

Step 1: Grasping the Text in their Town - What did the text mean to the original audience?

Repetition of Words – Contrasts – Comparisons – Similarities – Lists – Cause and Effect – Figures of Speech – Conjunctions – Verbs – Pronouns – General and Specific – Questions and Answers – Dialogue – Purpose/Result Statements – Means – Prepositions – Conditional Clauses – Action/Roles of People and the Actions/Roles of God – Emotional Terms – Tone – Connection between paragraphs and sentences

Step 2: Measuring the Width of the River to Cross - What are the differences and similarities between the original audience and us?

**A text cannot mean what it never meant.

**When it comes to meaning, context is critical.

a. Historical-Cultural Context: The Biblical Writer – The Biblical Audience – Geography/Topography – Economic issues – Political Issues

Remember the WHY of biblical interpretation: To know and love and glorify God and be changed as we apply it to our lives. Don't merely become a walking database of ancient facts and trivia.

b. Presuppositional context: All our preconceived notions and understandings that we bring to the text, which have been formulated, both consciously and subconsciously, before we study the text in detail.

We do not need to eliminate our preunderstandings, but we do need to submit them to Scripture and be willing to change them considering studying the Scriptures. Being aware of the specifics of some of our preunderstandings will help us do this.

c. Literary Context: The immediate textual surroundings of a passage, including the literary genre, style, and the words, sentences, and paragraphs that frame the passage. It guides interpretation by showing how a particular verse or section fits within its broader text to reveal the author's intended meaning.

Simile – Metaphor – Hyperbole – Irony – Euphemism – Dysphemism – Anthropomorphisms – Personification – Parable – etc.

Step 3: Crossing the Theological Bridge - What is the theological principle in this text?

This is usually the most challenging step. In it you are looking for the theological principle or principles that are reflected in the meaning of the text you identified in step one.

What is theology?

Theology is the disciplined study of God grounded entirely in Scripture and oriented toward worship, obedience, and transformation. The task of theology is knowing God through His revealed Word and applying that knowledge to life in faithful submission to Christ.

Theology must be grounded in Scripture: Theology begins and ends with divine revelation as recorded in Scripture. Jesus Christ established Christianity a religion of biblical authority and that

submission to Christ necessarily meant submission to the authority of Scripture (John 5:39; 2 Timothy 3:16–17).

Theology as Knowing God: Theology is the study of God leading to the knowledge of God.

Jeremiah 9:23- 24 Let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me.

Theology, then, is not mere speculation about divine things but personal engagement with God through Christ (John 17:3).

Theology as Devotion and Obedience: Theology must be a form of worship (Romans 11:33–36) and it should lead believers to holiness and obedience, echoing *James 1:22 Be doers of the word, and not hearers only.*

Theology as Covenant and Christ-Centered: All Scripture and theology must be read through the lens of God's covenant purposes fulfilled in Christ (Luke 24:27; Hebrews 8:6–10). The Old and New Testaments reveal God's one plan of redemption and that sound theology reflects this unity in Christ's person and work.

- Remember that the theological principle of the text is part of the meaning.
- Your task is not to create the meaning but to discover the meaning intended by God through the author.
- As God gives specific expressions to specific biblical audiences, He is also giving universal theological teachings for all His people through the same text.
- Try to identify any similarities between the situation of the biblical audience and our situation.
- The theological principle is most likely the same as the theological message or the main theological point of the passage.
- We will use this theological principle as the principlizing bridge by which we can cross over the river of differences.
 - The principle should be reflected in the text.
 - The principle should be timeless and not tied to a specific situation.
 - The principle should not be culturally bound.
 - The principle should correspond with the rest of the teaching of Scripture.
 - The principle should be relevant to both the biblical and the contemporary audience (us).

Step 4: Consult the Biblical Map - How does the theological principle fit with the rest of the Bible?

- Reflect back and forth between the text and teachings of the rest of Scripture.
- Is your principle consistent to the rest of Scripture?
- Do other portions of Scripture add insight or qualification to the principle?
- If your principle is valid then it should “fit” or “correlate” with the rest of the Bible.
- If studying the Old Testament, in what way(s) does the fact that we live in the church age (New Testament) impact the theological principle?
- We affirm that we are New Testament Christians, and we will interpret the Old Testament from that vantage point.

Step 5: Grasping the Text in our Town - How should individual Christians today apply the theological principle in their lives?

- Apply the theological principle to the specific situation of individual Christians in church today.
- Do not leave the meaning of the text stranded in an abstract theological principle.

- How does this apply in real-life situations today?
- While for each passage there will usually be only a few (and often only one) theological principles relevant for all Christians today, there will be numerous applicational possibilities.
- Each of us will grasp and apply the same theological principle in slightly different ways depending upon our current life situation and where we are in our relationship with God.

Practice: Joshua 6

Differences: Time period, covenant, culture language, physical warfare/destruction of the wall/city, physical city/wall

Similarities: God's covenant people, a command from God, obedience from the people, God keeps His word to them, character of God

Specific Theological Principles:

1. God can bring down the city walls with no warfare
2. Israel is to demonstrate God's holiness by not touching or looting the devoted things.
3. God shows mercy to Rahab the prostitute for helping the spies and fearing Him.
4. God makes good on His promise to give them the city.
5. Israel obeyed His command as He fulfilled His promises to them.

General Theological Principles:

1. God can do the impossible (Eph 4) for His people.
2. God's people are to live holy lives separate from the world (1 Peter 1:15-16).
3. God shows mercy to those who don't deserve it but recognize their need.
4. God makes good on all His promises to His people
5. God's people should obey His commands as He fulfills His promises to them.

Practice Deuteronomy 6:4-9: Often general principles are easier to pull out than others.

Differences: Old covenant, situation in the desert about to enter promised land, culture, language,

Similarities: God's covenant people, character of God, commands from God

Specific Theological Principles:

1. God is one
2. God's people are called to love Him with everything they are/have
3. God's Words in Deuteronomy are to influence the people in all things, and they are to incorporate them into their daily lives, including teaching them to their children. God's Word must be in a prominent place in the home and life of people.

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Practice: Deuteronomy 6:10-15

Specific Theological Principles:

1. When God fulfills His promises to bless Israel in the land, He commands them not to forget Him and not to live in pride as if they had earned and deserved all these blessings.
2. God's people are not to worship other gods of the nations around them, because He is a jealous God.
3. Idolatry and sin will result in destruction and removal from the land.

General Theological Principles:

1. God's people are to live in humility, accepting all blessings from God in the knowledge that He is the one who graciously gives them.
2. God's people are not to worship or pursue the popular gods or trends of the surrounding culture because He is a jealous God.
3. Idolatry and sin will result in consequences.

Word Study Example #1:

1. Use the STEP Bible program as your concordance to answer the following questions about Acts 1:8.
 - a) Write out the English transliterated form of the word translated power in Acts 1:8: dunamis
 - b) How many times does the word occur in the New Testament? 119
 - c) List the passages in Acts that translate the word as "power": 8
 - d) List the passages and acts that translate this word as "miracles" or "mighty works": 8:13; 19:11
2. Use the concordance to answer the following questions about Exodus 4:21.
 - a) Write out the English transliterated form of the word translated power in Exodus 4:21. Yad
 - b) How many times does this word occur in the Old Testament? 521
 - c) List the passages in Exodus that translate the word as power. 14:31
3. The ESV uses the word "judge" in 1 Corinthians 4:3; 5:12; and Revelation 20:4. Are these the same Greek words? Write out the English transliteration of the three Greek words translated as "judge" in these three passages. Anakrino – krino – krima
4. Use the concordance to answer the following questions about the word "hope":
 - a) Paul uses the word "hope" in Romans 4:18. How many times total does Paul use this same Greek word in his letters? (Do not assume that Paul wrote Hebrews). Elpis 30/53x total
 - b) How many times in the word used in Matthew, Mark and Luke? 0
 - c) Is this the same word for "hope" that is used in 1 Corinthians 13:13? Yes

Word Study Example #2:

You were studying the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) and the word “anxious” in Matthew 6:25 catches your eye. You decide to study the word “anxious” more in depth. Use the STEP Bible program as your concordance to answer the following questions:

1. What is the Greek word for “anxious” in Matthew 6:25? Write out the word and transliterated English form: merimnao

2. How many times is it used in the New Testament? 19x

3. Do more concordance work to decide what the word “anxious” could mean in the New Testament. Make a list of the meanings provided in the box to the right in the STEP Bible program. This gives you a good sense of what the word could mean. But you need to look a bit more closely at the context. There is an art to identifying a word’s range of meaning. Keep working at it and discover how the word is used in each context as a way of getting at its range of meaning:

- to worry, have anxiety, be concerned
- to be anxious, or solicitous, Phil. 4:6; to expend careful thought, Mt. 6:27, 28, 31, 34a;
- 10:19;
- Lk. 10:41; 12:11, 22, 25, 26;
- to concern one's self, Mt. 6:25; 1Cor. 12:25; to have the thoughts occupied with, be anxious to 1Cor. 7:32, 33, 34;
- to feel an interest in, Phil. 2:20*

a) What things are we told not to be anxious about in Matthew 6:25, 27, 28, 31, 34; Luke 12:22, 25, 26? Life, eat, drink, body, clothes, lifespan, tomorrow, how to defend yourself

b) What is the context of Matthew 10:19 and Luke 12:11? Is this a different kind of “anxiety” than that prohibited in Matthew 6:25? persecution

c) What stands in contrast to Martha's anxiety Luke 10:41? How does this contrast help to define some Martha's anxiety? Martha was anxious about serving and her sister not.

d) In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul uses the word four times to describe the context of this usage. Anxious for the Lord single; anxious about the world married

e) What do the context of 1 Corinthians 12 and Philippians 2 have in common? Both center on unity within the body of Christ through selfless service and humility.

f) What kind of “anxiety” is Paul describing in Philippians 4? How do you know? An anxiety that comes from not trusting God