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EQUIPPING MEMBERS OF ANNVILLE BAPTIST CHURCH
IN ANNVILLE, KENTUCKY, TO FAITHFULLY PRACTICE
BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

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David Earl Wilson

Read and Approved by:

Robert L. Plummer (Faculty Supervisor)

John D. Trentham

Date _____

To Tetch,
my love, best friend,
and lifelong partner in ministry.
This is as much your project as it is mine.

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PREFACE

I am indebted to several people who have helped this project become a reality. I am ultimately grateful for the triune God, Who has revealed Himself to us in His Word and to Whom I owe my salvation and very existence. The continual love and support of my wife not only enabled me to complete this project, but also encouraged me to persevere. From an early age in my life, my parents helped lay a biblical foundation and instilled in me a respect for the Word of God. Pastor Roger Williams' confidence in me and insistence prodded me to pursue this project. Dr. Robert Plummer provided invaluable insight all along the way. Fellow students, Blake Jessie and Dave Trepanier, encouraged me from the beginning, and their comradery, alone, made this journey worthwhile. Finally, Pastor Dan Marshall's contagious passion for the Word of God inspired me to spend the rest of my life reading, studying, and teaching it.

David E. Wilson

Annville, Kentucky

May 15, 2020

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“The B-I-B-L-E. Yes, that’s the book for me.” These lyrics to a popular children’s song are recognizable to most Christians in America. Many not only know the lyrics to this song, but also agree wholeheartedly with the words. Yet, recent polls show that Christians are not putting into action their belief that the Bible is for them because they are not regularly reading it. Only “thirty-nine percent of those who attend worship services at least once a month read [the Bible] every day, while only 13 percent of those who attend services less than once month pick up a Bible daily.”¹ If this is true, then it would seem as if the only time that many Christians hear the Bible is when someone else is reading it.

Context

Annville Baptist Church in Annville, Kentucky, celebrated its 150th anniversary in September of 2016. Like many churches, the church has experienced many ups and downs over the past fifteen decades, including a plethora of different members and pastors. As one might expect, change has been constant throughout the last century and half of the church’s existence. However, what has not changed is an unwavering commitment to the Word of God in the life of the church and its members.

¹Bob Smietana, “LifeWay Research: Americans Are Fond of the Bible, Don’t Actually Read It,” LifeWay Research, last modified April 25, 2017, <http://lifewayresearch.com/2017/04/25/lifeway-research-americans-are-fond-of-the-bible-dont-actually-read-it/>.

Thankfully, the church's emphasis and commitment to the Word of God still exists. The Bible forms the foundation for all that the church does, particularly its teaching, preaching, counseling, and discipleship. The pastors and lay leaders regularly quote Scripture in conversations and provide careful exegesis and application of the Bible in sermons and Bible Studies. Pastoral counseling is provided based upon biblical truths, and major church decisions are evaluated and made based on the Word of God.

Even with such an emphasis placed upon the importance of the Word of God, there exists within the congregation a sense of inadequacy in regard to personal study of the Bible. Many members, especially those who have been in church for years, have a working knowledge of the Bible, including the gospel message and certain stories. Yet, many members do not regularly engage in their own reading and study of the Bible.

One major reason they do not engage in personal Bible study is that they do not feel equipped to do so. They have been taught content about the Bible but never taught how to faithfully study the Word of God on their own. Their understanding has been a result of listening to the teaching and preaching of God's Word by others.

A quick survey of the church demographics shows some of the complexities of this issue. Although a large portion of the church is older than fifty, there is still a considerable size group of children, youth, and young professionals. These younger individuals struggle to see the relevance of the Bible for their own lives and find the language of the Bible to be both difficult and archaic, especially given the widespread use of the King James Version in the church. There is a small sub-group of farmers and blue-collar workers who view themselves as uneducated and unable to study the Bible for themselves. One final, and larger, group to mention is the specialized professionals and educators. These individuals often view Bible study to be a specialized skill obtained by pastors and other individuals in the ministry. The many educators spend all week, or most of their lives, teaching others and, therefore, often prefer to be taught about the Bible rather than digging in for themselves.

Rationale

The faithful study of God's Word is a part of true discipleship. Every believer should know how to study God's Word and practice it in their own lives. Although biblical content is important and learning from others is both helpful and Scriptural, nothing can replace a believer's own study of God's Word. Individual believers are a part of the family of God and a part of a larger community of faith, but they are also brought into a personal relationship with the triune God. One of the ways believers commune with and meet God is through the reading and study of His Word. Rather than personally communing with God, many believers vicariously commune with God through pastors and teachers. This type of relational interaction is like being married to someone and only communicating with them through a third party.

Once believers learn how to personally study God's Word, they can then teach and disciple others to do the same. This training of others can be done in various settings, including one-on-one relationships, small groups, and in parenting relationships. Disciple-makers, however, cannot pass this skill and knowledge onto a disciple unless they are first taught and equipped to do so.

Equipping members to study the Word of God also provides both personal and corporate accountability for local churches. Personal Bible study enables believers to constantly affirm and challenge their beliefs and understanding of God and how He works in the world. This provides personal accountability not only for the individual believer but also the entire church body. Personal study of the Bible enables individual believers to discern if local pastors and teachers are teaching truth or falsehood. Without personal Bible Study, believers cannot be noble Bereans (Acts 17:11).

With an abundance of Bible Study material, both printed and digital formats, in today's Information Age, one may wonder why another project of this type was needed. Although there are countless examples of Bible Study material available today, most do not teach hermeneutics and how to study the Bible. Content is often preferred to method.

Moreover, material that is focused on a small church context in Appalachia is rare. Therefore, this project focused on producing and implementing a training seminar in hermeneutics designed specifically for rural churches in Appalachia.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to equip and train members of Annville Baptist Church to faithfully practice biblical hermeneutics.

Goals

As described above, there was a need for training in hermeneutics at Annville Baptist. The following goals provided a concrete plan to address this issue and equip the members to personally study God's Word.

1. The first goal of this project was to assess the current level of competence and confidence in biblical hermeneutics among members of Annville Baptist Church.
2. The second goal of this project was to develop a six-session teaching series on hermeneutics that focused on basic Bible study skills.
3. The third goal of this project was to implement the six-session training and equip members to proficiently and confidently study God's Word.

The following section will lay out the research methodology that was used in order to measure the success of these goals.

Research Methodology

Each goal was measured and compared to a pre-determined benchmark in order to determine the goal's success. The first goal of this project was to assess the current level of competence and confidence in biblical hermeneutics among members of Annville Baptist Church. This goal was measured by administering the Hermeneutics Competency Survey² to members in order to assess their current level of competency and

²See appendix 1.

confidence in hermeneutics.³ This goal was considered successful if twenty members completed the questionnaire and the results were analyzed.

The second goal of this project was to develop a six-session training on hermeneutics that focused on basic Bible study skills. This goal was measured by the completion and approval of the training plan and teaching series by a committee of three church leaders. This committee used the Teaching Series Rubric⁴ to evaluate and score each of the six sessions. This goal was considered successful when each committee member gave each individual training session an overall average score of “sufficient” or better. If a session received an overall average rating of less than “sufficient,” then that particular session would have been revised and reevaluated until it met the minimum “sufficient” level.

The third goal of this project was to implement the training seminar and equip members to proficiently read and study God's Word. This goal was measured by the administration of the initial competency survey⁵ to members who completed at least five out of six training sessions. This goal would have been considered successful if a t-test statistically showed a positive difference between pre-survey and post-survey results.

Definitions, Limitations, and Delimitations

The following definitions of key terms were used in this ministry project:

³All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

⁴See appendix 2.

⁵See appendix 1.

Hermeneutics. This project used the simple definition provided by Bauer and Traina. They describe hermeneutics as “the way one thinks about and executes the practice of studying the Bible.”⁶

Member. The word “member” can have a different meaning depending on context. For this project, the term included both regular attenders of Annville Baptist Church and official members who are on the membership roster.

The limitations of this project pertained to the members. First, there was a possibility that participants in the surveys would not answer honestly, especially since many of the questions are of a personal nature. Members, therefore, anonymously completed the surveys using a four-digit personal identification code based on the last four digits of their social security number. Second, given the various demands of life, there was the possibility that members would miss one or more training sessions.

Participants still need further teaching and practice in order to master the skills learned in the training. The participants of this project were also limited to both the regular attenders and official members of Annville Baptist Church. No maximum age limit was used, but participants had to be at least 18 years old. The six-session training provided a solid foundation and some basic Bible study skills, but it was not exhaustive.

Conclusion

God has graciously given the Word of God to all followers of Jesus Christ. This project sought to help believers at Annville Baptist become unashamed, approved

⁶David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina, *Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 13.

workers who can rightly handle the Word of truth (2 Tim 2:15). Through the training sessions, members were equipped to study God's Word on their own. The next chapter will provide the biblical foundations for the study and interpretation of the Bible.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SUPPORT

Introduction

A faithful biblical hermeneutic is essential because the regular, personal study of the Bible is not only the responsibility of every believer, but also beneficial for all areas of the Christian life. Although there are several passages of Scripture from the Old Testament that comment on the Bible itself and the study thereof, this chapter will focus on five major New Testament passages that show the necessity and benefits of the personal study of God's Word.

Combatting Erroneous Teaching and Interpretations (2 Pet 3:15-18)

One of the great benefits of hermeneutical training is that it equips the believer to accurately interpret God's Word in their own life, which should lead to faithful obedience and practice. Hermeneutical training also helps the believer to be able to refute and combat erroneous Bible interpretation that is espoused and taught by others.

Faithful Interpretation through Careful Study (3:15-16)

The Bible is a large book filled with numerous verses and passages of Scripture. Many of these can be difficult to interpret, especially since today's believers

are far removed from the original authors and recipients of the different books of the Bible. This distance is caused by time—thousands of years—but also by geographical, cultural, and linguistic differences. Further, since the Bible focuses on the revelation of an eternal, invisible God and contains deep spiritual truths about him and His creation, it is expected that the contents itself will be challenging for finite beings to fully comprehend. The gospel of Jesus Christ is easy enough for a child to understand, but the rest of the Bible is not as easily understood by a modern believer. Even one of Jesus' own disciples admits that some of the apostle Paul's writings are hard to understand.

The apostle Peter, writing at the end of his second canonical letter, admits that the apostle Paul wrote in his epistles things that are “hard to be understood” (2 Pet 3:16). This phrase is a translation of the Greek word *δυσνόητα* which is rare word used to describe written material that is difficult to interpret.¹ Peter's admission about the difficulty of Paul's writings is extraordinary considering he was an apostle, walked with Jesus, was a part of Jesus' inner circle, and was a key leader in the early church. Compared to the modern reader, he was a contemporary of Paul and also closer to him geographically, culturally, and even linguistically. Peter, admittedly, does not say they are difficult for him specifically, but he does acknowledge their difficulty nonetheless.

In using the phrase “all his epistles,” there is some uncertainty as to whether Peter was referring to an officially established Pauline corpus or simply the letters in which he was personally acquainted.² What is important for our discussion is the simple

¹Richard Bauckham, *2 Peter and Jude*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 50 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 311.

truth that parts of the Pauline writings that Peter was familiar with were considered difficult to interpret. This means that a believer who is trying to faithfully read and study all of God's Word is faced with some parts of the New Testament that is labeled as "hard to be understood" by Peter, an apostle and biblical writer. Hermeneutical training certainly does not eliminate all of the multi-faceted interpretive challenges, but it helps in bridging the gap between believers and the Bible's original recipients. This type of training is beneficial to every believer in the local church as they personally read and accurately interpret not only the difficult Pauline corpus, but also the rest of God's Word, whether difficult or not.

Discerning Error through Careful Study (3:16-18)

Hermeneutical training helps believers personally interpret God's Word for themselves but also helps them to discern error from erroneous teaching or false teachers. Peter's admission about the difficulty of the Pauline epistles is not just an isolated comment. The point he is making in its greater context is that individuals who are "unlearned and unstable" distort Paul's difficult writings, leading to their own destruction (1 Pet 3:16). These "unlearned and unstable" individuals are the ones who are "liable to misinterpret them" and also "other Scriptures."³ The word *ἀμαθεῖς* "means not simply 'ignorant' but 'uninstructed,'" meaning the individuals Peter is referencing "have not

²Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary, vol. 37 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 396.

³Bauckham, *2 Peter and Jude*, 331.

received sufficient instruction in the faith to be able to interpret difficult passages in the Scriptures correctly.”⁴ In a similar manner, *ἀσθήριχτοι* is used of someone who is easily misled and, contextually, refers to those individuals who are “easily misled because their understanding and experience of Christianity are relatively superficial.”⁵

Peter describes a person who is both uninstructed and easily misled, with both adjectives seemingly resulting from a lack of training and instruction in the Word of God. It is easy to see how someone would be unstable and easily misled if they do not have a solid biblical and theological foundation. Hermeneutical training helps provide believers with the needed tools and skills to be able to faithfully study God’s Word in order prevent them from becoming uninstructed and easily misled by false teachers and doctrine.

The question must be asked if Peter is using “unlearned and unstable” to describe false teachers or those who are misled by false teachers. There is precedent in this same book for the word to describe misled individuals. The word *ἀσθήριχτοι* is used in 2:14 to describe unstable and weak individuals who have been misled, negatively influenced, and enticed by false teachers.⁶ Consequently, it is not very likely that the “misuse of Scriptures would be attributed to the false teachers’ followers and not to the false teachers themselves.”⁷ The assumption can be made that Peter is referring to both.⁸

⁴Bauckham, *2 Peter and Jude*, 331.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. “*ἀσθήριχτος*.”

⁷Bauckham, *2 Peter and Jude*, 331.

Both groups have been misled by a distortion of and misinterpretation of God's Word. Proper hermeneutical training could have played a significant role in preventing the first group from being led astray and the second group from developing into false teachers.

Given the challenges for today's believers in reading and interpreting God's Word, as described above, the necessity of hermeneutical training is all the more important, as it helps equip believers in such a way as to help prevent them from becoming unlearned and unstable. The unlearned and unstable are the ones who have the potential to develop into false teachers and the ones who are easily led astray by false teaching.

Confronting False Teaching and Living (2 Tim 2:14-19)

An important aspect of the Christian life is dealing with the schemes and deception of the enemy, who is the "father of lies." Believers are constantly bombarded with attacks of lies and falsehood, which often come in the form of false teaching and unholy living. Hermeneutical training can help the believer to discern between false teaching and that which is true and acceptable by God. The result being right living flowing from right belief.

Combatting False Teaching and Unholy Living (2 Tim 2:14-19)

Although the issue of false teaching is not nearly as prominent in Paul's second letter to Timothy as it is in his first, it is still addressed at certain points, particularly in

⁸Bauckham, *2 Peter and Jude*, 331.

2:14-4:4:8.⁹ Contained within this broader section of the letter is 2:14-19, which focuses primarily on the resistance of false teachers. Paul warns Timothy about the false teachers (v. 14), encourages him to lead the resistance against them (vv. 15-18), and closes the section with a word of encouragement (v. 19).¹⁰

In this pericope, Paul exhorts his young disciple to address false teaching and teachers in a couple of different ways. First, he commands Timothy to remind the church about what Paul had taught and preached (v. 14a), namely the gospel briefly laid out in the previous verses (vv. 11-13). Second, Paul exhorts Timothy to warn against “quarreling about words” (v. 14b) because it is worthless and only leads to ruin (v. 14c). Paul knew that disputing about words does not seek the victory of truth but rather the victory of the speaker.¹¹ Paul wanted Timothy and the believers to be focused on the victory of truth, which would ultimately be victory over the enemy.

Paul shows the path to victory of truth in verse 15. Opposed to his opponents’ myths and misconduct, Timothy’s genuineness would be shown by both his teaching and conduct, which would also be a deterrent to his opponents.¹² Paul knew that the “best medicine against the disease of ‘disputes about words’ is Timothy’s good conduct

⁹Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, Jr., *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, The New American Commentary, vol. 34 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 213.

¹⁰Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 214.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 46 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 524.

itself.”¹³ This good conduct included three features: to show himself worthy of God’s approval, to be a workman without shame, and to correctly handle the word of truth (v. 15).¹⁴ For our study, the last phrase is key in understanding the importance of hermeneutical training in guarding against false teaching and unholy living. If a person correctly handles the word of truth, then they will be able to recognize and reject false teaching and embrace truth, leading to holy living.

There has been some debate as to the meaning of the phrase “rightly handling the word of truth.” The difficulty does not rest with the phrase “word of truth,” which most scholars correctly believe is a referent to the Word of God. Rather, the difficulty is in understanding the phrase “rightly handling,” which is the singular word *ὀρθοτομοῦντα* in the original. It is a compound verb meaning to “cut straight” and is used “in nonbiblical Greek in connection with *ὁδός*, ‘way,’ meaning ‘to cut a straight path.’”¹⁵ A thorough examination of this word and its usages, reveals two possible understandings for our current text at hand. One possible understanding reveals the phrase to mean a “right interpretation of the gospel” and the other a “right behavior in line with the gospel.”¹⁶ Both of these understandings fit the context of the passage and Paul’s exhortation for Timothy to be careful about both his teaching and conduct. The right handling of God’s Word not only helps the believer to be able to accurately interpret and

¹³R. W. Ward, *Commentary on 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus* (Waco, TX: Word, 1974), 171.

¹⁴Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 215.

¹⁵Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 524.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 525.

teach the Word of God, but also helps them to conduct their lives in an unashamed way. Right living, action, and practice naturally flows out of right belief.

In these verses, Paul highlights the importance of rightly handling the Word of God in order to fend off attacks of false teaching and the allure of unholy living. What he does not do is explain how a person is to “rightly handle the word of truth.” How does one move from not rightly handling the word of truth to rightly handling it? Verse 16 advises the shunning of profane and vain babblings but gives no instruction on how to become a person who faithfully handles God’s Word. His focus is more on the what and the why, rather than the how. This is where hermeneutical training comes into play, which would train believers to accurately and rightly handle God’s Word. Timothy had spent a lot of time with Paul, who had undoubtedly taught and modeled for him how to rightly handle the Word of God. A modern reader of this passage does not have the same opportunity as Timothy of having Paul personally model this important skill. Hermeneutical training would provide such an experience for believers, with the intended outcome that they would increase their ability to rightly handle the word of truth. In so doing, they would be better equipped to recognize and reject false teaching and conduct themselves in a manner worthy of God’s approval.

Equipping for Good Works (2 Tim 3:16-17)

In this passage, Paul explains the Word of God is both inspired by God and profitable for equipping the believer to produce good works and become mature. This section will first unpack the importance of the Word of God in the life of the believer and then explain how hermeneutical training can help the believer maximize the profitability of the Word of God in his or her life.

Maximizing the Profitability of God's Word (2 Tim 3:16-17)

The main subject of these two verses is “scripture,” or *γραφή* in the original. Not only is the word in the nominative form, but it also is the main idea in which the rest of the two verses focus. The word *γραφή* is usually a reference to the Old Testament, just as it is in 3:15.¹⁷ However, with the writing of the New Testament and the closing of the Canon, believers now have Genesis through Revelation as Scripture.¹⁸ “Scripture” is then surrounded by three adjectives—*πάσα*, *θεόπνευστος*, and *ώφέλιμος*. The adjective *πάσα* can be translated as “every” passage of Scripture or “all” of Scripture in its entirety. This nuance is irrelevant because if every passage of Scripture is in view, then eventually an assertion can be made that all its content is in view.¹⁹ Similarly, if all of Scripture is the intended meaning, then this would imply every passage. Paul, therefore, has the entirety of the Scriptures in view when he makes his proceeding assertions.

The other two adjectives give further insight into “all Scripture.” The first one, *θεόπνευστος*, is translated in the KJV as “given by inspiration of God.” A more literal understanding is that it is God-breathed, which is reflected in the NIV translation. It is a predicate adjective further describing “all Scripture,” which is why the “is” is inserted in most translations.²⁰ In the same way, *ώφέλιμος* is a predicate adjective and the two are

¹⁷Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 235.

¹⁸John MacArthur, *2 Timothy*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 143.

¹⁹Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 235.

²⁰Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 569.

separated by the regular copulative *καί*.²¹ This particular adjective is often used to describe someone or something as being “useful,” “beneficial,” “advantageous,” or, as the KJV translates it, “profitable.”²² This means that “all Scripture” is both inspired and useful, “in the sense of yielding a practical benefit.”²³ Without explaining the actual process, Paul affirms the inspiration of Scripture and affirms its usefulness based on that inspiration.²⁴

The inspiration of Scripture is not further explained, but the usefulness of Scripture is further spelled out in a series of *πρός* phrases that follow *ώφέλιμος*.²⁵ First, Scripture is useful for *διδασκαλίαν*, meaning “teaching” or “instruction.” This “is to say, scripture instructs one by means of its content.”²⁶ The second way in which Scripture is useful is for *έλεγμόν*, which means to refute error.²⁷ Third, Scripture is useful for *έπανόρθωσιν*, which means to correct or restore,²⁸ “most likely with reference to

²¹Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 569.

²²Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. “ώφέλιμος.”

²³George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 449.

²⁴Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 236.

²⁵Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 449.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 449.

²⁸Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. “έπανόρθωσις.”

conduct.”²⁹ Finally, Scripture is useful for *παιδεῖαν τὴν ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ*, which the KJV translates as “instruction in righteousness.” The word *παιδεία* “had the original meaning of bringing up and training a child (*παιδίον*), but it came to be used of any sort of training.”³⁰ In this passage, it “describes a system of discipline in Scripture that leads to a holy life-style.”³¹ It is possible that “four purposes of scripture listed here are reflected in the four duties in 4:2 (‘preach the word...reprove, rebuke, exhort’).”³²

Regarding the structure of these four purposes, “Stott suggests that these four *πρὸς* phrases are arranged in two pairs each with a negative word and a positive word, the first pair dealing with belief and the second with action (‘creed and conduct’...),” and he “commends the NEB for the clarity of its paraphrase of each pair (‘for teaching the truth and refuting error,’ ‘for reformation of manner and discipline in right living’).”³³ In this singular verse, the apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, highlights the significance of Scripture in affecting both what we believe and how we act. Stott sums this up with the following: “Do we hope, either in our own lives or in our teaching ministry, to overcome error and grow in truth, to overcome evil and grow in holiness? Then it is to Scripture that we must...turn, for Scripture is ‘profitable’ for these things.”³⁴

²⁹Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 449.

³⁰MacArthur, *2 Timothy*, 161.

³¹Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 237.

³²Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 449.

³³Ibid.

Verse 17 begins with the *ἵνα* clause paired with the subjunctive *ῥη*. Although the *ἵνα* clause could be pointing to the result of Scripture in a believer's life, it more than likely points to the purpose of Scripture and its profitability.³⁵ The purpose of Scripture, then, is for the "man of God" to be *ἄρτιος*, which is a word that means to be "complete, capable, proficient," or "well fitted for some function."³⁶ The KJV translation's word choice of "perfect" can possibly be misleading based on this lexical understanding of the word. Scripture is given for the purpose of enabling "any 'person of God' to meet the demands that God places on that person and in particular to equip Timothy the Christian leader for the particular demands made on him (cf. 4:2)."³⁷ The concluding participial phrase, *πρὸς πᾶν ἔργον ἀγαθὸν ἐξηρτισμένους*, "strengthens the *ἵνα* clause by affirming that 'the person of God' has been 'equipped' by scripture 'for every kind of good work.'"³⁸ The equipping brought about by Scripture is not inadequate or partial, but rather fully capable of helping to make believers ready for whatever God asks of them.

Given both the inspiration and the profitability of Scripture, believers should read, study, memorize, and apply the Word of God to their lives. The importance of God's Word on the life of the believer cannot be overstated, as shown above. Although

³⁴Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 450.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁵Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. "ἄρτιος

³⁶Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 450.

³⁷Ibid.

the benefits of God's Word do not absolutely require a believer to undergo hermeneutical training, the usefulness of God's Word can certainly be magnified by appropriate hermeneutical training. In order for the Word of God to truly be profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness, it must be accurately interpreted. Otherwise, a believer will not be instructed according to truth and will not be corrected and reproofed according to truth and holiness. Without a proper interpretation of God's Word, a believer will not be as effectively trained in righteousness that leads to maturity and good works. Much of the profitability of the Word of God will be lost if it is not properly and accurately interpreted, which is why hermeneutical training is needed to ensure the maxim profitability and usefulness of the Word of God.

Diagnosing the State of the Heart (Heb 4:11-13)

Jesus makes it clear on the Sermon on the Mount (Mat 5-7) that God desires believers to be holy not only in their actions but also their thoughts. The writer of Hebrews explains how the Word of God works to diagnose a believer's heart and thoughts, so that any sinfulness can be dealt with appropriately. Hermeneutical training can help ensure the believer reads and interprets God's Word accurately, so that it can most effectively diagnose the state of the heart.

Exposing Sinful Thoughts and Intentions (Heb 4:11-13)

The writer of Hebrews spends the first ten verses of chapter four describing the true rest of God and admonishing his readers to not miss that rest. Verse 11 continues this theme. The author "urges his readers once more to make it their earnest endeavor to attain the eternal home of the people of God, and not miss it through disobedience like

that of the Israelites in the wilderness.”³⁹ God must be taken seriously and His Word “cannot be ignored with impunity, but must be received in faith and obeyed in daily life.”⁴⁰ This realization leads into a discussion of the Word of God in verse 12.

Verse 12 focuses on *ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ* as its main subject. Before the Reformation, this phrase was understood to be a reference to Jesus the Son, but since the Reformation, “the phrase has usually been interpreted as the written Word of God,” including both Old and New Testaments.⁴¹ The description of the Word as “quick and powerful” (KJV) means that it “possesses the power to effect its own utterance” and “possesses an energizing power that renders it always effective in accomplishing its purpose.”⁴² In essence, it “speeds to fulfill the purpose for which it has been uttered.”⁴³

The Word is then described as a “twoedged sword.” The piercing and dividing of soul from spirit and joints from marrow “are to be understood as a ‘rhetorical accumulation of terms to express the whole mental nature of man on all its sides.’”⁴⁴ The Word of God is able to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart. This is a Greek

³⁹F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 111.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹David L. Allen, *Hebrews*, The New American Commentary, vol. 35 (Nashville: B & H, 2010), 284.

⁴²Ibid., 288.

⁴³Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 112.

⁴⁴Ibid., 113.

word that means to discern or judge.⁴⁵ The Word of God “probes the inmost recess of our spiritual being and brings the subconscious motives to light.”⁴⁶

Verse 13 is a continuation of the thought previously began in verse 12, as it further explains the Word of God. Although most translators break the two verses up into separate sentences, it is a single sentence in the original.⁴⁷ The writer makes the claim that “all things are naked and opened” unto God, who is the one in whom we must give account. The phrase “naked and opened” may give offer the picture of “a wrestler using a choke hold on his opponent’s neck” and “connotes the picture of total exposure and utter defenselessness.”⁴⁸ Whereas the “exodus generation fell by the sword when they tried to enter Canaan in disobedience to God’s word,” the readers of Hebrews were “threatened by the sword of the word of God, exposing their thoughts and rendering them defenseless before God.”⁴⁹

The writer of Hebrews makes the amazing claim that the Word of God reveals the state of the believer’s heart, which even includes both intentions and thoughts. The state of the heart is revealed to God, in whom we must give account, but also to ourselves. As the believer reads and studies God’s written Word, it reveals unrighteous

⁴⁵Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. “κριτικός.”

⁴⁶Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 113.

⁴⁷Paul Ellingworth and Eugene A. Nida, *A Translator’s Handbook on the Letter to the Hebrews*, UBS Translator’s Handbooks (New York: United Bible Societies, 1983), paragraph 50290.

⁴⁸Allen, *Hebrews*, 289.

⁴⁹Ibid.

thoughts and intents. This is important because many times the believer is unconscious or unaware of his or her own sinful thoughts and intentions of the heart. “We may conceal our inner being from our neighbors, and we can even deceive ourselves; but nothing escapes the scrutiny of God; before him everything lies exposed and powerless.”⁵⁰

Hermeneutical training can help the believer ensure that his reading and interpreting of God’s Word is accurate. This will ensure that the Word of God can most effectively reveal and diagnose the believer’s heart. A false reading of God’s Word may lead to a believer wrongly diagnosing their thoughts, either considering an evil thought as holy or a holy thought as evil. The enemy so often operates in doubts and half-truths that must be dealt with in one’s mind and heart. Hermeneutical training can help a believer to better read and interpret the Word of God, so that the truths discovered therein can be compared and contrasted with the thoughts in his or her mind and heart.

Discipling Believers (Matt 28:18-20)

The Great Commission in Matthew 28:16-20 focuses on the disciple-making aspect of the Christian life, including what it means to make disciples. One of the aspects of disciple-making is teaching obedience to Jesus’ commands. This teaching would be impossible without the careful and accurate study of God’s Word, which contains the life, teaching, and commands of Jesus.

⁵⁰Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 114.

Faithful Teaching through Careful Study (28:18-20)

The Great Commission encompasses the last words of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel, and these final words reveal how Jesus planned to continue His ministry after He ascended. He spent around three years pouring his life into twelve disciples who would then carry on His ministry and be witnesses to His death and resurrection. These verses emphasize this with Matthew's use of the word *μαθητεύσατε*, which is not only an imperative but also the controlling verb in the passage. It is the verbal form of *μαθητεύω* and most modern Bibles translate it as "make disciples." This imperative is then followed by two uncoordinated participles—*βαπτίζοντες* and *διδάσκοντες*—that spell out the disciple-making process.⁵¹ Although France and others disagree, I also view the participle *πορευθέντες* that precedes the imperative as a part of the disciple-making process. Interestingly, the KJV translates both *μαθητεύσατε* and *διδάσκοντες* as "teach." This is unfortunate because it has the potential to cause confusion in Appalachian churches like mine who regularly, or exclusively, use the KJV. This further supports the need to equip believers to faithfully practice hermeneutics.

If making disciples is at the heart of the Great Commission, then great emphasis must be placed on teaching obedience to Jesus' commands, which is one of the three aspects of disciple-making. Although *μαθητεύσατε* is the only imperative found within the Great Commission, the two other participles, *βαπτίζοντες* and *διδάσκοντες*,

⁵¹R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 1115.

function as imperatives.⁵² Teaching obedience to Jesus' commands, then, must be understood as a command from Jesus. If it is in fact a command, then it is not an option. In verse 18, Jesus declares that "all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." This "power" is more than just mighty strength; it is universal sovereignty and is the basis for Jesus' authority and the giving of the Great Commission.⁵³ Believers are those who have submitted to the lordship of Jesus, who is Lord of lords, King of kings, and sovereign over all. Obedience to Jesus is, thus, not an option. This includes not only the Great Commission, but also all that it entails.

Being a couple of millennia removed from the historical life of Jesus, it would be impossible to know exactly what Jesus taught and commanded without some sort of oral or written record. The Word of God makes this possible by providing a written record of Jesus' life. Through the Word of God, the believer can read and learn all that Jesus taught and commanded in order to apply it to his or her own life. Because true discipleship is about multiplication, they can also know how to then teach others what Jesus commanded. Believers are not commanded to teach their own ideas but rather what Jesus has commanded.⁵⁴

As a part of the Great Commission, Jesus commands his disciples to teach, which is exactly what He Himself did.⁵⁵ The "commandments" that He taught are

⁵²Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 33b (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 888.

⁵³France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1113.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 1118.

closely connected and associated with the commandments that were given by God through Moses.⁵⁶ However, Jesus offers a new interpretation of the Mosaic Law⁵⁷ and ultimately fulfills it. This new interpretation and fulfillment of the Law by Jesus, as well as Jesus' institution of the New Covenant, creates misunderstandings among many believers. Many believers are left wondering which commandments in the Word of God should be obeyed. All of them? Only the ones commanded by Jesus? The equipping of believers to practice faithful hermeneutics can help them to determine which of Jesus' commands they should teach and obey.

A brief note should be made distinguishing the different types of teaching described in God's Word. The Bible describes the act of teaching, the gift of teaching, and the role of teacher in the church. Pertaining to spiritual gifts, teaching is listed as one gift of teaching that is given to some believers through the power of the Spirit but not given to every single believer.⁵⁸ Similarly, God has given the church certain individuals to help equip believers for the work of ministry (Eph 4:11-12). One of these roles is that of teacher. There is some obvious overlap between the three, but some clear differences. Not every person has the spiritual gift of teaching and not every person is called to the

⁵⁵Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 888.

⁵⁶France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1118.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 1119.

⁵⁸John MacArthur, *Matthew 24–28, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1989), 346.

role of teacher. However, every believer must be “committed to promoting the ministry of teaching God’s Word both to make and to edify disciples of Christ.”⁵⁹

Zooming out to a macro level, it’s interesting to note that the Great Commission itself is found within the Word of God. This means that equipping members to faithfully practice hermeneutics will not only help them to fulfill the teaching aspect of the Great Commission, but also help them to better study and understand it. On one hand, the Great Commission is simple and easy to understand. However, because it is the inspired Word of God and living and active, it is filled with depth and richness that a believer can continue to mine treasure from for years, especially as hermeneutical skills develop.

The more proficient a believer becomes in reading, studying, and interpreting God’s Word the better they will be equipped to both understand and live out the Great Commission. Because of the importance of the Word of God in the teaching aspect of the Great Commission, one could even make a strong argument that without practicing faithful hermeneutics a believer cannot fully carry out the Great Commission. Hermeneutical training would, therefore, help believers to better carry out the teaching aspect of the Great Commission. It would help believers to better interpret and understand the life, words, and salvific work of Jesus. Then, they could not only better live out Jesus’ commands in their own life but also help teach others how to do the same. The hermeneutical training that they personally receive could then be used to train other disciples how to interpret God’s Word and apply it to their lives.

⁵⁹MacArthur, *Matthew 24–28*, 346.

Conclusion

The main focus of this chapter has been to show the importance of God's Word, from that very Word, in the life of the believer and, then, to show the significance of hermeneutical training in helping the believer to maximize the effect and benefits of the Word in his or her life. Just from the five selected passages, this chapter has shown the role of the Word of God in helping the believer do the following: guard against erroneous teaching, become mature, produce good works, fight deceptions of the enemy, discern and diagnose the heart, fulfill the teaching aspect of the Great Commission, and much more. Hermeneutical training alone cannot produce and accomplish all of these things, but it can assist believers in maximizing and safeguarding the benefits of God's Word in their lives.

There are numerous other passages that could have been covered in this chapter, but for the sake of brevity, only these five passages were chosen. The reality is that to choose certain passages is to not choose countless others. As I mentioned early in the chapter, my focus was on five New Testament passages, but that does not mean that the Old Testament is void of any passages that discuss the importance and benefit of the Word of God. The book of Psalms, alone, has numerous passages that reference and describe the Word of God.

CHAPTER 3
THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL ISSUES

Introduction

In this chapter, I will argue that faithful hermeneutical training should equip individuals to systematically determine the intended authorial meaning of a passage of Scripture, to correlate the meaning with the rest of Scripture, and to apply the correlated meaning to their lives.

**Hermeneutical Training to Determine
Intended Authorial Meaning**

There are different theories and methods of hermeneutics when it comes to the Word of God. The following section will argue that faithful hermeneutical training should teach and equip believers to try to determine the intended authorial meaning of a passage.

Divine and Human Authors

For this project, I assumed the basic presupposition that even though the Bible has several human authors it has God as its primary author. The Bible makes numerous internal claims of divine authorship. Jesus and the other New Testament writers “viewed the Bible as a document written by men, to be sure, but at the same time as a document

whose source was God Himself.”¹ In Mark 12:36, Jesus quotes Psalm 110:1 and introduces it by saying “the Holy Spirit, declared.”² When the writer of Hebrews uses quotations from the Old Testament, he often introduces them with phrases such as “the Holy Spirit says.”³ In 2 Corinthians 6:16, the apostle Paul introduces a quotation from the Old Testament by using the phrase “as God says.”⁴ He also makes the claim that “all Scripture is breathed out by God” (2 Tim 3:16). This is a belief the New Testament writers clearly believed, given that they “quoted from every section of the Old Testament and from almost every book” in it.⁵ Because the Bible is authored by God, then it has “unmitigated and direct authority,”⁶ and it is, therefore, wholly trustworthy and without error.⁷

Although God is the primary author, the Bible was also written by a wide variety of human authors. Around 40 authors wrote in three languages, from three continents, and over a period roughly 2,000 years.⁸ Tim Chaffey highlights the diversity of this group of human authors:

¹Robertson McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying the Bible* (Chicago: Moody, 2009), 22.

²Dan McCartney and Charles Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand: A Guide to Interpreting and Applying the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 40.

³Ibid. See also Heb 3:7, 5:5.

⁴Ibid.

⁵McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying the Bible*, 23.

⁶McCartney and Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand*, 40.

⁷McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying the Bible*, 22-23.

Shepherds, kings, scholars, fishermen, prophets, a military general, a cupbearer, and a priest all penned portions of Scripture. They had different immediate purposes for writing, whether recording history, giving spiritual and moral instruction, or pronouncing judgment. They composed their works from palaces, prisons, the wilderness, and places of exile while writing history, laws, poetry, prophecy, and proverbs. In the process they laid bare their personal emotions, expressing anger, frustration, joy, and love.⁹

Yet, even with multiple human authors, the Bible still possesses a unity and coherence because God is the original and ultimate author whose sovereignty “produces and guides the human authors and their situations, and even directly influences and teaches them.”¹⁰ The end result is that “God has worked through human authors to convey His meaning through the conventions of language.”¹¹

Intended Authorial Meaning

If God worked through human authors to convey His meaning using language, then to determine the intended authorial meaning of a text is to determine God’s intended meaning. Hermeneutical training must focus on helping believers to determine the human author’s intended meaning. E. D. Hirsch, Jr., defines meaning as “that which is represented by the text” and “what the author meant by his use of a particular sign sequence.”¹² These signs “are simply the different conventions of written language—

⁸Tim Chaffey, “Unity of the Bible: Seven Compelling Evidences,” April 1, 2011, <https://answersingenesis.org/the-word-of-god/3-unity-of-the-bible/>.

⁹Tim Chaffey, “Unity of the Bible: Seven Compelling Evidences,” April 1, 2011, <https://answersingenesis.org/the-word-of-god/3-unity-of-the-bible/>.

¹⁰McCartney and Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand*, 47.

¹¹J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God’s Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 198.

grammar, syntax, word meanings, and so on.”¹³ Therefore, meaning in biblical hermeneutics is not determined by the reader but rather “what the author intended to communicate when he wrote the text.”¹⁴

Robertson McQuilkin argues that “since the Bible was written by human beings, it must be treated as any other human communication in determining the meaning intended by the writer.”¹⁵ He argues that the ability to communicate is a part of what it means to be made in the image of God and that communication is all about enabling another person, ideally one in whom there is a relationship, to understand what one is thinking.¹⁶ Communication, therefore, requires both a sender and a receiver. In order for communication to be successful,

the sender of information must accurately put into words his own thoughts, and the receiver must accurately understand those words. In the case of Scripture, God is the sender through human transmitters. We are the receivers, and our task is to make sure of the human author’s intended meaning. That is what interpretation is all about.¹⁷

The hermeneutical task of making “sure of the human author’s intended meaning” is not always an easy one, but it is the task, nonetheless, and must be the goal of any type of hermeneutical training.

¹²E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), 8, cited in Duvall and Hays, *Grasping God’s Word*, 195.

¹³Duvall and Hays, *Grasping God’s Word*, 195.

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying the Bible*, 93.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 95.

¹⁷*Ibid.*

The hermeneutical goal of determining the intended meaning of a particular passage of Scripture is not without its critics. In his “The Hermeneutical Spiral,” Grant Osborne summarizes and traces the two main trajectories that hermeneutics is moving, both of which are critical of the intended meaning method.¹⁸ The first group¹⁹ focuses more on reader-oriented hermeneutics and basically argues that “the theory that it is possible to discover the author’s intended meaning in a text is a self-deluding myth.”²⁰ Rather than trying to develop systems to discover the meaning of texts, individuals should instead view all works as “aesthetic productions that are open to one extent or another to the reader’s ‘freeplay’ on the playground of the text,” inevitably leading to polyvalence.²¹ The second group²² is moving in the opposite direction of the first group and more toward the centrality of the text. The focus of this group is to “bring the author-text back into the hermeneutical process” and to “modify the purely diachronic methods of historical criticism.”²³

Walter Kaiser acknowledges the challenges of determining the human author’s intended meaning, especially since the modern “interpreter is removed from the original

¹⁸Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1991), 366-396.

¹⁹This group includes Gadamer, Structuralism, Poststructuralism, and Reader-Response Deconstruction.

²⁰Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 395.

²¹Ibid., 395-96.

²²This group includes Hirsch-Juhl, Wittgenstein, Canon, and Ricoeur.

²³Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 396.

author by many years, governments, societies, and even religious conditions.²⁴ He argues, however, that the principles of interpretation do not have to be learned and are “as natural and universal as speech itself.”²⁵ For instance, he states that “the person spoken to is always the interpreter; the speaker is always the author.”²⁶ While this does not mean that every person will be automatically and completely successful in hermeneutics, it does mean that every person innately possesses the general rules and principles of interpretation. Faithful hermeneutical training has the potential to provide the necessary study and skills to help believers use those innate interpretive principles to become a successful biblical interpreter.

One-Meaning Principle

Closely connected to intended authorial intent is the one-meaning principle. This principle is a “general guideline teaching that any given portion of Scripture in any give context can have only one correct interpretation.” The goal of the one-meaning principle is to determine the singular meaning of the passage as communicated by God through the human author. Even though the principle focuses on determining a singular meaning, it allows for the meaning to be applied in multiple different ways.

Even for those who advocate the intended authorial meaning method, there is some debate as to whether every passage only has one single meaning. Biblical

²⁴Walter Kaiser, “Meaning from God’s Message: Matters for Interpretation,” *Christianity Today* (October 5, 1979), 31-32, cited in McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying the Bible*, 96.

²⁵Ibid., 96-97.

²⁶Ibid., 96.

prophecy, in particular, creates an exception to the one-meaning principle as it sometimes has multiple fulfillments. This is often referred to as *sensus plenior*, or “fuller sense,” in prophetic fulfillment.²⁷ For example, the gospel writer in Matthew 2:14-15 uses Hosea 11:1 to describe the sojourn of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus. The original quotation in Hosea 11:1 clearly refers to Israel’s exodus from Egypt.²⁸ An important point to note, though, about this example of revealed double meaning is that it was written by Matthew, an inspired author. In fact, every example of double, or fuller, meaning in the Bible is revealed to us either by Jesus or an inspired writer. They would certainly have the divine authority to designate a secondary or more fuller meaning.²⁹ Interpreters, therefore, should be cautious when looking for or interpreting a passage with more than one meaning.

Another possible shortcoming of the one-meaning principle is concerning metaphors. Because of the inherent flexibility of metaphors, a “human author can intend to convey multiple, often overlapping concepts through the use of metaphor.”³⁰ For instance, Jesus uses a metaphor to describe His followers as the “salt of the earth” in Matthew 5:13. The reader is left to try to understand what quality or characteristic of salt to which Jesus is referring: flavor, preservation, healing, worth, a combination of these, or something else?

²⁷Richard Alan Fuhr, Jr., and Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Inductive Bible Study* (Nashville: B and H, 2016), 29.

²⁸McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying the Bible*, 39.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 41.

³⁰Fuhr and Köstenberger, *Inductive Bible Study*, 29.

Because of some of the exceptions and shortcomings of the one-meaning rule outlined above, it is a principle that should be employed by interpreters not as a hard and fast rule but rather a general rule of thumb. Hermeneutical training, therefore, should encourage believers to use the one-meaning principle but with an awareness of its possible exceptions, particularly regarding metaphor and prophecy.

Exegetical Principle

The exegetical principle “teaches that the meaning of any biblical text must be drawn from the text rather than be ascribed to the text.”³¹ The goal of the principle is to try to understand a passage on its own terms and give it an opportunity to speak for itself,³² which is especially important if one truly wants to hear from God. This is opposed to imposing or reading a preconceived meaning or doctrine into a text. The former is usually labeled exegesis, whereas the latter is labeled eisegesis. Hermeneutical training that focuses on the discovery of the intended authorial meaning of a passage will engage the exegetical principle and help guard against intentional or unintentional eisegesis.

One of the challenges of faithfully following the exegetical principle and attempting to determine authorial intention is the preunderstanding that the modern reader brings to the text. Preunderstanding³³ is “all of our preconceived notions and

³¹Fuhr and Köstenberger, *Inductive Bible Study*, 30.

³²Ibid.

³³Following Fuhr and Köstenberger, I understand preunderstanding to be different than presuppositions. Presuppositions relate to how one views the Bible as a whole, including views like inerrancy, infallibility, and the authority of Scripture. See Fuhr and Köstenberger, *Inductive Bible Study*, 31.

understandings that we bring to the text, which have been formulated, both consciously and subconsciously, before we actually study the text in detail.”³⁴ Because modern readers are hundreds of years removed from the original context in which the Bible’s many books were written, they bring preunderstanding that is often foreign to the original audience and author. In fact, the large amount of preunderstanding the modern interpreter brings to the text is used by opponents of the intended meaning method to argue the impossibility of the task.

Osborne admits that preunderstanding can certainly be negative, especially if it is used to develop “an a priori grid that determines the meaning of a text before the act of reading even begins.”³⁵ However, he argues that preunderstanding can be a primarily positive component of the hermeneutical process, and it is possible that “a close reading of the text cannot be done without a perspective provided by one’s preunderstanding as identified by a ‘sociology of knowledge’ perspective.”³⁶ He writes that “reflection itself demands mental categories, and these are built upon one’s presupposed world view and by the faith or reading community to which one belongs.”³⁷ What is helpful concerning preunderstanding is for readers to give priority to the text by placing themselves in front of rather than behind the text; this allows readers to “determine which types of

³⁴Duvall and Hays, *Grasping God’s Word*, 139, cited in Fuhr and Kostenberger, *Inductive Bible Study*, 30-31.

³⁵Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 412.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid.

preunderstandings are valid and which are not, as the text challenges, reshapes and directs [their] presuppositions.”³⁸ In essence, readers must beware of their own preunderstanding and approach the text with a willingness to allow the text to alter those preunderstandings when necessary.

Theological Interpretation of Scripture

Some of the preunderstandings that believers bring to the text are their own denominational beliefs, which are often rooted in creeds, rules of faith, and other confessions. There is a movement called the Theological Interpretation of Scripture (sometimes referred to as TIS) that argues much of today’s interpretive world does not give enough attention, if any, to the various beliefs of the church over the centuries. Given that this movement is not yet twenty years old, it is not uniform and still developing, but Robert Plummer, in a sentence, describes it as “an academic movement that seeks to return reflection on the biblical text to the purview of the confessing Christian church.”³⁹ The movement “values pre-modern interpretation and tradition, and has as its context the Church and its practices.”⁴⁰ Erik Heen writes that TIS “seeks to bring together newer methods of biblical studies with confessionally based theological reflection in ways that historical-criticism did not always encourage.”⁴¹ This movement

³⁸Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 412.

³⁹Robert L. Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010), 313.

⁴⁰Ben C. Ollenburger, “Interpretation, Biblical,” in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 645.

⁴¹Erik M. Heen, “The Theological Interpretation of the Bible,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 21, no. 4 (2007): 373, cited in Plummer, *40 Questions*, 314-15.

is relevant to this project because any sort of hermeneutical training must take into consideration the various ways the church has interpreted the Bible over the centuries and determine the priority of such interpretations.

One of the main issues involved in any discussion of TIS is the issue of authority. As explained above, if the Bible is the inspired Word of God, then ultimate authority resides with it, rather than with the interpreter. The confessions, rules, and creeds of the church and the beliefs of Christians in earlier generations are certainly helpful and carefully articulated and developed based upon the Word of God, but they are still products of fallible men and women. The Reformation provides a great example of how the fallible confessing church can miss the mark and be corrected by the infallible Word of God in the hands of faithful exegetes. One such faithful exegete was Martin Luther. Because of his commitment to the Bible's authority, he could deem Origen's exegesis as "altogether useless."⁴² This is in stark contrast to some of the TIS authors who are "too uncritical in their praise and appropriation of ancient and medieval church interpreters."⁴³

The confessions of the church and interpretations of past generations need not be discarded altogether, though. Faithful biblical interpretation cannot be done in a vacuum void of any thought or consideration of the church and its interpretive work over the centuries. However, church confessions and ancient exegesis should not dictate final

⁴²Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 1-5*, in *Luther's Works*, ed. J. Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1958), 1:233, cited in Plummer, *40 Questions*, 317-18.

⁴³Plummer, *40 Questions*, 317.

interpretation or be allowed to skew the initial interpretive work of the passage.

Hermeneutical training should condition the interpreter to not come to the text trying to prove a preconceived confessional belief or doctrine. An interpreter should be trained to not look at the text through the lenses of confessional beliefs, but rather examine their confessional beliefs through the lenses of Scripture.

Context

Faithful hermeneutical training should include an emphasis upon determining a passage's context. Context is one of the most important things for an interpreter to consider when trying to determine the intended authorial meaning of a passage. Andreas Köstenberger defines context as the “circumstances that form the setting for an event, a statement, or a written text, by which that event, statement, or text can be rightly understood.”⁴⁴ He goes on to say that “‘context is king’ when interpreting the Bible, because understanding various contexts is so important to our understanding of biblical passages or ideas.”⁴⁵ To show the importance of context, Ben Witherington III gives the example of the word “row.” Without understanding the context of the word, it could mean a variety of different things. It could “refer to a line of seats, a verbal command to paddle water, an argument or a fight, a line of braided hair (e.g. a cornrow), and more.”⁴⁶

⁴⁴George H. Guthrie, *Read the Bible for Life: Your Guide to Understanding and Living God's Word* (Nashville: B and H, 2011), 34.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ben Witherington III, *Reading and Understanding the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 97.

Köstenberger uses the phrase “various contexts” because there are several different contexts that interpreters should be mindful of when trying to determine authorial intent. First, the interpreter should consider the literary context, which is basically how a passage fits and functions in a book.⁴⁷ Any passage chosen for interpretation will be made up of sentences. Beynon and Sach observe,

A sentence comes in the context of a paragraph. A paragraph comes in the context of a chapter or section. A chapter comes in the context of a whole Bible book. Lastly, the book comes in the context of the whole Bible.⁴⁸

One could even further group books into sections and testaments, but the point is made clear. Proper hermeneutical training regarding literary context can help deter readers from engaging in proof texting, which is the process of treating individual verses or phrases of Scripture “as independent divine declarations that retain their meaning and authority even when removed from their literary context.”⁴⁹ The second context to consider is cultural context. This particular context “has to do with attitudes, patterns of behavior, or expressions of a particular society, which affect our understanding of a passage.”⁵⁰ Historical context is the third type interpreters must consider. This type “has to do with historical events in the biblical era, either events recorded in the pages of Scripture or events that form the backdrop for the biblical story.” The final type to

⁴⁷Guthrie, *Read the Bible for Life*, 47.

⁴⁸Nigel Beynon and Andrew Sach, *Dig Deeper: Tools for Understanding God’s Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 34.

⁴⁹Richard L. Shultz, *Out of Context: How to Avoid Misinterpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 40-41.

⁵⁰Guthrie, *Read the Bible for Life*, 47.

consider is theological context. This context deals with where a passage or intended meaning fits into the theological themes found throughout the Bible.

Genre

Genre determination is another important aspect of the interpretive process that should be included in faithful hermeneutical training. Genre is “a classification of literary composition characterized by particular elements of form and content.”⁵¹ The Bible includes several different types of genre, including poetry, prophecy, psalms, epistles, parables, historical narrative, genealogies, law, gospels, and others. Books of the Bible are typically classified using one overarching genre, even though they often contain several different genres throughout the entirety of the book. This means that a particular passage might have a different genre than that of the book in which it is located.⁵² Hermeneutical training should equip interpreters to determine both the genre of the passage and the book as a whole.

Determining the genre of a passage and book is important because there are different interpretive rules connected with the different genres. For instance, the way interpreters approach prophecy should be different from the way they approach historical narrative. Köstenberger and Patterson compare the interpretation of different genres to

⁵¹F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, “Genre,” in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 493.

⁵²It is possible for a single passage of Scripture to contain more than one genre. One example would be the insertion of Old Testament quotations into the Gospels or epistles. Psalms and prophecy are often inserted into the gospel narratives and in the arguments of certain epistles. However, when more than one genre is present, there will still probably be an overarching or controlling genre.

playing different sports; if a person wants to play a particular sport, they must first learn the rules that govern the game.⁵³ This is similar to interpreting various genres because “in order to pick up the fine nuances conveyed by the biblical text, we must learn the ‘rules’ that guide the interpretation of that particular biblical genre.”⁵⁴ Not playing by the interpretive rules of a particular genre can lead to misinterpretations and heretical conclusions.

In addition to misinterpretations of texts, there are other reasons why the determination of the appropriate genre is important for interpreters. Robert Plummer discusses two additional interpretive missteps regarding genre. First, he states that “mislabeling a biblical genre can be an underhanded way of denying the text’s truthfulness.”⁵⁵ An example of this misstep is when scholars, or other interpreters, label historical narratives or the Gospels as myths.⁵⁶ Another misstep that Plummer highlights is that “principles for interpreting genres can be misused to excuse oneself from the demands of Scripture.”⁵⁷ An example of this misstep is when an interpreter mislabels Jesus’ commands as exaggeration in order to avoid the difficult requirements of the

⁵³Andreas J. Köstenberger and Richard D. Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 238. Köstenberger and Patterson credit the idea of “language games” to Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953).

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Plummer, *40 Questions*, 188.

⁵⁶Ibid., 188-89.

⁵⁷Ibid., 189.

commands.⁵⁸ Hermeneutical training must equip interpreters to guard against these missteps, to proficiently determine genre, and to apply appropriate rules.

In determining the particular genre of a passage, Osborne suggests that interpreters must consider both internal and external aspects of the passage. The external factors “concern the overall structural pattern, the form (meter, rhythm, narration), style, interrelationships and content.”⁵⁹ The internal factors “include the cohesive plot, action, narrative voice, setting and language.”⁶⁰ Even with these factors in mind, determining the different genres and rules will still take time and training, especially for interpreters who are new to the Bible. Hermeneutical training should provide hands on equipping and practice in this regard and also help point interpreters to helpful sources.⁶¹

Hermeneutical Training to Correlate Meaning with the Rest of Scripture

An important part of any hermeneutical training should be to teach interpreters to correlate their interpretive work with the rest of Scripture. Correlation can help check interpretive meaning with the rest of Scripture and even help in the interpretive process of more difficult texts.

⁵⁸Plummer, *40 Questions*, 188.

⁵⁹Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 149.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹See Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993) and chap. 13 of Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*.

Interpretive Correlation

Because God is the ultimate author of the Bible, it contains a coherent and noncontradictory unity. Each of its parts—passages, chapters, books, sections, and testaments—all fit together into a unified whole, which means that every passage studied is a small part of a much larger whole. The many passages combine together to create the biblical narrative and the overall message that God wanted to communicate. The authorial intended meaning of a passage discovered by the interpreter should line up with the rest of Scripture and not contradict other passages.

Interpretive correlation, then, can assist believers with interpreting difficult passages. Although there is a place for commentaries, interpretive correlation allows the Bible to function as its own commentary, meaning Scripture is used to interpret Scripture.⁶² This is particularly helpful for hard to interpret passages. Passages that are more transparent in meaning can be correlated and used by believers to help interpret passages that are less clear.⁶³ Another way the interpreter can allow Scripture to interpret Scripture is by considering the “full panoply of texts that touch upon a subject.”⁶⁴ For instance, the understanding and application of circumcision from an Old Testament passage alone would be very different than if that passage was correlated with the New Testament writings.⁶⁵

⁶²Fuhr and Köstenberger, *Inductive Bible Study*, 40.

⁶³Plummer, *40 Questions*, 97.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*

⁶⁵For a more detailed discussion, see Plummer, *40 Questions*, 97.

Correlation can also assist the believer with checking their interpretive work with the rest of Scripture. If the Bible does not contradict itself, then the intended authorial meaning should line up with the rest of Scripture. In this way, correlation serves as a safeguard, and a form of checks and balances, for interpretive conclusions. This can help prevent heretical and erroneous interpretations. Many “heretical groups often seize upon a few obscure texts, ascribe to them questionable meaning, and then interpret the remainder of the Bible through these aberrant lenses.”⁶⁶ Correlation, on the other hand, helps believers interpret obscure texts through the lenses of the rest of Scripture, especially those passages that are less obscure and more certain in meaning.

Robert Traina, in his book “Methodical Bible Study,” describes two primary means of correlation that interpreters can use to synthesize Scriptural discoveries with the rest of Scripture and even other data of experience. The first means is “formal association and the second is “informal association.”⁶⁷ Formal association focuses on the use of correlation in terms of topics, such as Anthropology, Soteriology, Christology, etc.⁶⁸ This approach has certain strengths but one of the drawbacks is “its tendency to divide thought into superficial compartments, thus hindering one’s awareness of the interrelatedness of truth.”⁶⁹ Informal association “permits the association of passages and

⁶⁶Plummer, *40 Questions*, 97.

⁶⁷Robert A. Traina, *Methodical Bible Study* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 225.

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹Ibid.

facts whenever a relation exists between them and not because they concern precisely the same topic.”⁷⁰ As an example of this approach, Traina gives the example of how the truths of Mark 8:27-9:2, John 15, and Romans 6:1-14 informally relate to one another and help to elucidate each other.⁷¹

Faithful hermeneutical training should emphasize and equip believers to correlate interpreted authorial intent with the rest of Scripture. Given the enormity of Scripture, the practice of correlation can be a daunting undertaking, especially for children, youth, and even adults who are new to the Bible. This should not stop readers of God’s Word from practicing correlation, though.⁷² Traina argues that correlation should begin as soon as “passages have been studied and to continue it as long as one is able to think.”⁷³

Like any other skill, correlation is one that will improve over time, especially as the interpreter gains experience and increases biblical knowledge. Engaging in Bible study with another person, group, or the community of faith can increase the effectiveness of correlation, as the experience and Bible knowledge of a collective group is greater than that of a single interpreter. This is also an area in which commentaries and

⁷⁰Traina, *Methodical Bible Study*, 225.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Traina argues that correlation does not have to wait until one has fully studied the entirety of Scriptures. He argues this for four main reasons. First, correlation is tentative. Second, the study of particulars never ends. Third, “there is a need to correlate parts of the Scriptures in order that one may guide one’s thinking and actions” in the present. Fourth, rather than being done all at once, the process of correlation is best accomplished bit by bit. See Traina, *Methodical Bible Study*, 224.

⁷³Traina, *Methodical Bible Study*, 224.

concordances can benefit the interpreter, in order to gain insight into a passage or check interpretive work. Reading such works gives the believer access to the interpretive experience and knowledge of many individuals, many of whom are gifted and well experienced in the hermeneutical task.

Hermeneutical Training to Apply Meaning

Believers and interpreters must be equipped through hermeneutical training to take the correlated meaning of the passage and appropriately apply it to their own lives. Stopping short of application is to be unfaithful to the hermeneutical process and, more seriously, to God and His Word.

Application

Duvall and Hays are careful to define application as “the response of the reader to the meaning of the text.”⁷⁴ Not only should a passage be interpreted first, but also should be applied to the interpreter’s life. Hermeneutical training that teaches the interpreter to either ignore application or jump to application before determining a passage’s meaning is inadequate. Rather than ask “What does this passage mean to me?”, the interpreter should ask, “What does this passage mean? How should I apply this meaning to my life?”⁷⁵ Application is the final step for the interpreter but also a gauge as to whether the passage is truly understood. A text or passage is not wholly understood unless it can be applied, since “understanding always includes application.”⁷⁶

⁷⁴Duvall and Hays, *Grasping God’s Word*, 195.

⁷⁵Ibid.

Daniel Doriani provides a helpful model for the practice of application in his book “Putting the Truth to Work.” Doriani lists and describes seven paths, or sources, for application found within the Bible. These paths include rules, ideals, doctrines, redemptive acts in narratives, exemplary acts in narratives, biblical images, and songs and prayers.⁷⁷ He distinguishes between this list and genres and admits that not every passage will have all seven of these paths of application.⁷⁸ In addition to these seven sources of application, he also describes four aspects of application: duty, character, goals, and discernment.⁷⁹ Each of these aspects are matched with four essential questions: 1. What should I do? (duty) 2. Who should I be? (character) 3. To what causes should we devote our life energy? (goals) 4. How can we distinguish truth from error? (discernment).⁸⁰ All four of these questions can then be joined with the seven avenues for texts, creating twenty-eight theoretical areas⁸¹ to examine in trying to determine a texts application and relevance.⁸² This method and overview of application possibilities would be a beneficial part of any type of hermeneutical training.

⁷⁶Hans-George Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd ed. (New York: Continuum, 1989), 307-11, quoted in Daniel M. Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work: The Theory and Practice of Biblical Application* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P and R Publishing, 2001), 27.

⁷⁷Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work*, 82.

⁷⁸Ibid., 92-93.

⁷⁹Ibid., 98.

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹Doriani provides a helpful chart that helps to diagram the twenty-eight possibilities. See Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work*, 96.

⁸²Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work*, 94-95.

Conclusion

Faithful hermeneutical training must equip believers with the skills and knowledge to be able to discern the intended authorial meaning of a passage. Then, interpreters should be trained to correlate this meaning with the rest of Bible, giving Scripture an opportunity to interpret Scripture. Finally, believers should be trained to apply truths discovered through the hermeneutical process to their own lives.

CHAPTER 4

ELEMENTS OF THE PROJECT

The ministry research project focused on equipping members to faithfully practice hermeneutics and personally study the Word of God. The central, strategic element in the project was the six-session training on hermeneutics that, for contextual reasons, was simply called “How to Study the Bible.” Other elements included a teaching series review committee, a teaching series rubric, a focus group, a pre-test questionnaire, and a post-test questionnaire. These elements were used in order to help accomplish the project’s three goals: (1) assessing the current level of competence and confidence in biblical hermeneutics; (2) developing a six-session teaching series on hermeneutics that focused on basic Bible study skills; and (3) implementing the training seminar in order to equip members to proficiently and confidently study God’s Word.

Scheduling of the Elements

The six-session training began on the first Sunday in September and continued until the first Sunday in October. The project took a total of fifteen weeks to complete from the time I started writing the teaching series material until the post-test questionnaire was administered.

Teaching Series Review Committee

A review committee was formed to evaluate the teaching series content after it was completed. There were three individuals chosen to comprise this group, and they ranged in age from 40 to 75. Since the task of this group was to critically evaluate and comment on a wide range of hermeneutical training content, including some more

advanced material, the members of this committee were carefully selected based on their maturity in the faith and experience in reading, studying, and teaching God's Word. All three have demonstrated a willingness and ability to teach God's Word and shown signs of the spiritual gift of teaching. One member was the former pastor of the church, and the other two were Sunday school teachers and leaders in the church. This means that each member possessed not only the skills and experience to sufficiently evaluate the teaching series, but also a familiarity of the church members and their context. Although it was not a conscious or intentional decision, there were no females included in this committee. In hindsight, having at least one female could have further enhanced the feedback on the teaching series content, especially since at least half of the participants in the training were females.

I met each individual in order to explain the role of the committee and to invite them to participate. Once all three individuals made a commitment to serve on the committee, they were each given a copy of the teaching series and evaluation rubrics. The committee was given three weeks to read through the teaching series content, score the sessions, and make critical comments. Given the busyness of life and the myriad of responsibilities of each committee member, I wanted to give them a clear deadline but at the same time wanted to make sure they had ample time to proficiently evaluate the material. My encouragement to the committee was for them to do their best, to be as honest as possible in their feedback, and, if all possible, to make the given deadline.

Teaching Series Rubric

In order to help guide the teaching series review committee's evaluation of the material and to give them a way of providing feedback, I provided each member with scoring rubrics. The teaching series was broken down into six separate teaching sessions, with each session needing to be evaluated using a separate rubric. This means that each committee member was given six rubrics, one for every session. At the top of every

rubric, the member had to indicate which “Session Number (1-6)” they were evaluating and had to write their “Personal Identification Code.” This code was the last four digits of the individual’s social security number or some other unique, four-digit code of their choosing. Identification codes were used for anonymity purposes and to encourage members to share honest, critical feedback.

The rubric guided the committee to evaluate the training sessions based on five different criteria. These criteria included the following: (1) relevance to the interpretation of the Bible; (2) biblical and theological soundness; (3) practical application; (4) thoroughness; and (5) clear presentation. Committee members were asked to rank each criteria using the following four point scale: (1) insufficient; (2) requires attention; (3) sufficient; and (4) exemplary. After ranking each criterion, members were given some space to make “Comments.” In retrospect, the spaces provided for comments were probably not large enough to encourage and allow for significant comments.

The second goal of my project focused on developing a six-session teaching series on hermeneutics. This goal would be considered successful when an evaluation committee gave each session an average overall score of “sufficient” or better. Otherwise, I would need to make significant changes and then have the session reevaluated by the committee. When I received all eighteen rubrics back from the committee, each session received at least a “sufficient” ranking or better. Therefore, I did not need to make any major changes and resubmit the sessions to the committee. I did, however, look at their rankings of the sessions and read their comments. Based on their evaluations and helpful feedback, I made some necessary adjustments to the teaching series content.

Focus Group

While the evaluation committee was in the process of reviewing the teaching series content, I started recruiting and promoting the six-week training. I promoted it in our weekly worship bulletin, large-group announcements, social media, and by word of mouth. Although I considered different time slots, I eventually decided to conduct the training during our weekly Sunday school hour. This time period was chosen for a few different reasons. Sunday school is a time when a large mass of committed church members already gathers together on a weekly basis. In order to attend the training for six sessions, members would not need to make an additional trip or try to fit it into their busy schedules. Childcare was another benefit of doing the training during Sunday school, as the children and youth would be in their regular classes. I thought having it during Sunday school would increase the likelihood more members consistently taking part in the training. For the six weeks of the training, we combined all our adult Sunday school classes and encouraged class members to attend the training.

The group that ended up participating in the six-session training was primarily made up of members who were regularly part of a Sunday school class, but we did have a few members join the training sessions who were not part of a regular class. Because we combined the adult male and adult female classes, we had a mixed gender group. The age range was also quite large, extending from around 35 years to 65 plus. The group was asked to basically do three things, which included take a pre-test questionnaire, attend the six training sessions, and take the post-test questionnaire. I strongly urged them to attend all the training sessions, or at least as many of them as they could.

Pre-Test Questionnaire

I administered the pre-test questionnaire to the training group on Sunday, September 1. It was completed by the group before I started leading the first training session, and it took on average around ten minutes for each person to fill it out. The

purpose of the questionnaire was to gauge the hermeneutical competence and confidence level of the participants before the training began. Because skill level is hard to determine in a questionnaire, questions largely focused on confidence levels and perceived skill levels. For instance, statement 3 in part 2 stated, “I feel confident studying the Bible on my own.” This statement and several others began with the phrase, “I feel confident...”

The questionnaire began with a short “Agreement to Participate” section, which made the members aware they were participating in the ministry project and, by so doing, they were giving permission to use their responses. At the same time, they were assured of the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses. Like the teaching series review committee, the training group was asked to use the last four digits of their social security number as their “Personal Identification Code.” If they chose to use a number other than their social security number, they were asked to use that same number for the post-test questionnaire so their responses could be compared.

The questionnaire was divided into two parts. The first part included five biographical questions, including age range, Christian faith status, frequency of reading the Bible, factors hindering Bible reading, and Bible translations normally used. This initial part provided helpful information, but it was not scored and compared like that of the second part. There were thirty-four statements in the second part that needed to be answered using a six-point scale: (SD) strongly disagree; (D) disagree; (DS) disagree somewhat; (AS) agree somewhat; (A) agree; and (SA) strongly agree. The participants were encouraged to answer honestly and to completely fill out the questionnaire.

Training Sessions

After weeks of preparation, the training finally began on Sunday, September 1 and continued the following five Sundays. Each of the six sessions took place during the regular Sunday school time period and lasted between forty-five minutes and an hour.

The training took place in the church gymnasium, as that was the only space, other than the sanctuary, that could accommodate the group. This is especially true given the need to provide table space for the participants to fill out the questionnaires and take notes. Attendance was taken at each session using the four-digit personal identification codes.

Each session focused on a different aspect of hermeneutics, and each subsequent session built on the material covered in the previous session. Throughout the entire training, the participants were led through a seven-step process of how to study the Bible and approach a particular passage of Scripture. Each session revealed and focused on a new step to add to the process, except for session 1, which added two steps. I used the story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-10 to walk the group through the seven steps. The six sessions were further organized into three groups based on the three steps of the Inductive Bible Study method—observation, interpretation, and application. Sessions 1 through 4 focused on observation. Session 5 focused on interpretation, and session 6 focused on application.

Session 1

The first teaching session was designed to be a basic introduction to the Bible. In attempting to answer the question “What is the Bible?”, the session briefly covered topics such as biblical authorship, inspiration, inerrancy, and translation. It also attempted to answer the question “How did we get the English Bible?”. Without getting into too many details, I tried to cover a brief history of how the English Bible came into existence. Emphasis was placed on the role and history of the King James Version of the Bible since that is translation that most of our members and people in our area use. I then introduced and explained step 1—“Pray”—in the 7-step process. This was followed by some training on how to determine what passage of Scripture to study, which led to an introduction to step 2—“Determine the passage to study.” The first session was

concluded with a brief, large group exercise of determining the beginning and ending of the Zacchaeus passage in Luke 19.

Session 2

I spent the majority of the second session discussing and walking the group through the highlights of the biblical meta-narrative and redemption history. I used a handout called the “Bible Timeline” that was helpful in illustrating the biblical narrative and how different sections and books of the Bible fit into that timeline. This was followed by a large group exercise in determining where select passages fit into the biblical narrative and redemption history. Passages that were used included: Exodus 20, 1 Samuel 17, Isaiah 53, Mark 1:1-8, Acts 9, and Galatians 5:16-26. Step 3 was then introduced—“Find where the passage fits into the biblical story and redemptive history”—and was applied to the Luke 19 passage.

Session 3

The third session focused exclusively on genre. It is no surprise, then, that step 4 that develops out of this session is to “Determine the genre of the passage.” I discussed the different types of genres in the Bible and lead the group in an exercise to determine the genre of a few select passages, including Genesis 5:6-11, Psalm 148, Joshua 6:15ff, Matthew 23:24, Luke 10:30-35, James 1:1-4, and Revelation 12:3-6. Time was devoted also to the reason why genre determination is important. Like before, I finished the session by walking the group in determining the genre of the story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19.

Session 4

Although the previous three sessions included different aspects of the observation process, this session focused heavily on observation, particularly within a given passage. Step 5 was introduced in this section: “Make observations about the

passage.” I spent time explaining the six fact finding questions—Who? What? When? Where? Why? and How?—and then used them to walk through the Luke 19 passage with the group. We simply asked the six questions and then tried to answer them from the text. The remainder of the time was spent going over structural relationships and looking for them in the passage. A handout that listed structural relationships and examples was helpful in explaining them to the group.

Session 5

After spending four sessions on observation, I finally focused on interpretation in the fifth session. I covered several topics relating to interpretation in this session, including the difference between exegesis and eisegesis, the use of commentaries, the original audience, cooperation with the Spirit, God’s self-revelation, the Christocentric nature of the Bible, and Scripture interpreting Scripture. The major step to be learned in this session was to “Determine the single, central meaning of the passage.” I closed out this session walking the group through determining the central meaning of Luke 19.

Session 6

The final session focused entirely on application. What I tried to do in this session was to give the group some categories to help them apply the central meaning of a passage to their lives. I used the categories of head, heart, and hand as a simple way of applying a passage’s meaning. In addition, I spent some time discussing four different areas of life that a passage’s meaning can be applied to, which included God, self, relationships, and mission. I used a handout to better explain these four areas. I then introduced the seventh and final step—“Apply the main meaning to your own life”—and, as a group, we took the main meaning of the Luke 19 passage and applied it to the four different areas of life.

Post-Test Questionnaire

Once the training was finished on Sunday, October 6, I administered the post-test questionnaire to the training group. This questionnaire was the same as the pre-test questionnaire. The purpose of giving the same questionnaire was to gauge the effectiveness of the training by seeing if there was any change in the responses between the pre-test and post-test questionnaires. Probably due to familiarity, the group tended to complete the post-test questionnaires quicker than the pre-test questionnaires, but most still took around ten or so minutes to complete them.

CHAPTER 5

PROJECT EVALUATION

Evaluation of Data

The results from the pre-test and post-test surveys comprised the primary data that was evaluated for this project. There was some data produced by the committee that evaluated the teaching series content, but I will discuss those findings in the following “Evaluation of Goals” section. Based on my six-point Likert scale, I assigned each response a point value between one and six, with six being the desired response. These scores were then placed into a spreadsheet to be analyzed. There were two questions—numbers fifteen and sixteen—that expected a negative response, so I made note of that as I collected the data.

There were three unclear questions—numbers eight, ten, and fourteen—that I decided to remove from consideration in my data analysis. They were not removed because the statements were unclear but because the desired response was not on one extreme of the Likert scale and, therefore, difficult to score them. The questions elicited a “yes” and “no” type of response, which is hard to score using a Likert scale. For instance, question fourteen states, “The Bible is organized chronologically from creation to the new heavens and earth.” This statement is generally true, as large portions of the Bible is organized chronologically and some of it is not. The Bible begins at creation and ends with the new heavens and new earth and is generally chronological in between but not always. Question eight is another example of this, which states, “The Bible should always be interpreted literally.” Once again, this is generally true but not always true. Unfortunately, I did not realize this issue until I started to score the questionnaires and

determine the point value of each response. For this reason, I decided to remove the questions from consideration in my data analysis.

Twenty-three members took the pre-test survey, but only seventeen took the post-test survey. The post-test number was less because a couple of individuals had to drop out of the training, and some were not able to be present on the day of the post-test questionnaire. By using a “Personal Identification Code” for attendance and the surveys, I was not able to follow up with the individuals who were absent or who did not take the post-test survey. Therefore, the participants who did not have both a pre-test and post-test questionnaire were not considered in my data analysis. One of the seventeen members who took the post-test survey did not completely fill out their questionnaire, so I had to remove that participant’s data from consideration as well.

After collecting all of the pre-test and post-test questionnaire data from the surveys and compiling it in a spreadsheet, I ran a t-test to determine if my training sessions made an impact on the participants. My t-test results are as follows: $t(15) = 4.219$, $p = .0003$. The results indicate that my six-session hermeneutical training made a positive difference on the participants. The overall mean score of the entire group increased from 129.18 in the pre-test survey to 139.75 in the post-test. This shows an average increase of 10.56 points. My t stat was larger than my t critical one-tail, and my p one-tail was less than 0.05, which both indicate that my training made a positive difference.

Although the overall mean of the group increased, there were three individuals whose post-test questionnaire results did not increase from their pre-test results. The scores of these three individuals actually decreased after the training. However, it must be noted that these scores did not significantly decrease, as they only decreased in amounts of -1, -2, and -4. These results would be more troubling if the totals were much larger, but they are still worth noting.

The overall attendance of the training sessions was positive. Every member attended at least four out of six sessions, and three participants attended every single session. The average attendance for the entire training was five sessions per participant, and the average difference between pre-test and post-test scores increased for individuals as the number of sessions attended increased. For instance, members who attended four sessions increased their post-test scores by an average of eight points. Participants who attended five sessions increased their scores by an average of 9.8 points, and those who attended six sessions increased their average by 15.6 points. I realize that further splitting my sample group into three reduces my sample size even more, but this data shows that there is at least some correlation between the number of sessions attended and an increase in average score. This correlation provides further support for my t-test results described above.

I evaluated not only the overall scores of the participants, but also the results from individual questions. The average response score increased on every question except three, with the average of two questions decreasing and one showing no positive or negative movement. Question 17—"I feel comfortable using a commentary to help me understand the Bible."—was the statement that showed no increase or decrease. This result does not surprise me, as I briefly mentioned commentaries in session 5 but did not do any training regarding the use of commentaries. One of the two questions that showed a decreased average score was question 22—"I feel confident in reading the Psalms." The average score for this statement decreased by 0.31, which showed the greatest decrease of any question. Again, this result does not surprise me, as I spent some time talking about the Psalms in session 3 on genres but spent little time training on how to actually read and interpret the Psalms. The other question with a decreased average score was question 28—"I am able to study the Bible and apply what I learn to my own life." Although the average score of this question only decreased by 0.31, these results were a

bit puzzling. This is because the entire final session was dedicated to application and was conducted immediately prior to the members taking the post-test.

Even though the average scores of two questions decreased and one remained the same, I was encouraged to see that the rest of the questions showed a positive increase. Instead of commenting on all of the questions, I will highlight a few questions that I found encouraging. Questions 9 and 19 showed the largest increase in average scores, which focused on eisegesis/exegesis and genres respectively. This was an expected result because I spent time in several sessions talking about “reading into” versus “reading out of” the Bible, and I spent an entire session on genres. There was an increase in the average scores of questions 3—“I feel confident studying the Bible on my own.”—and 4—“I could teach someone else how to study the Bible.” I highlight these questions because they are big picture confidence questions regarding the study of God’s Word. After taking the training, there was an increase in response scores from participants who said they could not only more confidently study the Bible, but also teach it to someone else. The final question worth highlighting that had an average score increase is number 2—“I have a regular time scheduled to read the Bible.” This increase may not include every single participant of the training, but it at least shows an overall movement of the group to become more intentional about studying the Word of God. This is extremely important because training members to read, interpret, and apply God’s Word for themselves is most beneficial to them if they put that equipping to use on a regular basis.

Evaluation of Goals

Before starting my ministry research project, I had three distinct goals that I wanted to accomplish. The first goal was “to assess the current level of competence and confidence in biblical hermeneutics among members of Annville Baptist Church.” This goal was measured by creating and administering the pre-test questionnaire, called the

Hermeneutics Competency Survey, to members of the church. In order for this goal to be successfully met, twenty members needed to take the questionnaire and have their results analyzed. On September 1, twenty-three members filled out the Hermeneutics Competency Survey, and I analyzed their results in the days that followed. Therefore, this goal was successfully met, based on the predetermined criteria. This number is higher than my t-test sample because some of these individuals either did not end up taking the post-test questionnaire or did not completely fill it out. I was able to assess their current competency and skill level of those individuals but was not able to gauge whether the training session was beneficial for them.

The church's regular worship average is just over eighty-two people per Sunday, which means that 28 percent of weekly worshipers took the questionnaire. This is a good sampling number for the congregation and includes a wide age range, but I realize that it may not be completely representative because it primarily includes members who are a part of a Sunday school group. This group is not only a part of a weekly Bible study group, but also generally more committed and more mature in their faith. I would expect their hermeneutical competency and confidence to be higher than others in the congregation. A larger sample group, particularly including more members who are not a part of a Sunday school group, would have given a more accurate assessment of the hermeneutical competency and confidence of the church.

The second goal was "to develop a six-session teaching series on hermeneutics that focused on basic Bible study skills." This goal was measured by the completion and approval of the teaching series content by a committee of three church leaders, who used the Teaching Series Rubric to evaluate and score each of the six sessions. This goal was considered successful when each committee member gave each individual training session an overall average score of "sufficient" or better. Upon receiving the graded rubrics from the committee, "Sufficient" was the lowest score that the committee members gave any area of the training. Therefore, the benchmark for this goal was

successfully met. If a session had received an overall average rating of less than “sufficient,” then I would have needed to revise that session and resubmit it to the committee for a second review. Although this resubmission was not necessary because of the committee’s scoring, I still took their comments and rankings into consideration and made appropriate changes to the teaching series content.

The third and final goal was “to implement the six-session training and equip members to proficiently and confidently study God's Word.” The measurement of this goal was done by the administration of the same competency survey before and after the completion of the six-session training. This goal was to be considered successful if a t-test statistically showed a positive difference between pre-survey and post-survey results. Although there were three participants whose total scores did not increase, the overall average score did increase. As described above, the t-test that I ran showed a positive difference between pre-survey and post-survey, which means that this goal was successfully met.

Evaluation of Process

I was overall pleased with the ministry project, but as with any process, there are always areas of improvement. The first and most important thing that I would do differently would be to add an additional training session, making it a total of seven sessions. The purpose of this seventh session would not be to add more teaching or content but rather to provide an entire session to review the material covered. I would design it so that most of the session would be spent taking passages of Scripture and walking the group through the seven-step process learned in the previous six sessions. Although I walked the group through the seven steps using the Luke 19 passage, it would have been helpful to have walked them through additional passages, particularly from other genres. It might have also been helpful at the end of session 6 to inform the group

of the passages that would be covered in session 7, so that they could go ahead do some hermeneutical work on the passages before examining them together as a group.

Another way that the project could have been improved is by providing participants with media recordings of the training sessions. By recording the sessions and making them available to the participants, this could have served a dual purpose. First, participants who were absent from a session could have used the recordings to catch up on the content and exercises they missed. Second, participants who were present during a session could have used the recordings to review that session's material. For both these reasons, I think the recordings would have helped the participants and even helped improve the results from the questionnaires.

There is only one change I would make to the teaching series evaluation committee. Although it was not a conscious or intentional decision, there were no women included in this committee. In hindsight, having at least one woman could have further enhanced the feedback on the teaching series content, especially since at least half of the participants in the training were women.

I would make a couple of adjustments concerning the competency surveys. First, I would have my competency surveys evaluated by two competent individuals. I would then administer them after receiving their feedback and making appropriate changes. Second, I would write out the answers to the statements, rather than just list the initials of the responses. For instance, instead of using "SD" I would write out "Strongly Disagree," and I would do this for all six responses on every question. Another option would be to place a key or legend on every page of the questionnaire or give them a separate key or legend to reference. This would have made it easier for the participants and ensured that they answered as honestly and accurately as possible. The third adjustment I would make to the questionnaires is the removal, or editing, of the three unclear questions—numbers 8, 10, and 14. The reasons for this change are discussed more fully in the above "Evaluation of Data" section.

Theological Reflection

This project has shown me the enormous need in local churches for followers of Jesus to be equipped to faithfully study the Word of God. Most of the participants in my training sessions were mature believers who had been a part of a church for most, if not all, of their lives. Yet, the pre-test surveys revealed that many of them did not have a high level of confidence in studying God's Word on their own, with a few even indicating that they did not regularly read the Bible because they did not know how. After the six-session training was over, one elderly lady told me that she had been in church most of her life and had never been taught how to study the Bible for herself. My own experience growing up in this context is similar to hers, as I was not taught how to study the Bible until I was away from home at college. At a young age, I made a profession of faith, was baptized, and was given a Bible with my name on it, but I was never taught how to read it or even where to start reading it. If the reading and studying the Bible is such a valuable spiritual discipline and foundational part of the Christian life, then church leaders must work to equip the saints to faithfully handle the Word of God. We cannot expect new and immature believers to simply figure out how to study the Bible on their own. Some believers may figure it out on their own, but they are usually the exception and not the rule. Intentional hermeneutical training can be an effective means of increasing hermeneutical skill and confidence, as proven by the results of this project.

Another theological aspect that this project reinforced over and over was the Theocentric and Christocentric nature of the Word of God. The temptation is to make the Bible all about the reader, to make it anthropocentric. The Bible is, however, all about God from first page until the last. It was written for us, but it is not about us; it is the revelation of the triune God. This is a truth that most believers, including myself, know and believe but often forget. I taught this truth in one session and emphasized it several times throughout the other sessions. I was surprised, therefore, when we interpreted the

Luke 19 story together as a group in session 5 and several participants offered interpretations of the passage that were more anthropocentric than Theocentric. The interpretive responses from the group either focused too heavily on Zacchaeus or tended to jump to application, and in so doing, completely missed the key Christocentric truth that Jesus came to seek and save the lost. For different reasons, believers simply do not always look for God when interpreting a passage of Scripture. They must be taught to do so and encouraged to continually do so, which leads to my next point.

Hermeneutical principles and skills cannot only be taught in a short-term training; they must also be modeled by church leaders. Although the six-session training was successful and beneficial, it was designed to be focused and temporary. Training of this type would be difficult to maintain over a long period of time and would be most effective if conducted periodically. In the periods between trainings, pastors, leaders, and teachers need to faithfully model hermeneutical skills and principles in their own teaching and preaching. By doing this in various settings, especially corporate worship, they not only reinforce what is taught in training sessions, but also introduce principles to individuals who may never attend a training session. Teaching principles and skills is beneficial, but that same teaching is even more effective when a pastor models it week after week in his preaching and teaching. I have already tried to be more intentional in doing this in my preaching. Just recently in preaching 1 Corinthians 3:5-9, I deliberately highlighted the contrast between human workers and God, who brings forth the growth. I drew attention to the structural relationship of contrast and also encouraged the congregation to look for things that are contrasted in their regular Bible reading. In doing so, I did not take up a lot of time in my sermon, but I was able to introduce and reinforce a hermeneutical principle to the listeners.

This project has also shown me a need for followers of Jesus in our culture to be encouraged, or even taught, to do focused, meditative reading and rereading of the Word of God. In today's information age filled with digital screens and social media,

people are conditioned to quickly read small bits of information—tweets, status updates, news headlines, etc.—and then move onto more information, without reflecting on what they just read. Observing, interpreting, and applying the Word of God requires more time and attention than scanning short soundbites on the internet. Many people think they cannot read or interpret the Bible, but sometimes they are just not willing to give the necessary time and focus to the process. For instance, I gave the participants some time during the training sessions to read and reread the Luke 19 story, which was a familiar story to all of them. Using some simple observation questions, they were amazed at the different things that they were able to observe and discover. I even noticed something about the story during the training sessions that I had never noticed before, which also reinforces the beauty and depth of the Word of God.

Personal Reflection

One of my biggest takeaways from this project is that I have become more proficient in the practice of hermeneutics. I gained a deeper understanding of hermeneutics through studying the biblical basis for it and researching the theory and practice of it. Developing the teaching series and teaching the six sessions also increased my knowledge and skill level, as teaching others is one of the most effective ways to learn. I have tried to implement the seven-step process into my own study of God's Word, and it has helped me to be more faithful and accurate in interpreting the Word of God. My four on-campus seminars also supplemented my hermeneutical training by teaching me sentence diagramming and arcing, showing me a model to read narrative, enhancing my understanding of Greek, exposing me to a variety of ways to read the Pauline corpus, and much more. I still have so much to learn, but I have made great strides through this journey. I did not take a pre-test and post-test questionnaire for this project, but I am confident that if I had, there would have been a significant statistical change in both my hermeneutical knowledge and confidence.

This project and all that has been associated with it has forced me to be more disciplined with my time. In the past, I prided myself on being a procrastinator, but I quickly realized that if I were going to finish this project, I had to develop better at time management. With the unpredictable and ongoing demands of family, church, and ministry, I did not always have a lot of large chunks of time. This required me to maximize smaller blocks of time on a consistent and scheduled basis. I found that the early mornings, after my quiet time, were the best times because my mind was sharper and there were less distractions. In order to get up early, I had to get in bed earlier, too. I was, therefore, able to successfully set up a schedule and create a regular rhythm. Even until now, I have continued this rhythm and have no plan to stop.

My love for the Word of God has only increased as I worked on this project. I have realized that the more time I spend reading, studying, and even learning how to study God's Word the more my passion for the Word increases. I am continually amazed at the depth and beauty of the Bible, which makes me want to read it more and more and to help others do the same. This love and passion flow not just from the Word of God but also from the One in whom it reveals. Studying the Word of God is not just an intellectual or educational pursuit. It is the pursuit of the triune God, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

APPENDIX 1

HERMENEUTICAL COMPETENCY SURVEY

The following instrument is the Hermeneutical Competency Survey. The survey was administered to all participants before and after they took part in the six-week hermeneutical training. The purpose of the instrument was to assess the level of each member's hermeneutical competency and confidence both before and after the training sessions.

HERMENEUTICAL COMPETENCY SURVEY

Agreement to Participate

This research is being conducted by David Wilson for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. Participation is strictly voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time. By the completion of this survey, you are providing informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

You will answer questions at the beginning of the project, and you will answer the same questions at the end of the project.

Your responses to this survey will remain anonymous. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Please use the last four digits of your Social Security Number as your personal identification number.

Part 1

Directions: Answer the following questions.

Date _____

Personal Identification Code _____

1. What is your age?

- A. 18-21
- B. 22-24
- C. 25-34
- D. 35-44
- E. 45-54
- F. 55-64
- G. 65 and over

2. Do you consider yourself a follower of Jesus?

- A. Yes
- B. No

3. How often do you personally read the Bible?

- A. daily
- B. several times per week
- C. once a week
- D. several times a month
- E. rarely
- F. never

4. What are the factors that keep you from regularly reading the Bible? (check all that apply)

- A. lack of time
- B. don't feel like it
- C. don't know how
- D. don't understand what you read
- E. lack motivation
- F. don't see the relevance for your life
- G. other _____

5. What translation of the Bible do you normally use to read the Bible on your own?

- A. King James Version (KJV)
- B. New King James Version (NKJV)
- C. New International Version (NIV)
- D. New Living Translation (NLT)
- E. English Standard Version (ESV)
- F. New American Standard Bible (NASB)
- G. Message (MSG)
- H. Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB)
- I. Christian Standard Bible (CSB)
- J. Other _____
- K. I Don't Know

Part 2

Directions: Answer the following statements by circling the appropriate answer. You should respond to each statement with your opinion using the following scale:

- SD = strongly disagree
- D = disagree
- DS = disagree somewhat
- AS = agree somewhat
- A = agree
- SA = strongly agree

1. The Bible is important and should be regularly read and studied.

SD D DS AS A SA

2. I have a regular time scheduled to read the Bible.

SD D DS AS A SA

3. I feel confident studying the Bible on my own.

SD D DS AS A SA

4. I could teach someone else how to study the Bible.

SD D DS AS A SA

5. I understand what it means for the Bible to be “inspired.”

SD D DS AS A SA

6. Context is very important to consider when interpreting the Bible.

SD D DS AS A SA

7. I understand the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament.

SD D DS AS A SA

8. The Bible should always be interpreted literally.

SD D DS AS A SA

9. I know the difference between eisegesis and exegesis.

SD D DS AS A SA

10. It is possible to interpret the Bible without bias.

SD D DS AS A SA

11. From creation to Jesus’ second coming, I could give a brief overview of the story of the Bible.

SD D DS AS A SA

12. I know where most of the books of the Bible fit into the overarching story of the Bible.

SD D DS AS A SA

13. When I read a passage of Scripture, I know where it fits into the overarching story of the Bible.

SD D DS AS A SA

14. The Bible is organized chronologically from creation to the new heavens and earth.

SD D DS AS A SA

15. Knowledge is the goal of Bible study.

SD D DS AS A SA

16. I am confused by the many Bible translations.

SD D DS AS A SA

17. I feel comfortable using a commentary to help me understand the Bible.

SD D DS AS A SA

18. I understand what the following phrase means: The Bible interprets the Bible.

SD D DS AS A SA

19. I am familiar with the various genres found within the Bible.

SD D DS AS A SA

20. I feel confident in reading the historical narratives in the Bible (Genesis, Kings, etc.).

SD D DS AS A SA

21. I feel confident in reading prophecy in the Bible (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, etc.).

SD D DS AS A SA

22. I feel confident in reading the Psalms.

SD D DS AS A SA

23. I feel confident in reading the wisdom literature (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, etc.)

SD D DS AS A SA

24. I feel confident in reading the gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John).

SD D DS AS A SA

25. I feel confident in reading the letters of the New Testament.

SD D DS AS A SA

26. I feel confident in reading the Old Testament.

SD D DS AS A SA

27. I feel confident in reading the New Testament.

SD D DS AS A SA

28. I am able study the Bible and apply what I learn to my own life.

SD D DS AS A SA

29. I know how we got the English Bible.

SD D DS AS A SA

30. Without the use of chapter or verse markers, I am able to determine the beginning and ending of a self-contained passage of Scripture to be studied.

SD D DS AS A SA

31. Without the help from a commentary or someone else, I feel confident in making my own observations about a passage.

SD D DS AS A SA

32. I feel confident in determining the single, central meaning of a passage of Scripture.

SD D DS AS A SA

33. I know what structural relationships are and can identify them in a passage.

SD D DS AS A SA

34. I have a love for the Word of God.

SD D DS AS A SA

APPENDIX 2

TEACHING SERIES RUBRIC

The following instrument was used by a committee of church leaders to evaluate the six-session teaching series. This committee evaluated the teaching series for biblical and theological faithfulness, clarity, relevance, and thoroughness.

TEACHING SERIES RUBRIC

Personal Identification Code _____ Session Number (1-6) _____

Hermeneutics Teaching Series Evaluation					
1 = insufficient; 2 = requires attention; 3 = sufficient; 4 = exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
This session is relevant to the interpretation of the Bible.					
The content in this session is biblically and theologically sound.					
This session contains points of practical application.					
This session is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material.					
This session is clearly presented.					

APPENDIX 3 TEACHING GUIDES

The following teaching guides provided the core material for the six hermeneutical training sessions. Handouts used for a particular session are included immediately following the teaching guide for that session.

Hermeneutical Training

Teaching Guides

Session 1

[Hand out “Session 1 Handout.”]

Before we talk about how to study the Bible, it is important to first ask the question: What is the Bible and how did we get it?

[Ask the group, “What is the Bible?”]

The Bible, at its most basic level, is a book. But, we know and believe that it is far more than just a book.

The Bible was written in three different languages, over a period of around 2,000 years, and on three different continents.¹ It was written by some forty or so different authors. Tim Chaffey writes:

Shepherds, kings, scholars, fishermen, prophets, a military general, a cupbearer, and a priest all penned portions of Scripture. They had different immediate purposes for writing, whether recording history, giving spiritual and moral instruction, or pronouncing judgment. They composed their works from palaces, prisons, the wilderness, and places of exile while writing history, laws, poetry, prophecy, and proverbs. In the process they laid bare their personal emotions, expressing anger, frustration, joy, and love.²

Although, the Bible had forty or so different human authors, there was always one author at work behind the scenes. That singular author was God Himself.

God, through His Spirit, was at work guiding and influencing the human authors, while still allowing them to maintain their own unique personalities and writing styles. This is a process called inspiration, with the end result that the human authors did not write anything contrary to what God desired.

With such diversity in authorship and writing contexts, one might expect a lack of coherence. However, because God is the original and ultimate author, the Bible has a beautiful unity and coherence. Because God is the ultimate author, the Bible is free from error. We call this inerrancy.

¹Tim Chaffey, “Unity of the Bible: Seven Compelling Evidences,” April 1, 2011, <https://answersingenesis.org/the-word-of-god/3-unity-of-the-bible/>.

²Ibid.

The original documents that the biblical authors wrote down are called autographs. The Old Testament was written primarily in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek.

These autographs were copied by hand and then circulated over the years. We do not have any of the original autographs.

Over time, these manuscripts were translated into other languages. The Septuagint was one of the first instances of God's inspired Word being translated into a different language. It was a translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek.

In the early centuries following Christ's death, the NT Greek manuscripts and Septuagint provided a Greek translation of the inspired books of the Bible. However, as Latin increasingly became the dominant language in the Western Roman Empire, there was a need for a Latin translation of God's Word. Although not the first Latin translation of the Bible, Jerome's Vulgate was finished around 405 AD. It was an important translation for its time and also helped to set a standard for later translators.

English Bible³

John Wycliffe, in the 1300s, translated the New Testament from the Latin Vulgate, rather than the Greek. Although he translated it quite literally, it was still a translation of a translation. With the help of others, Wycliffe was able to translate the entire Bible from the Vulgate, which was all done by hand since the printing press would not come for another 100 or so years. However, because of Ecclesial opposition of having the Bible translated in the common language of the people, it was dangerous to be in possession of this translation.

William Tyndale translated the New Testament from Greek, rather than Latin. In 1526, the first edition of Tyndale's New Testament was printed. He also translated much of the Old Testament from Hebrew into English before he died as a martyr. While being burned at the stake, he cried out, "Lord, open the king of England's eyes!" This was answered in 1537 when the first English Translation of the Bible was printed in England.

Other Translations were created between the time of Tyndale's Bible (1530s) and the 1611 King James Version. Some of these include the Cloverdale Bible (1534), the Matthew Bible (1537), the Taverner Bible (1539), the Great Bible (1539), the Geneva Bible (1560), the Bishops' Bible (1568), and the Roman Catholic Douai-Rheims Bible (1609). Most of these Bibles used Tyndale's work to varying degrees.

The King James Version of the Bible was published in 1611. It contains around 2/3 of the Tyndale Bible. In addition, the KJV New Testament contains about 90% of the wording

³Information on this "English Bible" section was taken from Arthur L. Farstad, *The New King James Version in the Great Tradition* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1989), 9-24.

of Tyndale's Bible. It also includes some phrases from some of the previous translations just mentioned above.

The KJV was commissioned by King James I of England. It was translated by a group of fifty-four Greek and Hebrew scholars. This group was subdivided into six smaller groups, with two groups stationed at the major learning centers in England (Oxford, Cambridge, and Westminster). Each of the six groups were tasked with translating a different portion of the Bible. Once finished, each group sent their finished translations to the other five groups for review. This took around three years to complete. Then, a final version was created and sent to London, where a committee made a final review and added headings and chapter-content notes. This took an additional year.

The 1611 version of the KJV is often called the "Authorized Version" even though "it was never formally authorized by any competent body either in church or state."

In 1769, a revision of the original 1611 KJV was completed, which included an update on archaic spelling and punctuation. This revision is what is found in almost all KJV Bibles today. It would be very challenging for most modern readers to read the original 1611 version.

[show example of 1611 version next to 1769 version]

As we move through this training seminar over the coming weeks, I want to provide you with some steps to follow when reading, interpreting, and applying the Word of God.

Step 1: Pray

The Bible is inspired and written by God. Therefore, the best way for us to start studying and understanding the Bible is to pray to the One who wrote it and is the subject thereof.

After praying, we must first determine which passage of the Bible is going to be studied. This is not always as easy as choosing a chapter and studying it.

Verses, chapters, and sections are later additions to the Bible and not a part of the original manuscripts. They are helpful but cannot always be trusted.

Some tips in choosing a passage:

- Look for changes in themes or topics
- Look for the completion of thoughts and arguments
- Stories should be looked at in their entirety
- Most Psalms are self-contained
- Some passages may be less than a chapter and some may extend beyond a single chapter

Step 1: Pray

Step 2: Determine the passage to study

For the remaining sessions, I want to focus on one passage for us to look at week after week. For this, I have chosen the story of Zacchaeus in the Gospel of Luke. Let's turn to Luke 19:1-10.

[Go to Luke 19, and do "Step 2" together as a group.]

Session 1 Handout

What is the Bible?

The Bible, at its most basic level, is a B_____. But, we know and believe that it is far more than just a B_____.

The Bible was written in _____ different languages, over a period of around _____ years, and on _____ different continents. It was written by some _____ or so different authors.

We believe the Bible ultimately had _____ author, G_____.

God, through His Spirit, was at work guiding and influencing the human authors, while still allowing them to maintain their own unique personalities and writing styles. This is a process called _____, with the end result that the human authors did not write anything contrary to what God desired.

With such diversity in authorship and writing contexts, one might expect a lack of coherence. However, because God is the original and ultimate author, the Bible has a beautiful unity and coherence. Because God is the ultimate author, the Bible is free from error. We call this _____.

The original documents that the Biblical authors wrote down are called _____. The Old Testament was written primarily in _____ and the New Testament in _____.

The first English Bibles were translated from L_____.

In 1611, the K_____ J_____ V_____ of the Bible was first published. It was commissioned by King James I of England.

The 1611 version of the KJV is often called the “A_____ V_____” even though it was never formally A_____ by any competent body either in church or state.

In 1769, a R_____ of the original 1611 KJV was completed, which included an update on archaic spelling and punctuation. This R_____ is what is found in almost all KJV Bibles today. It would be very challenging for most modern readers to read the original 1611 version.

Session 1 Handout Continued

Bible Study Steps (steps 2 of 7)

STEP 1: P _____

STEP 2: D _____ the P _____ to S _____

Some Tips:

- Look for changes in themes or topics
- Look for the completion of thoughts and arguments
- Stories should be looked at in their entirety
- Most Psalms are self-contained
- Some passages may be less than a chapter and some may extend beyond a single chapter

Session 2

In our first session I tried to answer the question: What is the Bible? It is important to first know the “what” before we get into the “how” of studying the Bible.

In this session, I want to start talking about the “how” to best understand and interpret the Bible. We will continue to use Luke 19:1-10 as our example.

One method that I have found to be very helpful is the Inductive Bible Study Method.⁴ This method focuses on three major areas:

- Observation – What does the passage say?
- Interpretation – What does the passage mean?
- Application – How does the passage apply to my life?

This session and the next two will focus on Observation. The fifth session will focus on Interpretation and the sixth on Application.

Bible is an anthology of smaller books that are grouped together, but it is not always chronological (happening in order of time). It is important to know where certain books fit into the biblical story, sometimes called the meta-narrative. I did not fully realize the grand story of the Bible until I read through the entire Bible after college.

Because the Bible is organized topically rather than chronologically, it is important to know where a particular passage fits into the greater biblical story.

[Hand out “Bible Timeline” chart]

This chart shows the major events in the biblical story and where the different books of the Bible fit into a particular time period in the larger narrative.

[Using the “Biblical Timeline,” talk through the basic biblical timeline and where the various groups of books fit into the overarching story. Focus on each of the major groupings, including Torah, History, Poetry, Prophets, Gospels, Acts, Letters, and Revelation]

[Highlight the different aspects of the plan of redemption, including creation, fall, people of God, Law, Jesus, church, Jesus’ second coming]

[Conduct an exercise where different passages are given and the group must determine where it fits in the biblical story and in redemptive history. Possible passages include:

- Exodus 20 – Ten Commandments
- 1 Samuel 17 – David and Goliath
- Isaiah 53 – Suffering Servant

⁴Robert A. Traina, *Methodical Bible Study* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980).

- Mark 1:1-8 – John the Baptist
- Acts 9 – Paul’s Conversion
- Galatians 5:16-26 – Fruit of the Spirit]

Let’s review our Bible Study steps and add another one.

Step 1: Pray

Step 2: Determine the passage to study

Step 3: Find where the passage fits into the biblical story and redemptive history

[Spend some time together as a group doing “Step 3” with Luke 19.]

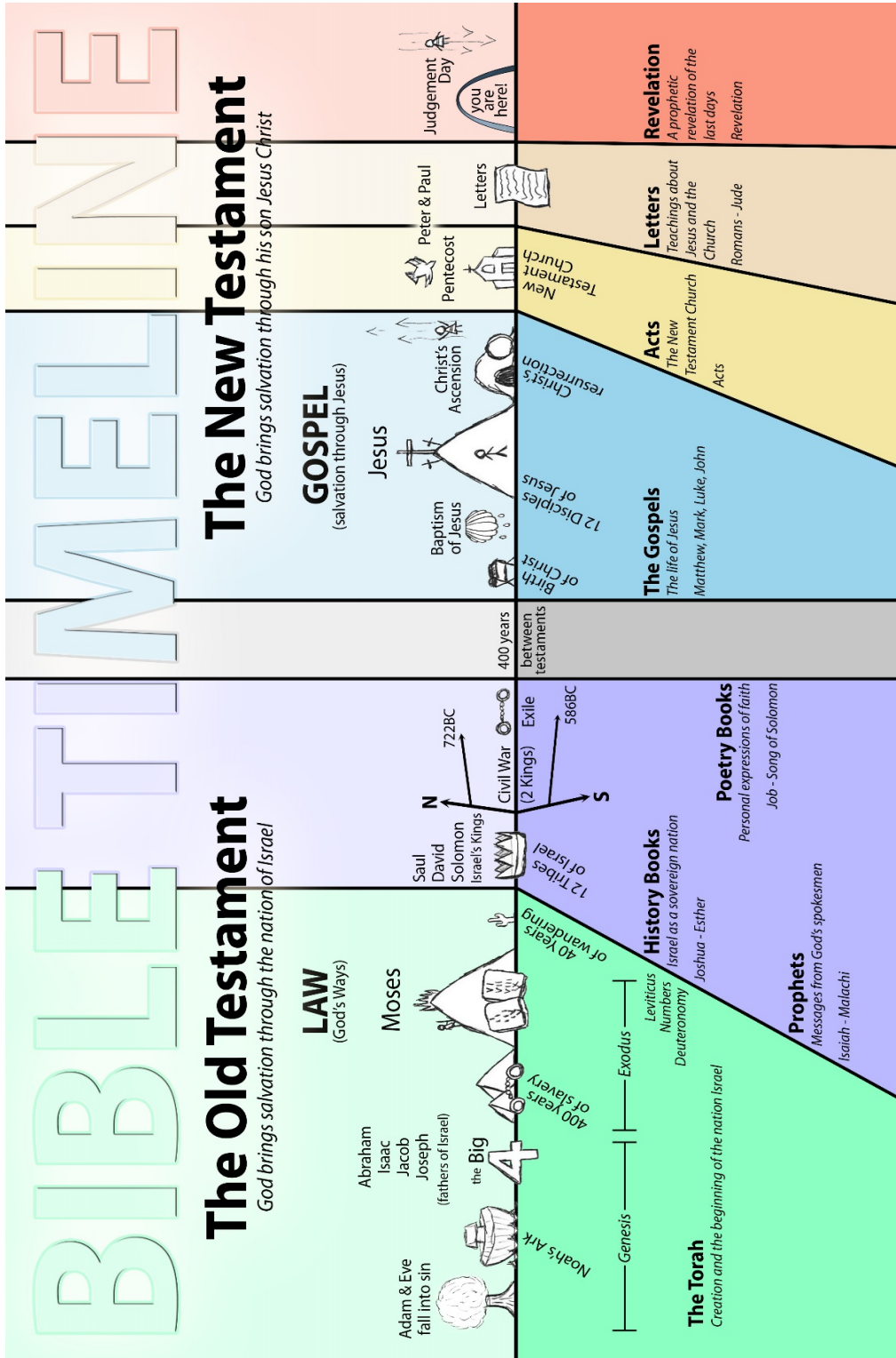


Figure A1. Bible Timeline

Session 3

In our last session, we talked about how each passage in the Bible falls somewhere in the bigger story of the Bible and redemptive history. This week we will start to look at the literary context of a passage of Scripture.

I want to spend some time today talking about genre. The Bible contains a wide variety of genres, or you could say “types of literature.”

Whether we realize it or not, we already encounter different types of literary genres in our daily lives, which we interpret and understand differently. We don’t read an instruction manual in the same way we read a love letter from a spouse. We don’t read a restaurant menu in the same way we read poetry or song lyrics.

Each of these types of genres in the Bible, and in our daily lives, have different sets of rules that must be used to read and understand them. This is similar to how different sports have different rules that must be used to play them.⁵ A person does not play basketball with the same rules as football and vice versa. Further, if one does not know the rules to a sport, they cannot properly play the sport or even watch it. The same is true for the way we read and understand different genres.

[Ask and response: “What are some of the genres in the Bible?”]

- Genealogy
- Historical Narrative
- Prophecy
- Proverbs
- Psalms/Songs
- Letters
- Laws
- Parables
- Apocalypse

Most books contain a single genre. However, there are books that contain more than one genre, but usually there is one primary, or controlling, genre. For example, the Gospel of Matthew is primarily historical narrative, but it also contains parables, prophecy, and even genealogy. Therefore, it is important to determine not only the genre of the passage in focus but also the book in which it is found.

Why is determining genre important? The misunderstanding of or the mislabeling the genre of a passage can lead to misinterpretations, which will ultimately lead to misapplication.

⁵Andreas J. Köstenberger and Richard D. Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 239.

[Ask the group if they can think of any examples where mislabeling the genre could lead to misinterpretation. Some examples include:

- Instead of labeling the Gospels as historical narrative, labeling them as mythology⁶
- Rather than labeling Jesus' command to pluck out one's own eye if it causes one to sin as hyperbole, labeling it as a literal command or law
- Viewing proverbs as definite promises rather than words of wisdom
- Viewing creation as allegory
- Viewing apocalypse as historical narrative]

[Genre determination practice. Read several passages of Scripture and ask the group to identify the genre. Examples include:

- Genesis 5:6-11 – Genealogy
- Psalm 148 – Psalm
- Joshua 6:15ff – Historical Narrative
- Matthew 23:24 – Hyperbole/Exaggeration
- Luke 10:30-35 – Parable
- James 1:1-4 – Letter/Epistle
- Revelation 12:3-6 – Apocalypse]

The Bible is a book that is full of words (over 780,000 words). Those words make up phrases, that make up sentences, that make up paragraphs, that make up chapters, that make up sections, that make up books, that make up two testaments, that make up the entire Bible. We must never forget that a single passage is part of a larger whole.

Every passage studied will fall within the context of a particular book. It is a smaller part of the larger whole of the book. Therefore, by zooming out of our passage and getting a better understanding the book in which the focus passage is found, will help us to better understand the passage. This includes the genre of the book and its location in the biblical story, but also its meaning, purpose, structure, themes, and much more.

I encourage you to read large chunks of Scripture and even whole books at a time, depending on the size of the book. When you do this, you will start to better understand the book, which will provide more context for the passage you are studying. This is true not only for books as a whole, but also the different sections that make up the book.

For example:

- The popular parable of the two men who built their houses on a rock and sand (Matthew 7:24-27) is the concluding passage in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. It is more than a fun story about two men. It is illustrating the difference between one who listens to Jesus' words and does them and one who doesn't. What

⁶Robert L. Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010), 188.

sayings is Jesus referring to? The context points backward to all of the Sermon on the Mount, which describes the ways of the Kingdom of God. The first four chapters introduce Jesus as the true King of Israel and show him proclaiming the nearness of the kingdom. Understanding the parable within its context within Matthew helps us to better understand it and its purpose. The wise man is the one who hears the words and ways of the Kingdom and obeys them in submission to King Jesus.

- The first three chapters of the letter of Ephesians focuses on our identity in Christ and all that Jesus has done to bring this about. Then, the letter transitions in chapter four to focus on practical implications and exhortations. The commands found within the second half are only possible because of the reality of the first half of the book. If we studied a passage in the second half, it would be essential for us to keep in mind the first half. The commands and exhortations must be understood and obeyed in the light of what Christ has done, is doing, and will do in our lives.
- The narratives about Daniel in the first half (chapters 1-6) of the book of Daniel reveal him to be a reliable receiver and interpreter of the visions in the second half of the book (chapters 7-12).

Step 1: Pray

Step 2: Determine the passage to study

Step 3: Find where the passage fits into the biblical story and redemptive history

Step 4: Determine the genre of the passage

[Spend some time as a group determining the genre of Luke 19.]

Session 4

In this session, we will continue to talk about Observation. We will zoom in and finally start to look at our selected passage of Luke 19.

Because of the influence of technology and other factors, our culture struggles with being able to focus on the same information for an extended period of time. We are trained to quickly take in small amounts of information, like tweets and news blurbs, without ever spending time to focus, reflect, or meditate on that information. Observation takes time, though. We must be patient.

Reading is a big part of observation. You cannot make observations about the passage without reading it. Read it over and over again. Reading aloud also helps.

What types of things should you be trying to observe? Or, what should you be looking for?

Ask fact finding questions.

- Who?
- What?
- When?
- Where?
- Why?
- How?

Look for words or phrases that jump out at you.

Look for Structural Relationships

[Distribute the “Structural Relationships” handout and walk the group through it]

Step 1: Pray

Step 2: Determine the passage to study

Step 3: Find where the passage fits into the biblical story and redemptive history

Step 4: Determine the genre of the passage

Step 5: Make observations about the passage

[Lead the group in making observations on the Luke 19 passage.]

Structural Relationships⁷

Literary Feature	Definition	Example
Introduction	The presentation of background information to prepare the reader for what follows	Luke 1:1-4
Repetition	When a word, phrase, or concept is used more than once in a passage	Romans 11:28-32
Comparison	Comparing of things in order to show similarities	John 20:21; 2 Timothy 2:3
Contrast	Comparing things in order to show differences	Psalm 1; Matthew 2:1-12
Question and Answer	When questions are used to frame an argument	Romans 6:1-2a
Conjunctions	Connecting words that direct the flow of a discourse	Ephesians 4:1
Climax	A high point built by a progression from the lesser to the greater	James 1:14-15; Acts 1:8 → 28:28-30
Particularization	The movement from general to particular	Joel 1:1 → rest of the book; Genesis 1-11 → 12-50
Generalization	The movement from particular to general	Hebrews 13:22; Judges 21:25
Causation	The movement from Cause to Effect. Words to look out for: therefore, so, then	Ephesians 4:1; Matthew 1:17
Substantiation	The movement from Effect to Cause. Words to look out for: because, for	Romans 1:16-17 → 1:18-11:36
Pivotal Point	A changing or turning (pivot) in which elements on each side of the point differ in some way	Acts 9:3-19; John 11:54
Summarization	The restating of the main points to sum up or to briefly restate the particular truths	Deuteronomy 1-4; Acts 7; Esther 9:24-28

⁷Adapted from Traina, *Methodical Bible Study*, 50-52 and Lindsay Olesberg, *The Bible Study Handbook: A Comprehensive Guide to an Essential Practice* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 126-27.

Session 5

In our previous sessions, we have been focused on Observation. In today's session, we will be focusing on Interpretation. There is a reason that we started with Observation, rather than just jumping right into Interpretation. We want our interpretation of passages to flow out of the passage (inductive) rather than reading our interpretation into the passage (deductive).

The goal of interpretation is to start moving toward a single, central meaning of the passage. Most passages will have a single meaning but with many application points.

We want to ask: What did this passage mean to its original audience?

Reminder: interpretation is done in cooperation with the Spirit of God, which is why prayer is Step 1. Prayer, however, must also continue throughout the process, especially at this point.

For some people, there is a temptation to jump straight into application before interpreting the passage, but that will come next. We must first interpret the passage.

Another temptation is to go straight to the commentaries. There is a place for commentaries, especially in trying to understand the socio-historical context, but resist going to them until you do your own observation and interpretation work.

In your interpretation, remember that the Bible is the triune God's revelation of himself. It is written for us, but we are not the focus. God is the focus. This will serve us well in the interpretation phase.

Use your work in the Observation phase to try to determine the central meaning of the passage for its original audience.

This is a good place to start referencing other Scriptures to help with interpretation. Since the Bible has one ultimate author in God, it is coherent and non-contradictory. For this reason, other Scriptures can help check your interpretive work, as well. Clearer passages can be used to help interpret more difficult passages.

Fellow brothers and sisters in Christ can also help check your interpretation. This includes those at the local church, pastors, and even global believers throughout history through commentaries.

Finally, it is important to ask: where is Jesus and/or the gospel in the passage?

Here are two questions (guardrails) to ask once you have determined the passage's meaning:⁸

1. Does the passage itself support this interpretation?
2. Would the original audience agree with this interpretation?
3. Does the rest of the Bible agree with this interpretation?

Step 1: Pray

Step 2: Determine the passage to study

Step 3: Find where the passage fits into the biblical story and redemptive history

Step 4: Determine the genre of the passage

Step 5: Make observations about the passage

Step 6: Determine the single, central meaning of the passage

[Using the observations previously made on Luke 19, walk the group through determining the passage's single, central meaning. See "Session 5 Handout."]

⁸Adapted from Olesberg, *Bible Study Handbook*, 159.

Session 5 Handout

Focus Areas

O _____

I _____

A _____

Bible Study Steps

Step 1: Pray

Step 2: Determine the passage to study

Step 3: Find where the passage fits into the Biblical Story and Redemptive History

Step 4: Determine the genre of the passage

Step 5: Make observations about the passage

Step 6: Determine the single, C _____ M _____ of the passage

Step 7: (NEXT WEEK)

Notes:

3 Guardrail Questions to Ask

1. Does the passage itself support this interpretation?
2. Would the original audience agree with this interpretation?
3. Does the rest of the Bible agree with this interpretation?

Central Meaning Options

- Zacchaeus was saved by his deeds (i.e. the giving of his money away)
- Zacchaeus was saved because he was a “son of Abraham”
- We should seek and save the lost
- We should be obedient to Jesus
- Zacchaeus’ life was changed by Jesus
- Zacchaeus was eventually saved because he was seeking Jesus

What is the Central Meaning of Luke 19?

Session 6

[Distribute “Session 6 Handout.”]

James 1:22 says that we must be “doers of the word, and not hearers only.” Our study of the Bible must always lead to application.

Interpretation cannot be the final step. However, we cannot properly apply a passage until we interpret it for its original audience.

Application is something that takes time and practice. What can be helpful is to have some categories to think through when doing application.

The first set of categories is Head, Heart, and Hand.

- Head – This deals with knowledge and belief. What do I need to start believing based on my interpretation? What belief do I need to alter?
- Heart – This deals with our emotions and feelings but also focuses on who we are as a person. God is not just concerned about what we know and what we do but also who we are. What character changes need to be made based on this passage?
- Hand – This deals with action and the things we do. What action steps do we need to take based on this passage. What do we need to start doing? Stop doing?

With head, heart, and hand in mind, you can then apply them to four different areas of life: God, Self, Relationships, and Mission.

[Distribute the “Application Questions” handout and talk the group through it.]

Step 1: Pray

Step 2: Determine the passage to study

Step 3: Find where the passage fits into the biblical story and redemptive history

Step 4: Determine the genre of the passage




Step 5: Make observations about the passage

Step 6: Determine the single, central meaning of the passage

Step 7: Apply the central meaning to your own life

[Using what was just learned about application, go to Luke 19 and walk the group through determining some application points from the passage.]

Session 6 Handout

Head		This deals with knowledge and belief. What do I need to start believing based on my interpretation? What belief do I need to alter?
Heart		This deals with our emotions and feelings but also focuses on who we are as a person. God is not just concerned about what we know and what we do, but also who we are. What character changes need to be made based on this passage?
Hand		This deals with action and the things we do. What action steps do we need to take based on this passage? What do we need to start doing? Stop doing?

Area of Life	Application Questions ⁹
God	What does this passage show about God's character and purposes? How does my view of God need to change in light of what I learn here? How would my relationship with God be different if I fully believed what this passage says about him?
Self	With which of the characters do I most identify? Why? Does that character provide an example to follow or avoid? How does this passage challenge me to repent, trust or act?
Relationships	What problem between people is addressed in this passage? In which of my relationships is that problem present? How does this passage call me to treat people differently?
Mission	What does this passage reveal about God's purposes in the world? How does it invite me to participate with what God is doing?

Bible Study Steps

- Step 1: Pray
- Step 2: Determine the passage to study
- Step 3: Find where the passage fits into the biblical story and redemptive history
- Step 4: Determine the genre of the passage
- Step 5: Make observations about the passage
- Step 6: Determine the single, main meaning of the passage

Step 7: A _____ the C _____ M _____ to your L _____

⁹Adapted from Olesburg, *Bible Study Handbook*, 166.

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ABSTRACT

EQUIPPING MEMBERS OF ANNVILLE BAPTIST CHURCH IN ANNVILLE, KENTUCKY, TO FAITHFULLY PRACTICE BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

David Earl Wilson, DMin.
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Robert L. Plummer

This project sought to equip members of Annville Baptist Church in Annville, Kentucky to faithfully practice biblical hermeneutics. Chapter 1 describes the ministry context of Annville Baptist, the rationale behind the project, and the goals of the project. Chapter 2 presents the exegesis of five passages of Scripture (2 Pet 3:15-16; 2 Tim 2:14-19; 2 Tim 3:16-17; Heb 4:11-13; Matt 28:16-20) that show the necessity for believers to have a biblical hermeneutic in their reading and study of God's Word. Chapter 3 highlights the hermeneutical significance of authorial intent, correlation, and application. Chapter 4 lays out the details of the project, focusing on the planning, implementation, and evaluation stages. Chapter 5 evaluates the success of the project based on the predetermined goals in chapter 1. The main purpose of this project is to equip believers to competently and confidently study and interpret the Word of God.

VITA

David Earl Wilson

EDUCATION

BA, Georgetown College, 2006

MABS, Asbury Theological Seminary, 2013

MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT

Youth Pastor, Emirates Baptist Church International, Dubai, U.A.E., 2007-2012

Pastoral Specialist, For All Mankind Movement, Abu Dhabi, U.A.E., 2014-2016

Associate Pastor, Annville Baptist Church, Annville, Kentucky, 2016-2018

Senior Pastor, Annville Baptist Church, Annville, Kentucky, 2018-