

Grasping God's Word

The Basics of the Journey

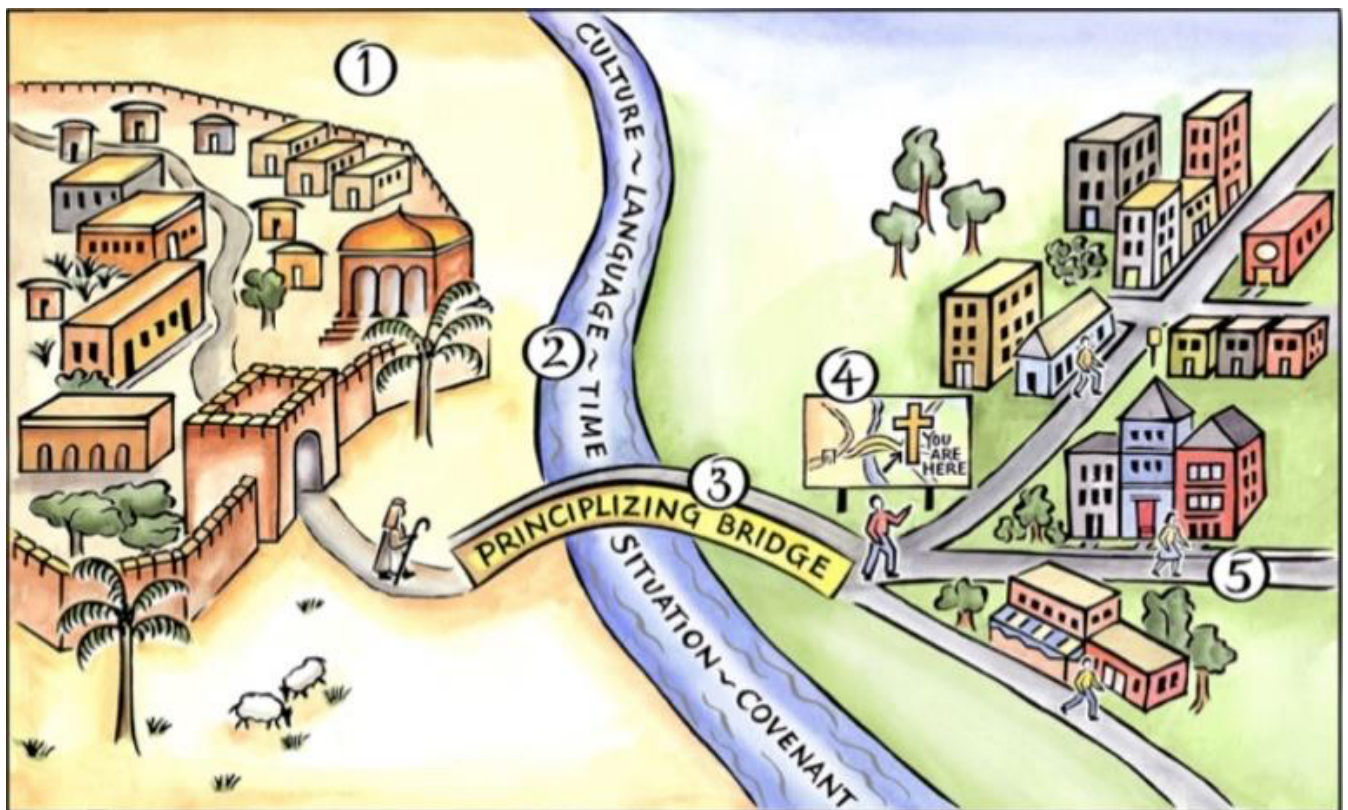
- This morning, we will be looking at **Grasping God's Word: The Basics of the Journey**.
- Before we jump into **The Basics of the Journey**, let us look at a verse of Scripture that is often taken out of context.

Matthew 18:20

For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

- This verse is often quoted to remind everyone that group prayer is especially effective.
- **However, is that what it is saying? Is this saying that Jesus is only with us when we are with other Christians?**
- Maybe after following **The Basics of the Journey** that I am about to teach you, you'll be able to answer these better.

5 Steps of the Interpretive Journey



Step 1: Grasp the text in their town.

What did the text mean to the original audience?

- The first part of Step 1 is to read the text carefully and observe it. Try to see as much as possible in the text.
- Look at the text's grammar and all of the significant words that it contains.

- Also look at the historical and literary contexts of the passage. Look at how the passage relates to the verses before it and after it.
- After doing all of this, you will have a good idea of what the text meant to the original audience.
- Resources you will use in throughout the steps: Study Bible(s), commentaries, concordance, dictionary...

Step 2: Measure the width of the river to cross.

What are the differences between the biblical audience and us?

- We today are separated from the biblical audience by differences in culture, language, situation, time, and covenant.
- These differences form a river that hinders us from moving straight from meaning in their context to meaning in ours.
- However, the width of the river varies from passage to passage.
- In this step, you will take a good look at the river and determine just how wide it is for the passage you are studying.
- You are looking for significant differences between your situation today and the situation of the biblical audience.
- If you are studying the OT, be sure to identify those significant theological differences that came as a result of the life and work of Jesus.

Step 3: Cross the principlizing bridge.

What is the theological principle in this text?

- This is probably the most challenging step because you are looking for the theological principle or principles that are reflected in the meaning of the text.
- Your task is not to create the meaning, but to discover the meaning intended by the author.
- As God gives specific expressions to specific biblical audiences, he is also giving universal theological teachings for all his people through these same texts.
- In order to determine the theological principle, you will have to do back to the differences you identified in steps 1-2.
- You will then need to identify similarities between the situation of the biblical audience and ours today.
- Once you have looked at the differences and similarities, go back to step 1 where you uncovered the meaning for the biblical audience and try to identify a broader theological principle that is reflected in the text.
- Be sure that this principle relates to the similarities between us and the biblical audience as well.
- It is this principle that you uncover, that you will use as a bridge to cross the river of barriers.

Step 4: Consult the biblical map.

How does our theological principle fit with the rest of the Bible?

- During this step you will reflect back and forth between the text and the teachings of the rest of Scripture.
- You will ask, is the principle consistent with the rest of Scripture? Do other portions of Scripture add insight or qualification to the principle?
- The criteria for formulating the theological principle are the following:
 - The principle should be reflected in the text.
 - The principle should be timeless and not tied to a specific situation.

- o The principle should not be culturally bound.
- o The principle should correspond to the teaching of the rest of Scripture.
- o The principle should be relevant to both the biblical and the contemporary audience.

Step 5: Grasp the text in our town.

How should individual Christians today live out the theological principles?

- This is the step where we apply the theological principle to the specific situation of individual Christians today.
- We cannot leave the meaning of the text stranded in an abstract theological principle; we must grapple with how we should respond to that principle in our town.
- Usually, there will only be a few (and often only one) theological principles in a passage relevant to Christians today.
- However, there will be numerous possible applications because Christians today find themselves in many different specific situations.
- Each of us will grasp and apply the same theological principle in slightly different ways, depending on our current life situations and where we are in our relationship with God.
- The issue is that people jump right to this step and they do not do the necessary work in steps 1-4 to arrive here.
- This causes people to take the Scripture out of context in many events and leads to erroneous applications of God's Word to their lives.
- When people do this, it is like using a GPS that is linked to another person's position. It just won't work.

Matthew 18:15-20

¹⁵ Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

¹⁶ But if he will not hear *thee*, *then* take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

¹⁷ And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell *it* unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

¹⁸ Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

¹⁹ Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.

²⁰ For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

- **V.20** should not be read outside of the context of the entire passage of **Matthew 18:15-20**.
- Here Jesus is not talking about 'God's presence,' but about His support and blessing for the "testimony of two or three witnesses" that is mentioned in **v.16**.
- It makes no sense to think this means that God is only present when we have two or three people gathered, however it makes perfect sense that Jesus said this to give assurance to the people that if they followed His model of discipline that God would support them and bless them.
- This is just one of many examples of Scripture being taken out of context and applied incorrectly and it is why we must teach **Grasping God's Word**.