

HOW TO READ THE BIBLE
THE GOSPEL ARC



REDEEMER INSTITUTE



THE GOSPEL ARC

ROUND 1: LISTEN TO THE TEXT

LISTENING TOOLS

- Listen to God in and with the text.
- Luxuriate in the text.
- Slow, gentle reading.
- A spontaneous, even naïve engagement with the text.
- Learn to listen, think, feel, see, imagine, encounter, and ask questions of the text in the presence of God.
- Imagination and empathy come first, and analysis comes second.
- The Bible is a “stranger thing”. Admit it and be curious.



Listen for Yourself.

Soak your soul in the text.

Become an “Intelligent Mystic”.

Experience God with the text.

The Bible imparts its own energies.



Listen for the world of the text.

Enter the life of the text – its sights, sounds, scents.

The world of the text informs & ignites our ideas of the text – not the other way around.

Feel the force of the text.

Drink its drama.



Listen for others.

Become a “Physician of the soul”.

Listen on behalf of the multiform needs, conditions, and burdens of others.

For example, how would a divorced single parent, irreligious person, someone struggling with same sex desires, or people in a pandemic hear this text?

“Shut up and listen!” All good Bible reading begins this way.



THE GOSPEL ARC

ROUND 2: UNDERSTAND THE TEXT



Create a Textual Map.

Itemize main and supporting ideas.



With a Running Commentary.

Answer significant questions in the text.

Freshly squeeze meaning from the text.

RUNNING COMMENTARY TOOLS

- Words.
- Ideas.
- Images.
- Repetitions.
- Connector words.
- Quotes & allusions from other places in the Bible.
- Characters & dialogue.
- Scenes & places.
- Actions & events.
- Historical background.
- The unexpected, surprising, shocking, confusing, out of place details, and questions that provoke you in the text – great place for the deepest meaning to hide.

Example From Romans 10.1-4

TEXTUAL MAP

- Israel is not achieving salvation or righteousness – v1.
 - Paul's passion is that they do.
 - Paul's prayer is that they do.
- Israel struggles for righteousness – v2-3.
 - before God and His law – v2.
 - without understanding – v2.
 - without understanding the righteousness of God – v3.
 - by seeking to establish a righteousness from human effort – v3.
 - by not submitting to the active power of the righteousness from God – v3.
- Christ is the end of the struggle for righteousness – v4.
 - that is Christ has achieved law-righteousness.
 - that is the end of the struggle for righteousness is over.
 - that is for all who believe.

RUNNING COMMENTARY

- Verse 1 summarizes the substitutionary-shaped heart of Paul from Romans 9.1-3.
- The word “for” in verse 2 is a connector word explaining why Israel is not achieving salvation or righteousness.
- How is Christ “the end of the law for righteousness”? The word “end” has three possible meanings:
 - (1) termination – Christ's person and work brings an end to the law in some way.
 - (2) goal – Christ's person and work fulfills the law in some way.
 - (3) result – Christ's person and work produces the effects or outcome of the law in some way.

The background is a grayscale photograph of two hands holding open books. A thin, vertical red line is positioned to the left of the text. The text is white and centered over the books.

THE GOSPEL ARC

ROUND 3: DISCOVER THE TEXT'S
MESSAGE



A Human Condition of the text.

A particular aspect of the human condition addressed by the text.

What is the God-shaped or God-sized hole in the soul in the text?

What is...



The Big Idea of the text.

The primary powerful thing the text is *saying*.

What is the dominant thought, idea, image, story, need, 'aha', subject, theme, or content in the text?

This text is about _____.

The "Speech" in Speech-Act.



The Applied Big Idea of the text.

The primary powerful thing the text is *doing* with what it is saying.

What is the dominant 'so what?', 'why should I care?', force, function, movement, intention, action, practical difference, or transformative possibility of the Big Idea?

This text is doing _____.

The "Act" in Speech-Act.

Record in a sticky statement or vivid image.



THE GOSPEL ARC

ROUND 4: DISCOVER THE TEXTUAL
JESUS



Pole 1.

The original historical meaning of the text.

The “true” but not “exhaustive” meaning of the text.

Read forward.

Follow the *Gospel Threads* in the text (the human condition, Big Idea, and Applied Big Idea) to Jesus & His Salvation (Pole 2).



Pole 2.

The ultimate overall subject and meaning of all of Scripture – Jesus & His Salvation.

The final, full, complete, exhaustive, integrated, redemptive-historical, or canonical meaning of the text.

Read backwards.

Look thru the *Gospel Lens* of Jesus & His Salvation to see more in the text or to find the surplus of meaning already divinely embedded in the text.

The Biblical text has not been properly read, understood, interpreted, applied, or communicated until the original meaning (Pole 1) has been integrated with the final and full revelation of God, the Word Himself (Jn 1.1) Jesus Christ (Pole 2).

READ FORWARD TOOL (GOSPEL THREADS)

- Attribute or action of God in the text.
- The grace at work in the text.
- Theme or idea in the text.
- Image in the text.
- Redemptive & non-redemptive people, places, institutions, experiences, hearts, actions, words, works in the text.
- Type or pattern in the text.

READ FORWARD TOOL (GOSPEL THREADS)

- Story (individual or community) in the text.
- Human condition, need, burden in the text.
- Human longing in the text.
- Sin and its effects in the text.
- Functional gods, saviors, salvations, trusts in the text.
- Law, imperative, or Biblical ethic in the text.
- Instinct or “Sixth Sense” in the text.

READ BACKWARDS TOOL (GOSPEL LENS)

- **Look thru the Gospel Lens (Pole 2) to see how Jesus & His salvation addresses, accomplishes, solves, resolves, satisfies, fulfills, completes, escalates, exhausts, interprets, embodies, is the ultimate source of the:**
 - Attribute or action of God in the text.
 - Grace at work in the text.
 - Theme or idea in the text.
 - Image in the text.
 - Redemptive & non-redemptive people, places, institutions, experiences, hearts, actions, words, works in the text.

READ BACKWARDS TOOL (GOSPEL LENS)

- Story (of an individual or community) in the text.
- Human condition, need, burden in the text.
- Human longing in the text.
- Sin and its effects in the text.
- Functional gods, saviors, salvations, trusts in the text.
- Law, imperative, or Biblical ethic in the text.
- Instinct or “Sixth Sense” in the text.
- Big Idea in the text.
- Applied Big Idea in the text.



Craft a specific Textual Jesus.

One specific aspect of Jesus & His salvation in the text.

That is clear to the mind and real to the heart.



To speak you back to life again.

To experience by faith.

To reach & renew.

To connect with God, others, & mission.



And others...

relationships, homes, churches...

schools, ballfields, communities...

new friends, workplaces, the culture...

the world.

Record in a sticky statement or vivid image.



THE GOSPEL ARC

ROUND 5: PICK A POINT AND BUILD
EVERYTHING AROUND IT

PICK A POINT!

HOW DO YOU **PICK A POINT?**

YOU'VE DONE THE HARD WORK

- #1 The human condition in the text.
- #2 The Big Idea of the text.
- #3 The Applied Big Idea of the text.
- #4 The Textual Jesus in the text.

HOW DO YOU PICK A POINT?

JUST ADD ONE MORE

- #5 What is the “Local Listening Need”?
 - Pandemic?
 - Cultural chaos and controversy?
 - Devastating flood? Loss? Death?
 - Relational conflict and wreckage?
 - Some sin and misery?
 - Specific life event?
 - Some church, un-church, over-church, de-church need? burden?
 - Etc....

NOW YOU ARE READY TO
PICK A POINT



Blend.

Blend the *human condition*, *Big Idea*, *Applied Big Idea*, *Textual Jesus*, and *Local Listening Need* into a:

1. Sticky Statement.
2. Vivid Image.
3. Or Suspenseful Question.

This is your Point.

Arrange your “interpretive tracks” in an engaging way to best deliver your Point.

This is your Map.



Lead with ONE.

Lead with THE ONE that rules them all.

This is your POINT.

Arrange your other “interpretive tracks” in key supporting roles as needed to best shine the light on your Point.

This is your Map.



Tell the story.

“This is a story about ____.”

This is your Point.

Tell the story using your “interpretive tracks”.

This is your Map.

Pick a Point! Then build everything around it.

PRACTICAL MAP TOOL

- **Expand (unpack) THE POINT** with supporting ideas.

who? what? when? where? why? how?

in. to. by. for. that. or. that is.

- **Answer THE POINT** with supporting ideas.

answer #1. #2. #3. etc.

- **Contrast THE POINT** with supporting ideas.

not this. not that. but.

- **Give some implications (applications) of THE POINT** with supporting ideas.

so what? why care?

therefore #1. #2. #2.

- **Connect personally to THE POINT** with supporting ideas.

so what? why care?

Help #1. #2. #3. etc.

address local listening need.

answer “How does _____ hear this text?”

case studies. personal stories. apologetic side-bar. church history bonus.

- **DO NOT ADD more POINTS.**

no “and”.

no lists.