

Preview

Understanding the Bible

Storyline of the Bible

(Genesis)

Context Clues

"I am able to do all things through him who strengthens me."
-Philippians 4:13, CSB

Five Questions

Who? What? Where? When? Why?

Understanding the Bible

Unit of Meaning	Definition	Examples/Questions
Genre	The genre is the type or category of literature. Knowing the genre or type helps us know what to expect.	Prophecy, narrative, poetry or song, private history, genealogy, psalms, letters or epistles, etc.
Chapter	The chapter and book provide context, so you can understand the big picture.	What is the book about? Why was the book written? What is the chapter about? What is happening around the chapter? What happens before and after this chapter?
Paragraph	Paragraphs or the group of thought (a group of sentences) that are connected by a common idea or thought.	What is the main idea of the paragraph? What is the main theme or idea? How does this paragraph fit into the chapter? How does it relate to other parts of the chapter?
Verse	Each verse is a complete thought that can stand alone.	What is happening in the paragraph? How does this verse fit into the meaning of the paragraph?
Word	The smallest unit of meaning that makes up the verse or sentence.	What is happening in the paragraph? How does this word fit into the verse in this paragraph of thought?

LARGEST to smallest unit of meaning

Raising ROOTED DISCIPLES

Colossians 2:6-8



The Top-Down Approach

We tend to read the Bible upside-down. No, not literally, but literarily, from the bottom up. We often start making meaning of or understanding the Bible at the verse level. (Fun fact: Did you know that the chapter and verse numbers were not originally in the Bible? These were added much later.) Greg Kousser warns against this by saying, "Never read a Bible verse. Instead, always read a paragraph (at least) if you want to unlock the meaning of a passage. The key to the meaning of any verse comes from the paragraph, not just from the individual words." Fee & Stuart say we need to understand that the meaning of words and sentences "have full and clear meaning only in relation to preceding and succeeding sentences." (p. 31) We should gain meaning from the Bible using the "top-down approach," says Russell. This means starting with the largest unit of meaning first, the genre (or kind of text). After we understand the type of literature that it is, we gradually flow down to the smaller units of meaning like phrases and even the individual words.

There are several dangers to gaining meaning from a verse when it is taken out of its context (the larger units of meaning). Let's just focus on three dangers, although there are many more. First, we can produce a meaning that the author never intended, therefore believing something that isn't true. For example, we might believe that a promise given specifically to Joshua is meant to claim that we have a right to a permanent and confusion when "our promise" isn't fulfilled. Second, we can use a verse out of context to justify sin. A person might prefer to think he says, "I can do all things through a verse taken out of context," is hilariously sad. Third, all false teachers and cults (and even Satan himself) use this to come up with their own "scriptural" meaning to fit their worldview or desires. "I can teach them a truth." Reading the Bible and the temptations of the world show that in doing just this. The purpose of this page is to explore the top-down method or approach. I believe its key to understanding the Bible.

Colossians 2:6-8

Resources:

- "Playing with Fire: How the Bible Ignites Change in Your Soul" by Walt Russell
- "Reading Scripture with All Your Mind," a BIOLA University Lecture by Walt Russell
- "Never Read a Bible Verse: The Most Important Thing I could Teach You," Greg Kousser, www.str.org
- "How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth" by Gordon D. Fee & Douglas Stuart

Quick Tips for Bible Study

1. Always read more than one verse. Gain a better understanding of the context by zooming out. This way, you're reading a whole idea, not just part of one. It helps to do this using the "top-down" method as shared in this resource pack.
2. Use different versions or translations when you read the Bible. Some Bible versions are just easier to understand. Instead of just translating the word (like "flesh"), some translations spell out what the word actually means (our "sinful nature"). I think BOTH kinds of translations are good to have on hand. (Fee & Stuart)
3. These Bible study tools are great to have: 1- a good translation (or two) in study Bible format, 2- a Bible dictionary, and 3- access to commentaries. (Fee & Stuart)
4. Meet with other believers and wrestle with difficult Bible concepts that you don't understand. Dig into the context together. Don't be afraid to ask the hard questions.
5. There are two parts of studying God's Word: 1- gaining the meaning of the Bible based on the context and 2- applying the meaning by asking, "What does it mean for us now?" It's most definitely a balance of understanding the text *and* applying what it says. Both are needed, but they need to be done in the proper order. Start with studying the general book, chapter and/or passage and/or apply it to your life. We can be all too eager to want the Bible to mean something *for us*. In doing this, we sometimes completely skip over the original intent of the Holy Spirit in having the author write it. When we skip the context, we can also take something away from the text that the author never said, which can later go on to be teaching! We cannot make the Bible mean anything that pleases us or that give us glory. The Holy Spirit gets credit for it. (Fee & Stuart, *When Preaching Preaches*, p. 54) "Before we can apply anything through its meaning, we have to be *informed* of its content. Realistic understanding must precede transformation." (p. 54)
6. To piggy back on number 5 above while we may understand the meaning of the text better as we study or as we are in various seasons of our life, the Bible's original meaning **DOESN'T CHANGE**. Simply put, we don't get one meaning one day and a different meaning another day. I've heard too many Bible teachers say, "The Bible is alive. It can mean one thing one time you read it and something different the next time you read it." That's simply not true. You can come to understand it more deeply, but the original meaning doesn't change depending on my mood or circumstance.

Storyline of the Bible

Use this page with the "Storyline of the Bible" Chart on p. 17 of this file. Learners can also fill in the blank chart on p. 18 as they listen.

The Bible, which means "little books" in the Greek, is an anthology of 66 books. It was written by about three dozen authors, who, for the most part, did not know each other, over a time span of approximately 1500 years on three different continents! (Ryken) The cohesive story the Bible tells is nothing short of a miracle.

Understanding how a story or book of the Bible fits into God's larger story is key to understanding the Bible. God is above time, space, and matter. This means that before time, space, or any created matter, God is. All of history is HIS story. Throughout the entire storyline of the Bible, God is to be glorified. (Write "God is Glorified" in the box beside the vertical line on the left side of your page.)

In Genesis, God created the heavens and the earth. We watch Him work for six days to make everything we see. God said all He had made was good. It was perfect. Adam and Eve didn't have to worry about sickness or disease. They walked with God in the Garden of Eden. (Write "Creation" in the first blank beside the vertical line: Read Genesis 1-2.)

But what came next? Satan entered the world and the fall happened. Man listened to Satan's lies instead of listening what God said. Both Adam and Eve were separated from God (death) and fell from grace. (Write "Fall" in the second blank beside the vertical line.) Optional: Read Genesis 3.

God didn't need to "measure out" Israel 3000 years after the fall. He knew it would happen. God chose a man named Abraham, who later became Abraham, to be the father of the nation of Israel. (In the blank under "Fall," write "Israel.") Israel wasn't chosen because they were more righteous or more numerous than other nations. Quite the opposite, actually. The Bible says they were the fewest among all peoples and that they were "stiff-necked." (See Deuteronomy 7:6-9, 9:5-6) But God knew that from Abraham's line would come a Man who would redeem all the people of the world, Jesus.

Unfortunately, the Israelites were not a light to the nations that God desired for them to be. They often fell into sin, worshipping other gods and taking part in the detestable things God had forbidden them to do. (Write "Sin" in the first blank beside



Genre

Genre is a French word for "type" or "kind." When we think of music, we have genres such as classical, jazz, or pop. We also have genres or types of literature. The entire Bible is written in human genres that we can understand. This makes sense when we think about who God is. He isn't a hidden God that doesn't desire to be found. He wants us to know Him, and He's given us His Word so we can. The Bible includes genres such as prophecy, narratives, poetry or songs, proverbs, history, sermons, genealogy, parables, letters or epistles, laws, among others. As a matter of fact, both testaments of the Bible are organized by genre.

The kind of writing (genre) affects what we expect to read and how we read it. For example, if you picked up the newspaper and read this headline in the religion section: "The Saints were Killed by the Bears," you might think it was about missionaries who were attacked by bears. Oh my! But if this same title was in the sports section of the paper, you would expect to read the highlights of a football game. Same title. Different genre.

*Understanding Various Genres Through the Bible:

- **Old Testament Narratives (history)** show us how God worked (and is still working) throughout human history. They give us truths about God as well as give us positive and negative role models.
- **The Law** shows us what God thinks about discipline and how He wants us to be holy people.
- **The Psalms (songs, poetry)** model worship and prayer, as well as show us how to take our sin and our need for God seriously.
- **Proverbs** help us understand how to be wise and make wise choices.
- **The Prophets** warned the people to be obedient in their covenant relationship and gave them truths about future events. (Some of these "future events" are in our past, but some are yet to come.)
- **The Gospels (narratives, sermons, parables)** teach us who God is as we can see the visible image of the invisible God through Christ. Jesus showed us what it looked like to be obedient to God, even through His sufferings.
- **Acts (history)** shares the beginning of the church and what God is doing in the church age.
- **The Epistles (letters)** teach us how we are to fix our eyes on Him, live in relationship with other believers, all while being a light in the world.
- **Revelation (prophecy)** tells us what's to come at the end of the age and encourages us because God has the final say. Hallelujah!

Storyline of the Bible

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(Genesis)

1. Creation

2. Fall

3. Redemption

4. Restoration

(Revelation)

Sin

Exile

Return

Christ's

FIRST

Coming

Church Age

Christ's

SECOND

Coming

of Israel, people,
& creation

Colossians 2:6-8

Raising

**ROOTED
DISCIPLES**

Understanding the Bible

www.raisingrooteddisciples.com

Unit of Meaning	Definition	Examples/Questions
Genre	The genre is the type of literature or communication used by the writer. Knowing the genre or type helps us know what to expect.	prophecy, narratives, poetry or songs, proverbs, history, genealogy, parables, letters or epistles, laws, etc.
Context of the Chapter or Book	The chapter and book provide context so you can understand the big idea surrounding your paragraph and/or verse.	What is the book about? Why was the book written? What is the chapter about? What's happening around the chapter (what happens before and after the chapter)?
Context of the Paragraph	The paragraphs or the sections are the basic units of thought in the Bible (Russell). Paragraphs are often off to the side.	What is this section or paragraph about? What is the main theme or idea? How does this paragraph fit into the verses that come before and after?
Verse	Individual sentences that make up the paragraphs. <i>Verses are meant to be understood within the context of the paragraph, not as standalone units!</i>	What's happening in the paragraph? How does this verse fit into the meaning of the paragraph? <i>Colossians 2:6-8</i>
Word	The smaller units of meaning that make up the verse or sentence.	What's happening in the paragraph? How does this word fit into the verse in this paragraph of thought?

Raising
**ROOTED
DISCIPLES**

LARGEST to smallest unit of meaning

Begin with the largest unit of meaning, genre, and move to the smallest when you are trying to understand the Bible. This is the "top-down" approach.

How to Assemble the Visual

Optional: Print each page on colored cardstock. Read the read aloud page for each unit of meaning before using the ovals.

Each oval comes with a line at the very bottom. Learners should write the unit of meaning there. Begin with "Genre" as it's the largest unit of meaning.

Learners should write the information about each unit of meaning on the lines. This information can be found on the chart, on the read aloud pages, or on the individual oval pages that follow.

Cut out the oval and hole-punch the top. When the next smallest oval is completed, which is "context of the book or chapter," cut it out, hole punch it, and attach it ON TOP of the "genre" oval.

Be sure to hole-punch each oval with a hole punch or a metal ring clip.

This visual can serve as a helpful reminder on how to understand scripture. In the same way we read and compare other types of writings (the newspaper, books, article) we should understand scripture from the "top-down." (Russell, p. 65)

Instead of starting at the verse level to gain meaning, we need to understand how the verse fits inside the larger context of the paragraph, the chapter, the book, and the genre.

In this section, learners can write a definition of the unit of meaning, examples, cautions, or questions to ask.

genre

Raising Rooted Disciples

ROOTED DISCIPLES

Write information about "word" on these lines

word

verse

Context of the paragraph

Context of the book or chapter

genre

Colossians 2:6-8

Five Questions

Do your research about the book of the Bible by answering these five questions. Use the notes in your study Bible, a Bible dictionary, or consult a reputable Bible commentary.

Who? Who wrote the book? To whom was it written?

What?

What is the book mainly about? What genre(s) are used?

When?

When was the book written? How does it fit into the story line of the Bible?

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DISCIPLES**

Where?

Where was the author when writing the book? Where did the recipients live?

Why? Colossians 2:6-8

Why was the book written?

Context Clues

Context is important! Someone said it this way, "Context is king."

Read the following Bible verse, often taken out of context. Take a step back to investigate. Follow the clues to discover what it means.

"I am able to do all things through him who strengthens me."

~Philippians 4:13, CSB

Investigate:

Clue #1: Explore the Genre

- What genre is this Scripture? (Read Philippians 1-2.)
- Who is writing, and to whom is it written? (Read Philippians 1-2.)

Clue #2: Explore the Context

- Read all of Philippians and just Philippians 4:10-14.
- What does Paul say the church had done for him? (Reread verse 10, 14.)
- What does Paul say he has learned to do? (Reread verses 11-12.)

Clue #3: Explore the Verse IN Context

- How is Paul able to be content? (Reread verse 13.)
- Does this verse give us the license to do anything we want because we know Christ will strengthen us?

Conclude:

What do you conclude about this verse after considering its context?

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ROOTED DISCIPLES

Colossians 2:6-8



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