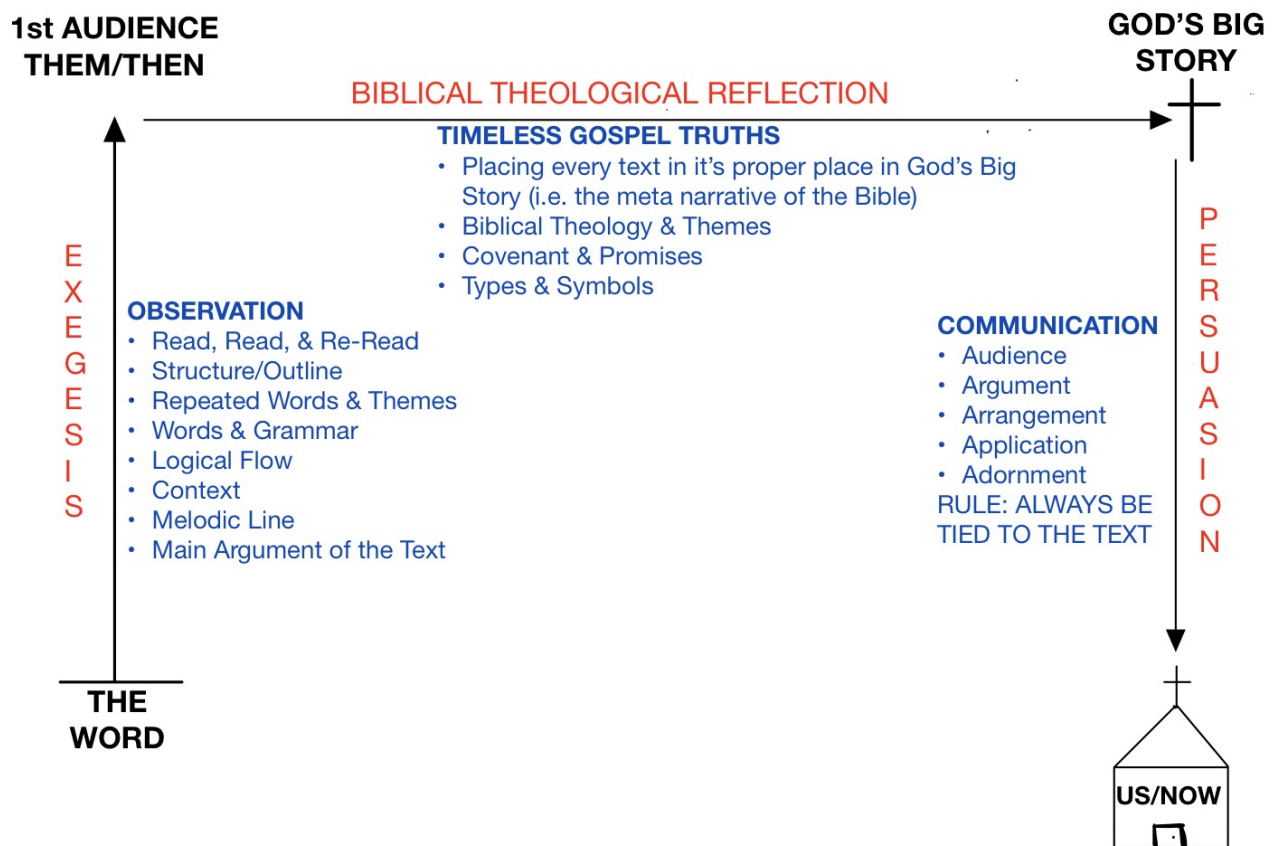




THE NECESSITY OF AN EXEGETICAL TOOLBOX

The goal of Lead School is that we would all *make progress in the Word* (1 Timothy 4:15), so that we become convictional people who live by Word-informed faith in all things. However, in order to *make progress* – we must have the right tools to do Word-work well (this is called exegesis) or we will end up with mystical impressions of the Word that *have a form of godliness but deny its power* (2 Timothy 3:5). Therefore, the goal of our Word-work is to develop deeply-rooted, exegetically faithful, Word-centered convictions that compel us to be people of faith in all things. Then we will not only be faithfully followers of Christ Jesus, but we will be equipped to help others follow Him as well.

THE LONGEST WAY AROUND IS THE SAFEST WAY HOME





THE EXEGETICAL TOOLS

The following exegetical tools are not exhaustive but they are the absolute essentials. Similarly to being a mechanic, you can always acquire more specific tools, but there are certain tools that you simply must have in your tool box at all times. The following tools are essential if you are going to rightly handle the Word of Truth (2 Timothy 2:15).

#1: OBSERVATION – We must begin by reading and re-reading the text. All along the way, ask good questions of the text, notice even the smallest details! Hold off on coming to conclusions as long as possible – so that you don't misconstrue evidence that supports your preconceived ideas. Be a good detective! This observation stage includes the following steps:

- A. Read, Read, & Re-read – you'll never adequately digest the Word unless you chew on it over, and over, and over again. Read the entire book (when possible). Read looking for connections and changes. Read looking for key themes or repeated ideas. Read in different translations. Listen to the book. As you read, take note of significant observations and questions that need to be answered.
- B. Meditate – take time to ponder, memorize, and contemplate the text! Let it dwell in you! This step is often overlooked. Once you feel like you understand the meaning of the text – just spend time thinking about it. Let it soak in (Deuteronomy 6:6-9 & Joshua 1:8-9).
- C. Pray & Submit – we must have a posture of radical dependence & humble obedience before the God of the Word. All of the right tools without the right heart posture will produce intellectualism, moralism, and hypocrisy. To rightly understand the Word, you must be submitted to the Word – for the Spirit illuminates the Word to those who humbly submit to the Word (Romans 12:1-2 & 1 Corinthians 1:18 & James 1:21).

SIMPLY PUT: All biblical exegesis could be under the banner of observation – for we are continually observing the text so that we can rightly discern the authorial intent of the text. At the heart of all biblical exegesis is the commitment carefully & continually observe the text.

TABLE DISCUSSION: At your table – read Ephesians 4:17-24. Take a few minutes to come up with the most significant observations.



#2: MELODIC LINE – Like all good music has a clear melody, so every book of the Bible has a clear melodic line. As you carefully interpret the Word – you'll begin to hear the central theme of the book and how each individual part fits into the whole.

A. FINDING THE MELODIC LINE: Every book of the Bible has an overarching theme or purpose which everything in the book fits into. In other words, the reason for every word, sentence, paragraph and section in a book is tied to the purpose of the composition as a whole. The author organizes and structures their whole book to accomplish the purpose they have in writing (i.e. the melodic line). Here are some basic tools to find the melodic line:

- List all the words or ideas that are repeated throughout the book
- Group related words and ideas together
- Identify which words or ideas seem most significant and why
- Wrestle through how the author connects various words and ideas – especially in the same verse or section
- Try to synthesize the key themes or ideas by writing a sentence that captures the main ideas or argument of the book

B. THE WHOLE & THE PARTS: To understand any passage in a book, we have to understand the book as a whole. But it's also true that you can't understand the book as a whole without understanding each of the individual parts of it. And so we must continually be zooming in and zooming out, looking at the trees and seeing how they fit into the forest.

C. THE COMPLETE PICTURE: Just like all good stories, the threads are woven together and will ultimately come together in the end – every book of the Bible will have all the various passages and themes woven together into a coherent whole. Nothing is irrelevant in any book of the Bible. The more we study the Bible, the more clear it is that every single book of the Bible has a cohesive message and purpose. Our goal then as we exegete the Word is to understand how each part fits into the purpose of the book as a whole – then each individual part will be rightly understood.

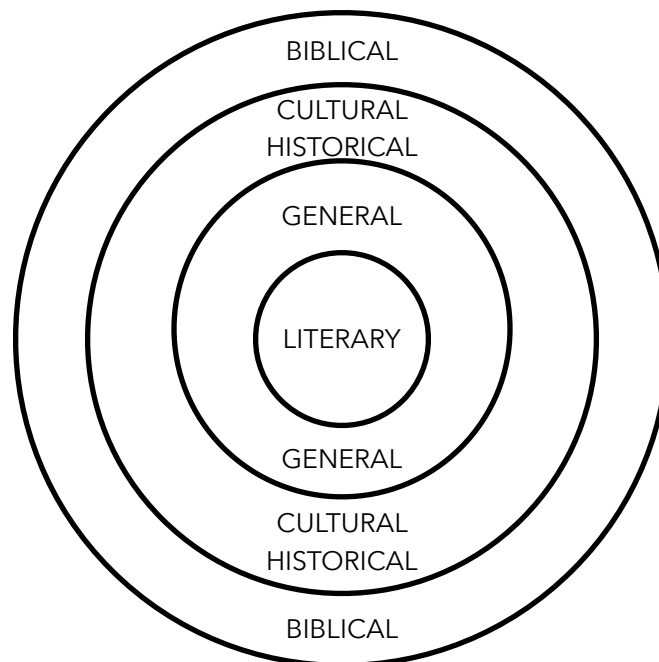
TABLE DISCUSSION: At your table – read Ephesians 4:17-24. How is the melodic line of Ephesians affected by this passage AND how does the melodic line of Ephesians affect the way you read & understand this passage?



MELODIC LINE OF EPHESIANS: God's eternal plan to sum up all things in Christ.

#3: CONTEXT – What is happening in and around the text that informs the meaning of the text. When it comes to studying the Bible, words matters (i.e. vocabulary, verbs, tenses, repetition, connections, changes, sentence structure, etc.). However, the context around a word or sentence will give important information about how those words are being used.

RULE OF THUMB: Start close to the text you are studying and then zoom out. When it comes to context, zooming out too quickly will cause you to lose the authorial intent of that particular text. Even when it's hard to place a text in its context, do not zoom out too quickly.



A. **LITERARY CONTEXT** – *what is happening immediately before & after the text you are in*

Without question, the literary context is the most important context. *Reading right before and right after the text you are studying is crucial to understanding the passage you are in.* Without placing your text in the immediate context, you will be entirely unable to rightly discern the meaning of the text.

B. **GENERAL CONTEXT** – *finding your passage in the melodic line (i.e. purpose & theme) of the book that it is in*



Each part of the Bible provides a *unique contribution* the whole. This is why careful exegesis matters in every text. And yet, each text fits into the whole of the book perfectly – like a puzzle that isn't complete until every piece finds its home. Individual passages cannot be fully understood and applied until they are placed in their general context.

C. CULTURAL & HISTORICAL CONTEXT – *understanding the setting of the original audience that is relevant to the interpretation of your passage*

Considering the cultural and historical context is to take into account the setting of life both for the author and people in the book. At times, you must also consider how the book would have been understood by the first audience.

Remember – the cultural and historical context of the Bible is unique throughout the Bible (the Bible was written by over 40 different authors, spanning 1400 years, 3 languages, many different cultures). Therefore, considering the cultural and historical context of the Bible is unique to the specific book or genre that you are studying.

D. BIBLICAL CONTEXT – *does your text clearly refer back to something that has already been written in the Bible*

The question being asked in Biblical Context – was the author making any connections that the first audience would have reasonably understood. This is not the time to look for theological themes or connections throughout the entire Bible (we'll do this later when we get to theological reflection). Biblical context is looking to see if the author is specifically referring to another part of the Bible that was previously written (directly or indirectly). Most often – when the Bible refers back to the Bible, it is to reinforce that what is being said is not new.

REMEMBER: the meaning of the text is found primarily in the words of the text itself! Context is necessary and helpful but not ultimate. Context should clarify the text, not eliminate the text.

TABLE DISCUSSION: Read Ephesians 4:17-25. What could happen if you ignore all spheres of context when studying this passage?

#4: STRUCTURE – The structure of a text reveals the emphasis or purpose of the author. We know that we have the proper structure of a passage when we see how each part offers a unique contribution to the passage it is in, being distinct from the other parts, yet still relating to them.



Just like the skeletal system holds gives organization and definition to various body parts – so the structure of the text provides clarity to the emphasis of the text. While some passages are more structured than others, we always want to understand the flow of thought of the author reflected in how he organized his writing.

- A. **INDIVIDUAL PARTS:** Each passage has parts and is a part. To truly understand a passage you must understand the parts that make up the passage, but also how it is part of whatever section of Scripture it is in.

WARNING: You must not neglect certain parts due to excitement about other parts or confusion as to where to place a specific part. In order for the structure to be complete – each part must find it's rightful place in the structure of the passage.

- B. **UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION:** Each verse and section have a unique contribution, a unique point that contributes to the overall point of the text you are studying and the point of the book as a whole.

We know that we have the proper structure of a passage when we see how each part offers a unique contribution to the passage it is in, being distinct from the other parts, yet still relating to them.

- C. **FINDING STRUCTURE:** Two overarching tools to help us discern the structure of the text – connections and changes.

Connections are words or themes in the text that tie verses together and unify them.

Changes are words or themes in the text that separate texts.

Looking for connections and changes helps us to discern when a number of sentences are making a point together vs. when there is a shift and a new point is being developed.

REMEMBER: The individual parts are significant, but the structure is what gives coherence to purpose of emphasis of the text. To find the emphasis of the text, you must discern the structure.

TABLE DISCUSSION: Read Ephesians 4:17-24. What could happen if you don't consider structure but you find a whole bunch of really interesting parts?



#5: WORDS & GRAMMAR – The text itself is where the meaning is found, and the text is made up of words and grammar. Words and grammar are the symbols that contain the meaning of a text. To rightly understand the Word, we must do careful work in words & grammar.

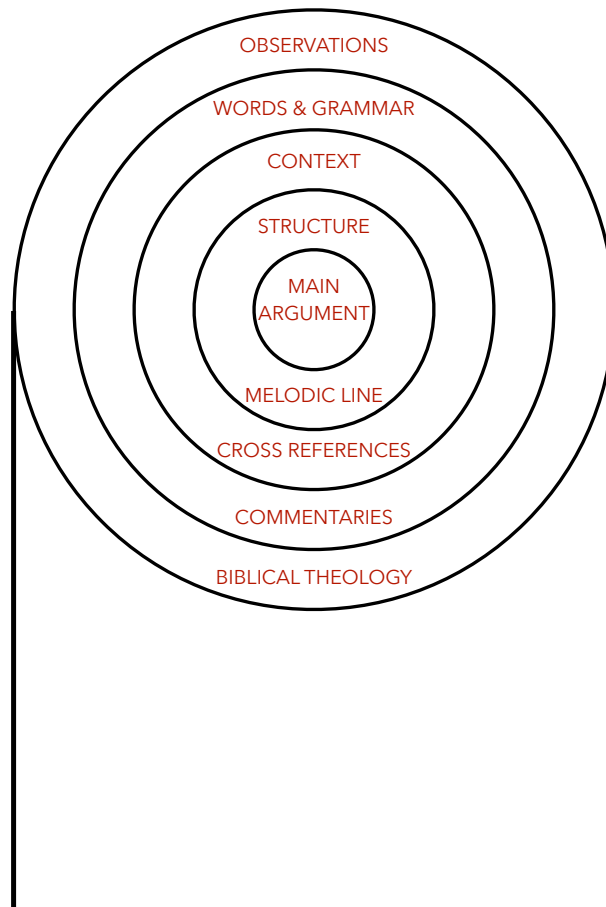
VITAL TRUTH: Words and grammar contain the meaning of the text. If you have no words, you have no meaning no matter what the context! Words and grammar are the symbols that contain the meaning of a text. Context limits and clarifies that meaning from being ambiguous or misunderstood. But context can't make words and grammar mean something out of nothing. Context can only refine and limit the meaning that is already there with the words and grammar.

- A. **WORDS HAVE MEANING:** We don't make up the meaning of words, otherwise communication couldn't happen. The meaning of a word is the shared understanding among a group of native speakers of a language. When enough people use a word to mean something, it communicates that concept when people use it.
- B. **WORDS HAVE A RANGE OF MEANING:** One of the most important concepts about words to understand is that words have a range of meaning. Think of words as having circles of meaning. If you draw two circles for two words, their meaning could overlap. One word may have a small circle, meaning it has a small range of meaning, and other words have a large circle, meaning it has a large range of meaning. Simply put – different words have different ranges of meaning.
- C. **CONTEXT DETERMINES RANGE OF MEANING:** While words have a range of meaning, the given context limits the meaning to one of the meanings in context. Words don't mean everything they can mean in each occurrence. Rather, in context one of the meanings will be intended by the author and make sense. You usually want to start with the first and most basic meaning, and work down through to the more obscure meanings until one fits. You should definitely look at all the meanings in case one of the more specific meanings is a perfect, with your context...but don't just pick your favorite!
- D. **SENTENCE STRUCTURE MATTERS:** A sentence is a complete thought with a subject, verb, along with dependent clauses and modifiers. A sentence at its minimum has a subject and a verb. Then a sentence will have other descriptors/modifiers that hang off of these main parts of the sentence. It's usually very helpful to find the main subject and verb of a sentence, and then see how all the other parts connect to these to understand what the sentence means.



TABLE DISCUSSION: Read Ephesians 4:17-24. What would happen if you define *due to the hardness of the heart* differently than the grammar and context requires?

#6: LOGICAL FLOW – The logical flow is the progression of the author's logic as he unpacks his main argument. The main argument is the synthesis of the logical flow of the text. The main argument of the text is that essential thing that that author (both human & divine) are endeavoring to prove in the text. When everything is boiled down, the main argument is what was being communicated to the first audience.



DANGER: If we are using all of our exegetical tools to look at words, grammar, themes, connections, changes, cross references, etc. – we might have a lot of biblical things to say about our text, but we will miss the the logical flow of the text. The thing that the Holy Spirit is arguing for will be lost. It is crucial then that learn how to put all of our exegesis together so that we can rightly discern the main argument of the text.



- A. LOOK FOR CLAUSES: When discerning the logical flow of a passage, look for independent vs. dependent clauses. Independent clauses are complete thought units that can stand alone. Dependent clauses are not complete thought units and cannot stand alone. Independent clauses carry more weight than dependent clauses.
- B. LOOK FOR LOGICAL CONNECTIONS: Words like so and, but, because, for, therefore, in order that, but, as a result, etc. These words are significant when it comes to discerning the logical flow of the text.

MAKE PROGRESS: The goal for each and every one of us is to *make progress*. You might be feel inadequate to find the main argument of the passage. But if you take the exegetical tools you've learned and you take your best shot at studying the Word with these tools, you will make progress!

AIM FOR THE RIGHT TARGET: All of your exegetical work is simply helping you understand the author's intended purpose to the 1st audience. What truth was he trying to persuade them of SO THAT they would live move fully by faith? This is the logical argument of the text that you are fighting to comprehend.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION:

- #1: Which exegetical tool has been most helpful for you in your personal study of the Word?
- #2: Which exegetical tool is still confusing or challenging for you to use and why?
- #3: Spend time in prayer – specifically for *Course 2 – the Basics of Bible Teaching* to help each one of us better help others follow Jesus!