

Bible Study Tip 4 – How to Read the Book – Paragraphs (from Chapter 4 Grasping God’s Word – Duvall)

We have learned how to make observations at the sentence level . Now we will continue to develop our skill in making observations, but at the paragraph level! Keep observing! Keep looking! For inspiration, the “Story of the Fish” has been uploaded to the GCT app and it can also be referenced here:

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/agassiz-and-the-fish/>

Things to Look for in Paragraphs

1. **General and specific** – Sometimes an author will introduce an idea with a general statement, overview, or summary of the main idea. The author will then follow this with the specifics of this idea. An example of this is found in Galatians 5:16-23 when Paul writes “walk by the Spirit’ and then goes on to explain what this looks like. Romans 12:9-13 is another example of this. Or in I Cor 13:1-13, we see the general statement come at the end instead of the beginning.
2. **Questions and Answers** – Sometimes an author raises a rhetorical question and then answers it. Paul does this several times in Romans (Rom 6:1-2; Rom 3:1-2, 5-6, 9, 27-31). Mark also uses this in Mark 2:7; 2:16; 2:18; 2:24; 3:4.
3. **Dialogue** – Dialogue, at first glance may seem too obvious to worry about. But do not simply read past the point of the dialogue. Who is speaking? What is the setting? Are there others around listening? Is it an argument? A discussion? A Lecture? Friendly chat? What is the point of the dialogue? The stories of the Bible contain a multitude of wonderful dialogues.
4. **Purpose/Results Statements** – Always identify purpose result statements. These are phrases that describe the reason, the result, or the consequence of some action. They are frequently introduced by result-oriented conjunctions such as *that, in order that, so that...* Examples include Eph 2:10; John 15:16; Deut 6:3; Ps 119:11.
5. **Means (By which something is accomplished)** – When an action, result or a purpose is stated, look for the ‘means’ that brings about that action, result, or purpose. How is the action or result brought into reality? An example is Ps 119:9.
6. **Conditional Clauses** – Identify all conditional clauses. These are clauses that present the conditions whereby some action, consequence, reality, or result will happen. Usually the conditions will be introduced by the conjunction “if” And the action or result introduced by “then.” Examples of this are in I John 1:6; 2 Cor 5:17; Deut 28:1.
7. **The Actions/Roles of God and People** – Identify the actions of God and the roles of people as separate. Ask the questions: What does God (further identify as Father, Son, Holy Spirit) do in this passage? What do people do in this passage? Is there any kind of connection between what God does and what people do in the passage? An example: Eph 5:1-2.

8. **Emotional Terms** – The Bible is a book about relationships, primarily relationships between God and people. Emotions play a big role in relationships. Emotions are often overlooked in Biblical interpretation. Read Gal 4: 12-16 or Jer 3:19-20 and note the emotional connotations in these passages.
9. **Tone** – Try to identify the tone of the passage. This will often be closely related to the identification of emotional terms. However, once you identify emotional terms, continue on to determine the overall tone of the passage. Is it one of anger? A scolding tone? A sorrowful tone? Or a tone of unimpassioned explanation? For example, contrast the tone of Col 3:1-4 and Gal 3: 1-4. One is calm and explanatory, and the other is scolding or chiding. What is Jesus' tone in Matthew 23:33-35?

According to Howard Hendricks, **"A pen is a mental crowbar."** It is important that you mark these observations or write them down. You can mark and annotate any way that is best for you. Keep in mind that we are not trying to interpret the text yet. The interpretation phase comes later. The first phase – and a critical one – is that of observing or seeing. We are merely asking, "What does the text say?"

Here are two examples Deut 6:1-3 and Col 1:3-8. **This week practice doing the same with Mathew Chapter 5.**

