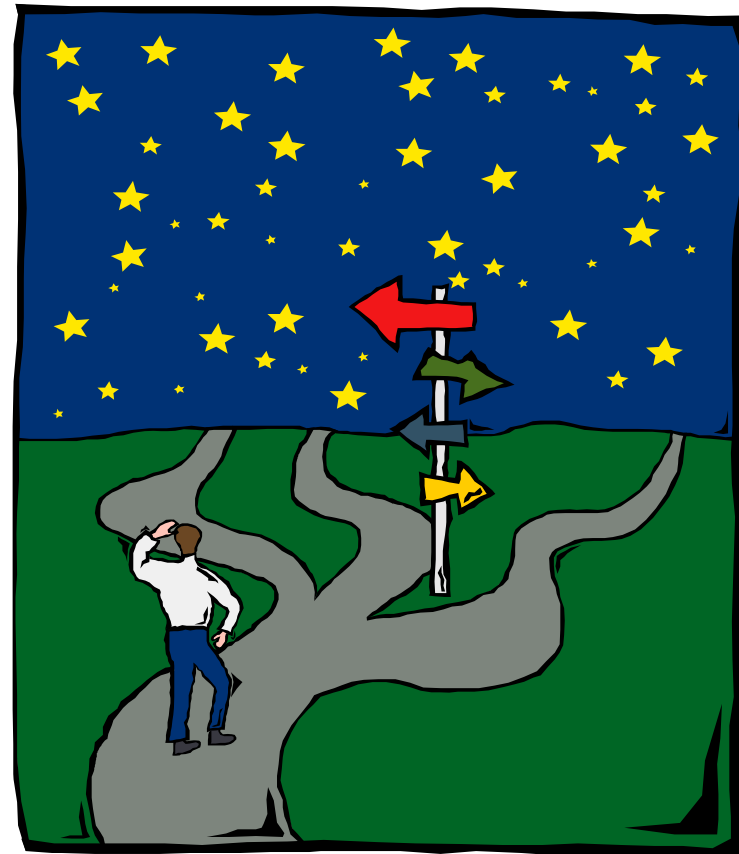
# The Interpretive Journey

- Introduction

- *Grasping God's Word* is for people who want to understand the Bible at a deeper level.
- Why do we have to *interpret* the Bible?
- The process of interpreting and applying the Bible may be compared to taking a *journey*.
- There is a *river of differences* separating us from the biblical audience—culture, language, time, situation, and covenant.

How can we cross the river?

Intuitive  
or  
“feels-right”  
approach



How can we cross the river?

Spiritualizing  
approach



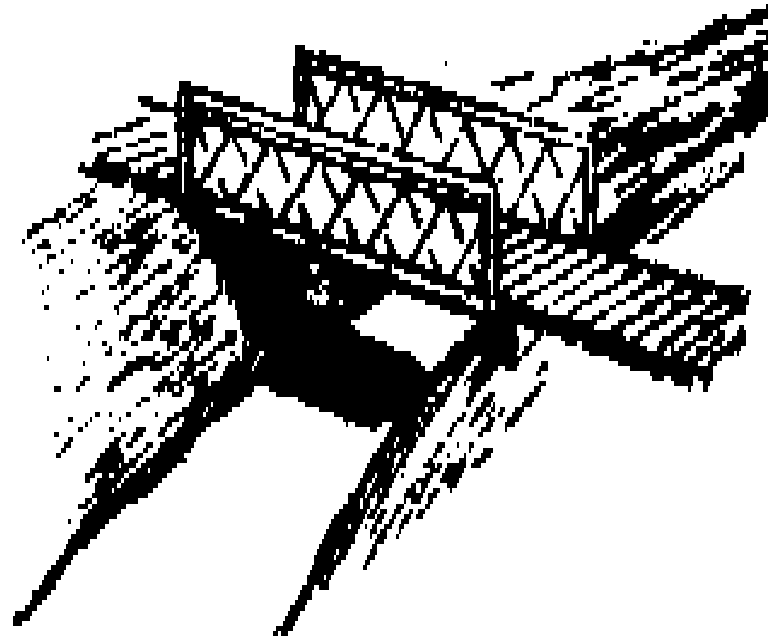
How can we cross the river?

Get discouraged  
and  
give up



How can we cross the river?

*Grasping God's  
Word*—an  
accurate,  
consistent  
approach



- Basics of the Journey

- Assumptions:

- The Bible is God's communication of himself and his will to us.
    - We do not create meaning; rather, we seek to discover the meaning that is already in the Bible.
    - Theological principles revealed in specific passages of the Bible are applicable to both the biblical audience and to Christians today.
    - We can use the *principlizing bridge* to cross the river of differences.

– Four Steps:

1 – Grasping the Text in Their Town

*What did the text mean to the biblical audience?*

2 – Measuring the Width of the River

*What are the differences between the biblical audience and us?*

3 – Crossing the Principilizing Bridge

*What is the theological principle in this text?*

4 – Grasping the Text in Our Town

*How should individual Christians today apply the theological principle in their lives?*

- Example–Joshua 1:1-9

- *Step 1 What did the text mean?*

The Lord commanded Joshua, the new leader of Israel, to draw strength and courage from God's empowering presence, to be obedient to the law of Moses, and to meditate on the law so that he would be successful in the conquest of the Promised Land.

- *Step 2 What are the differences?*

We are not leaders of the nation Israel (although some of us may be leaders in the church). We are not embarking on the conquest of the Promised Land. We are not under the old covenant of law.

– *Step 3 What is the theological principle?*

To be effective in serving God and successful in the task to which he has called us, we must draw strength and courage from his presence. We must also be obedient to God's Word, meditating on it constantly.

– *Step 4 How should we apply this principle?*

- Spend more time meditating on God's Word
- Obey God when he calls you to a new and demanding ministry, trusting in his presence to empower you.
- Focus on God's presence to bring you new courage and strength in your present ministry situation.

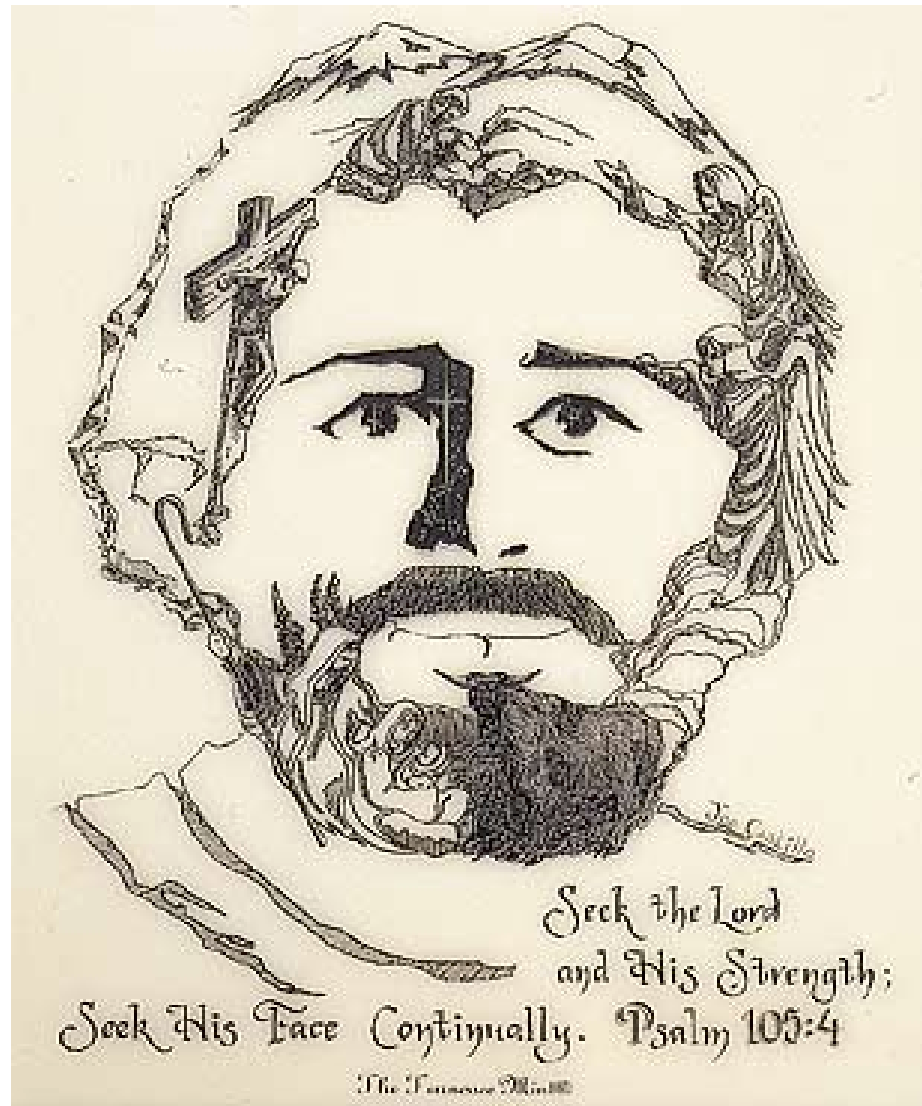
# How to Read the Book—Sentences

- Introduction

- What do you want—baby food or steak?
- Superficial reading means that you will always be tied to your previous understanding.
- Serious reading allows you to hear God as you dig deeper into his Word.

- Serious or careful reading (love letters)
  - Serious reading means looking at the big picture and looking at the details.
  - At first, refrain from *interpretation* or *application*.
  - Start with *observation* and try to see as much as possible. Look carefully at the details of the text.





What do you see?

- Things to look for in sentences:
  - Repeating words and phrases (“world”)
  - Contrasts (“gentle answer” vs. “harsh word”)
  - Comparisons (“soar on wings like eagles”)
  - Lists (fruit of Spirit)
  - Causes and effects (“wages of sin is death”)
  - Figures of speech (“The Lord is my rock”)
  - Conjunctions (“therefore” in Romans 12:1)
  - Verbs (where the action is)
  - Pronouns (“our Father in heaven”)

# How to Read the Book—Paragraphs

- Things to look for in paragraphs:
  - General and specific (“live by the Spirit” – fruit)
  - Questions and answers
  - Dialogue (conversation between Jesus and Peter)
  - Purpose statements (“God so loved that he gave”)
  - Means (“by the Spirit put to death the misdeeds of the body”)

- More things to look for in paragraphs:
  - Conditional clauses (if ... then)
  - Actions/roles of people and actions/roles of God
  - Emotional terms (“I plead with you brothers”)
  - Tone (“You foolish Galatians!”)

- Conclusion

- Observe first, apply later.
- Write down your observations.

“A pen is a mental crowbar.”

- Howard Hendricks



- The Bible is God’s love letter to you.  
Read it carefully!

# How to Read the Book—Discourses

- Introduction

- The Bible is more than a random collection of unrelated words and disconnected sentences.
- The Bible is a story with themes that run through paragraphs to form discourses.
- “Discourse” – a unit of connected text larger than a paragraph
- We need to see not only the smallest details, but also the larger patterns and themes.

- Things to look for in discourses:

- Connections between paragraphs and episodes

- Repeated words or themes
- Logical connections (e.g., cause and effect)
- Characters and their actions
- Time sequence

- Story shifts: major breaks and pivots

- Where does the story take a new turn?
- Where does the topic change?
- Does a verb change signal a break?
- Do you see a pivotal episode in a longer story?

- More things to look for in discourses:

- Interchange

- Is there a switch back and forth between two stories?
- Is the author trying to contrast or compare the characters in the two stories in some way?

- Chiasm

A I got up this morning,

B got dressed

C and drove into town.

D I worked hard all day,

C' returned home,

B' put on my PJs

A' and went to bed.

- Review

- Interpreting and applying the Bible is like a *journey*.
- A *river of differences* separates us from the biblical audience—culture, language, time, situation, and covenant.
- We begin to build a bridge across the river by discovering what the text meant to the biblical audience.
- This calls for careful *reading and observation* of sentences (Chapter 2), paragraphs (Chapter 3), and discourses (Chapter 4).

- What if we bypass observation and move straight to application?



- To hear from God in clear and exciting ways, we must look carefully at what God communicated and not put words in his mouth.