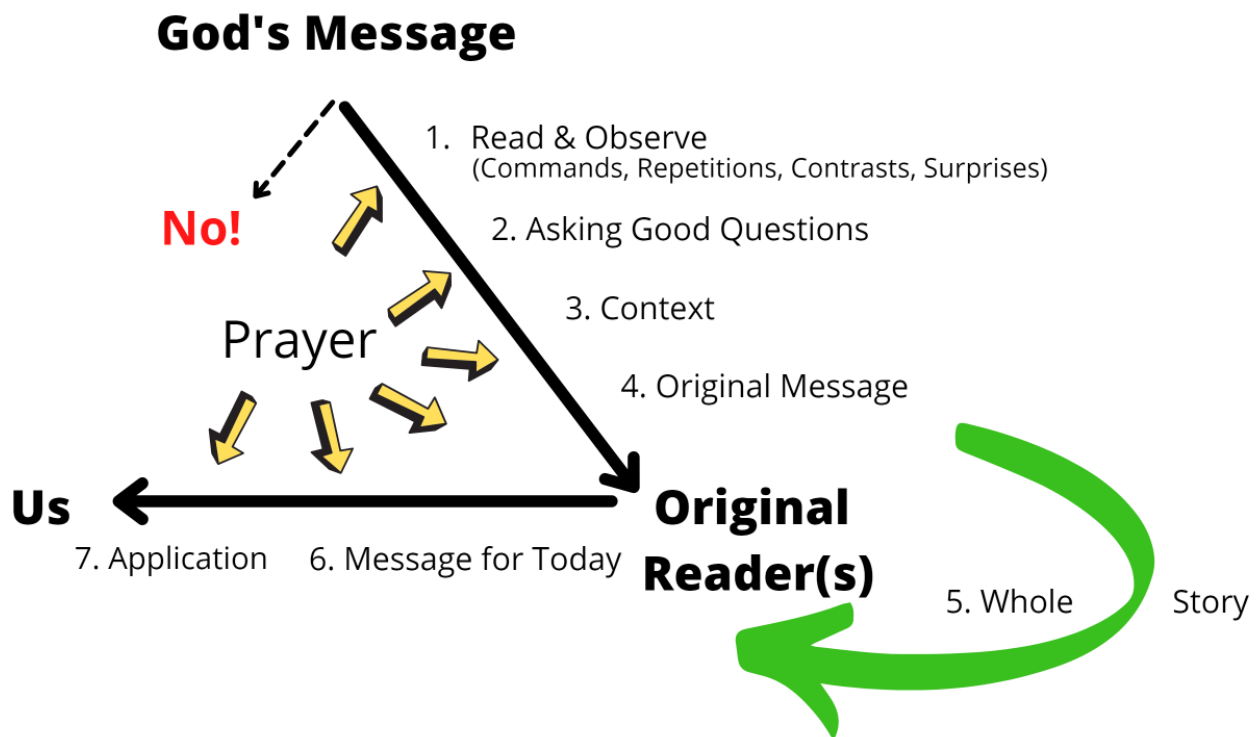




An Introduction to Careful Bible Study

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Introduction to the Bible Pathway

We are all familiar with what it means to travel on a path. For many of us it is the primary way we get from one place to another. We travel by path from house to house, village to village, and sometimes from one region of the country to another. Even in the city we use paths in parks and through gardens. Walking on a path is not only a means of travel but can also be a means of learning. We learn about the people and places we meet along the way, about the plants and animals we encounter, and the scenery we see as we travel. Walking down a familiar path is one way of connecting with our community and experiencing life. Walking a new path often allows us to expand our lives and experience new things.

Studying the Bible can be viewed in much the same way as walking on a path. As we read through the Bible we learn new things. The more often we read the same passages, the more familiar we become with what we find there. The things we discover as we read enrich our lives and help us connect with God and with others around us. When we read new sections of the Bible we encounter new ideas that expand our thinking and lives.

Learning to walk on a new path requires some patience. It is also helpful to have direction from those who have been there before. Learning to study the Bible is like that as well. There are new skills to learn and habits to develop if we are going to do a good job walking through the Bible's teachings.

This course is designed to take you down the path of how to study and teach the Bible well. Once you have mastered these skills, you will gain great understanding about what God has said in His Word. You will also be able to effectively share that understanding with others. Are you ready to begin? We hope this will be a fun, challenging, and fruitful adventure for you.

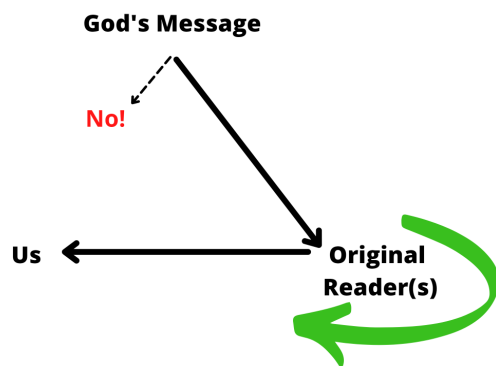
The Bible Pathway

When we hurry along a pathway, we want the shortest, straightest path to our destination. But we often find that impossible because something blocks the path—a river or a mountain. Sometimes a danger along the way makes the shortest path unwise. So, we must take a path

that curves and takes longer to travel if we are going to safely arrive at our destination. This principle is also true of our path to understanding the Bible.

We often are in a hurry to understand what God has to say to us in His Word. We want to take what the Bible says and immediately apply it to our lives. But there are major problems blocking our way. The first problem is that the Bible was not written directly to us but to people who lived a long time ago in cultures sometimes far different from ours. The Bible was not written to us, but it was written for us. If we do not take time to first understand what the author was emphasizing to the original readers, we are in danger of misunderstanding God's message to us.

Second, we are sometimes tempted to approach the Bible from our own cultural and personal outlook, often reading into the passage what is not there. Once again, we need to try to understand what the author was trying to communicate to specific people in a specific historical setting. Once we understand that we can then ask, "What is God saying to us in our time and culture?" The following diagram illustrates this process which we call "The Bible Pathway."



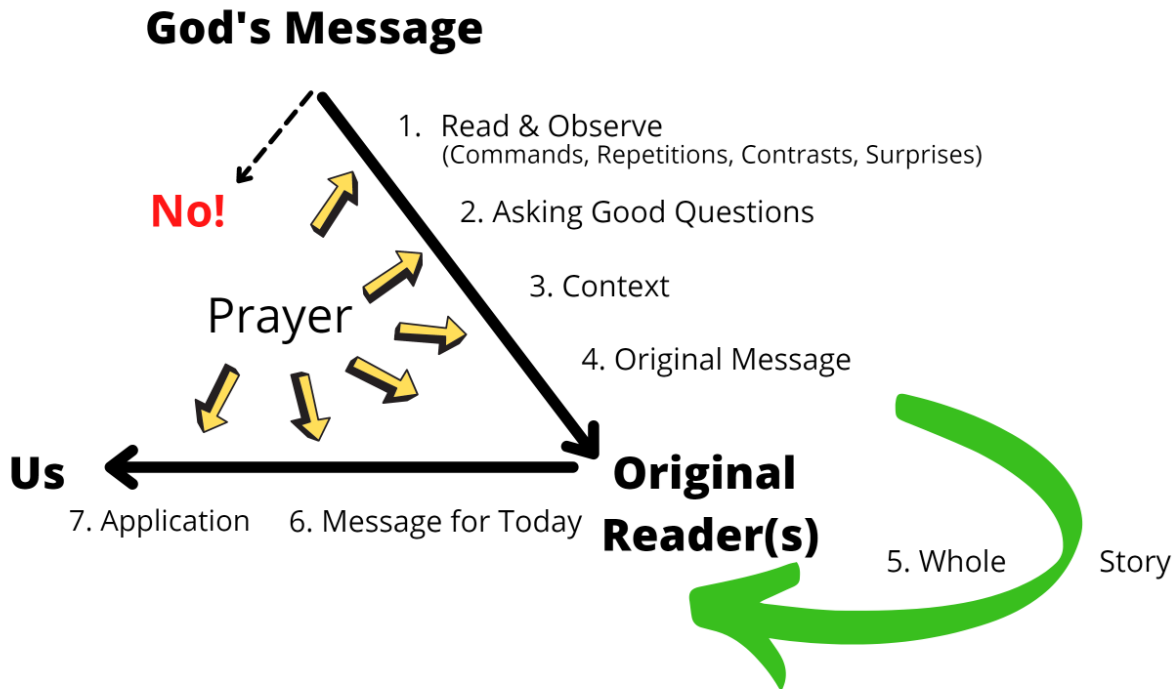
Sometimes the need to travel this path to the original readers is obvious and at other times it is not. For example, the Bible gives specific instructions in Exodus about how to sacrifice animals. Do you follow these instructions when you sacrifice animals in your church? Of course not, because most of us realize that we do not still have to sacrifice animals. Why not? Because Christ is now the "once for all" sacrifice for our sins (Hebrews 9:26).

Exercise: In groups around your table, read Numbers 15:37-41. Answer the following questions.

- Who were the original readers?
- What message was the author emphasizing to the original readers?

- How should Christians apply this message differently?

The purpose of this course is not to tell you what the Bible says, but to help you discover what the Bible says. Below is a diagram of all the main things you will learn in this overview.



Since we are studying the Word of God, we want the Word to impact and transform our thinking and lives as we study. We want to challenge you as teachers and preachers of the Word to have this goal in your teaching: the transformation of you and your listeners. Throughout the course, we will regularly call for reflection and application to our own lives of what we are learning from the Word. If our listeners are to be transformed, our lives must first be transformed. We will need to depend upon Jesus and the Holy Spirit as we study.

Careful Bible Study is essential to understanding the author's emphasis for any Bible passage. Because we believe that the Bible is the Word of God and communicates God's thoughts to us, we want to respect His Word by being careful to accurately understand what it says. We do not want to impose our ideas onto the Bible. We want to listen closely to what God is saying through His Word.

Step 1: Reading and Observation

As we study, we must have a posture of humility and teachability. Therefore, prayer must be woven into every aspect of our study. We must be open to whatever the Holy Spirit has for us through His Word. It is essential that we study prayerfully. It is important to stop and pray before each step along the Bible Pathway and to ask God to send his Spirit to help us understand the text.

After praying, we must begin our study by carefully reading the passage several times, paying close attention to observe what it says. Sometimes it may be helpful to read the passage aloud or even to write the passage down on paper. This will slow us down and help us notice everything in the passage.

A good observation comes from the text and is:

- A short sentence (subject + verb)
- Obvious
- Something that cannot be disagreed with

It is helpful to remember that observations cannot be disagreed with. We are simply stating what is there. If someone can disagree with us, we have moved from observing to trying to understand the meaning of the passage.

As you are making your observations from the text, here are four important things to look for:

- Commands - *does the text have any orders, requests, or instructions that are meant to be followed?*
- Repetitions - *does the text have any words, phrases, or ideas that are repeated?*
- Contrasts - *does the text compare or contrast two or more things or are opposites (i.e. Light/dark)*
- Surprises - *does anything in the text surprise or startle you as you read it?*

Exercise: In groups around your table, read Psalm 67:1-7. Make at least 10 observations of the text. Then, answer the following questions.

- What is your understanding of the author's emphasis to the original readers in this passage?
- What do you think is the message is for us today?

Step 2: Asking Good Questions

Asking good questions helps us discover insights that we might not see otherwise. What are good questions? A helpful way to think of a good question is: *"What questions would you ask the author if he were here?"*

A good question is any question that moves me toward understanding what the author is emphasizing. Good questions also slow us down and help us see what details are in the text. As we begin to interact with the text, we ask things like: What is he saying here? Why does he say that? Why does he use that word? How does this command, repetition, contrast, or surprise, help reveal the author's emphasis?

It is helpful to divide a sheet of paper into three columns, labeling the first "Verse", and write out each verse of the passage, the second, "Observations" and the third, "Questions". We call this the **Observation/Question Worksheet**.

Verse	Observation	Questions
1:8	This verse begins with "Therefore".	How does this passage relate to what came before?
	Paul commands Timothy not to be ashamed.	What is Timothy not to be ashamed of? Why?

Exercise: In groups around your table, read 2 Timothy 1:8-14. On the Observation/Question Worksheet, make at least 10 observations of the text. Then, write at least 10 questions that come from the text and your observations.

- Once you have completed your observation/question worksheet ask, which of your questions are answered in the text or its context?
- How did asking questions help you focus or discover new insights from this passage?
- Now write a Message Statement for the Original Readers which shows what the author was emphasizing in 5-18 words.

Observation / Question Worksheet - 2 Timothy 1:8-14

Verse	Observation	Questions
1:8		
1:9		
1:10		
1:11		
1:12		
1:13		

1:14		
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Message Statement:

Step 3: Context

As we travel on the Bible Pathway to understanding the Bible, we need to understand the concept of the Context, or the surroundings, of the passage we are going to study. The context for any passage we study is made up of the verses that surround it. The idea of context is much like the idea of community.

We all live in communities. We have relationships with many people who live around us, and these relationships give meaning to our lives and influence us greatly. Some of these relationships are close and some are more distant. The people we are closest to influence our lives the most. Those who are more distant influence us less.

The same is true of words and ideas in the Bible. None of the words in the Bible exist alone. All are found in relation to other words found in the Bible. The words and ideas in any passage we study are surrounded by many other words and ideas; those found in the previous and following passages. These surrounding words and ideas have an impact on what the words we are studying mean.

Exercise: In groups around your table, discuss the following verses and how they are typically used.

1) Philippians 4:13 “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.”

- Now, in your groups, read and discuss the context of Philippians 4:10-16.
- How has your understanding of verse 13 changed?

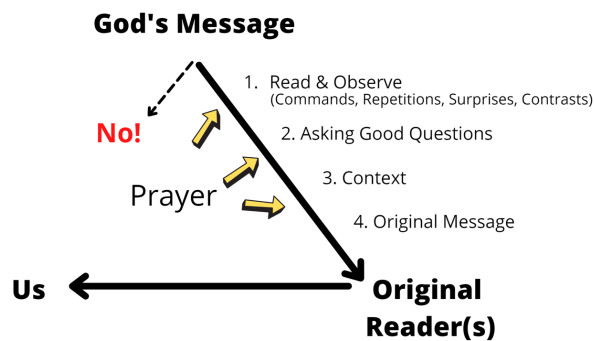
2) Revelation 3:20 “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.”

- Now, in your groups, read and discuss the context of Revelation 3:14-22.
- How has your understanding of verse 20 changed?

3) Matthew 6:33 “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

- Now, in your groups, read the context of Matthew 6:24-34.
- How has your understanding of verse 33 changed?

Step 4: Original Message



As we begin our study with any text and work our way around the triangle, we must resist thinking about what the text means for us today until we have determined what the author is emphasizing to the original readers. Making observations, asking good questions, and thinking through the context all help us to identify the author's emphasis. Once we identify

the emphasis our next step is to put that into a 5–18 word sentence. We call this sentence the Original Message Statement.

The Original Message Statement is God's message to the original readers. This statement includes what the author emphasizes in the text and to which everything else relates. All the steps that you have received until now help you identify God's message to the original readers.

Exercise: As a large group, pray and then read Genesis 12:1-9 aloud.

1) Read and Observe

- What commands do you see in the text?
- What repetitions do you see in the text?
- What contrasts do you see in the text?

- What surprises do you see in the text?

2) Ask Good Questions

- What questions would you ask the author if he were here right now?

3) Context

- Read Genesis 11:27-32. How does this help your understanding of 12:1-9?

4) Original Message Statement

- What is the author emphasizing in the text?
- Write a sentence that captures the message God intended for the original readers.

Step 5: Whole Story

Introduction

When we use the term “Whole Story” we are referring to the idea that the Bible is one large cohesive story, written in many parts. The Bible begins with the story in Genesis, progresses through the Old Testament, leads to Christ as the climax in the New Testament, and then concludes in Revelation. One way to see the unity of the Whole Story is to look at the way it begins and ends.

Exercise: At your table, pray and then:

1) Read Genesis 1:1-3 Write down the big Bible themes from these verses.

2) Read Revelation 21:1-6 Write down the big Bible themes from these verses.

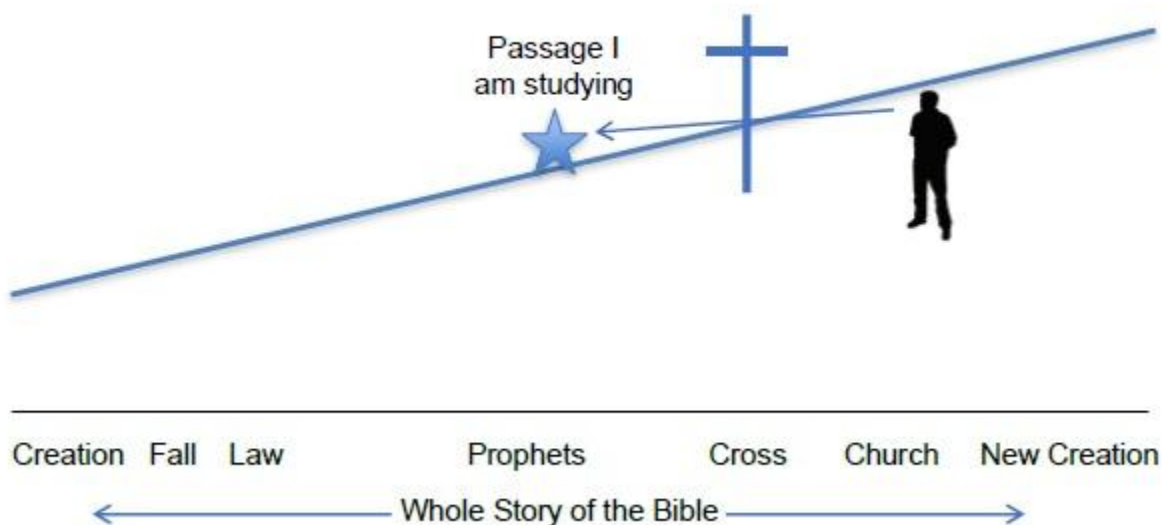
Which themes do you see repeated in the two passages?

Remember, God is the most important character in the story. He is the hero! The more we study our Bibles, the better we understand God and His progressive plan. We also learn how the Whole Story helps us understand the text that we are studying.

The Whole Story of the Bible

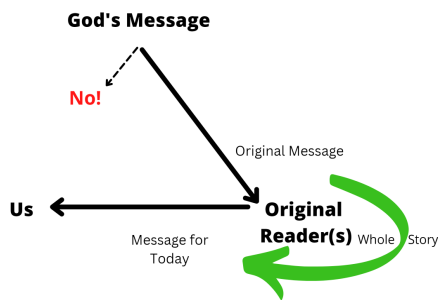
The Bible 📖 is the story of God 👉 and his progressive plan 📈 to redeem a
 sinful people 🙇 to himself 🤝, through Christ 🙋,
 by the Spirit 🕊, for his glory 🙌.

The diagram below illustrates that the Bible progressively reveals the story of God and his plan. It also shows an example of where my passage is on the Whole Story incline. Notice that part of the Whole Story happens before our passage, and part is after. We must look both ways to do good Whole Story work. We begin by asking: What does my passage add to the Whole Story of the Bible?



The best way to grow in your skills of understanding and using the Whole Story is to read and reread the whole Bible. Whole Story work is a lifelong journey. To get started, try reading one Old Testament book, then one New Testament book, and go back and forth (Genesis, Matthew, Exodus, Mark, etc.) or discuss Bible reading plans you have found helpful. As you read, try to identify Whole Story themes we are discussing in this workshop. Enjoy your exciting journey!

Whole Story Shift



The Whole Story idea helps us understand that the Bible is one cohesive story about God and His progressive plan. Our first Whole Story question is: What does my passage add to the Whole Story of the Bible?

Then, the Whole Story helps us move from the message to the original reader to the message for us today. The second important Whole Story question we ask is: How does the Whole Story help us shift from the original message to the message for today?

Exercise: At your table, pray and then read Leviticus 4:27-29 and Hebrews 10:10:

- What is the instruction of the text? Is this something we still do today?
- How does knowing the Whole Story of the Bible help us understand the message regarding sacrifice today?

This shift is easy for us to see today, but there are other shifts in the Whole Story that are more complicated. Let's look at one in Deuteronomy 27:26-28:7.

Exercise: As a group, pray and then

- 1) Read Deuteronomy 27:26-28:7. What is God's message to the *original* reader?
- 2) Read Galatians 3:10-14. What is God's message to the *original* reader?

What is the difference between these two passages?

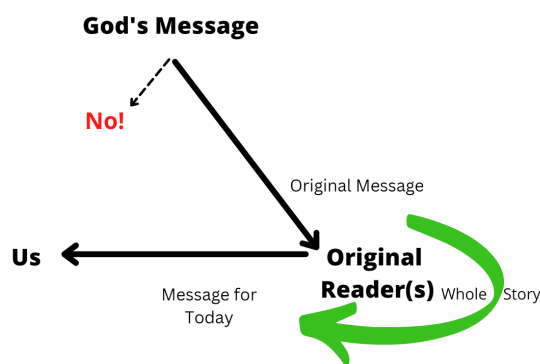
So how should we understand passages like Deuteronomy 28 in view of the Whole Story shift? If you struggle with this shift, you are not alone. Our goal was to get you to study the Deuteronomy passage, and then consider how to understand it in view of the Whole Story shift. We need to keep reading our Bibles, from Genesis to Revelation and pay attention to the progression of the story, the shifts, and changes in the story, especially the changes that happened when Christ came into our world. Remember to always read the Bible through the

lens of the Whole Story and ask *how does this passage help tell the Whole Story in the Bible* and *how does the Whole Story help us shift from the original message to today?*

Exercise: As a group, pray and then read Jeremiah 29:10-14.

- What was the message to the original reader?
- What are some common understandings of this text for today's audience?
- How does the Whole Story help us better understand this text?
- What is the message for us today?

Step 6: Message for Today



Now that we have our Original Message Statement, we need to spend some time thinking about how our passage and its emphasis fits into the Whole Story of the Bible. We also must consider how the Whole Story helps us move from the Original Message to the Message for Today. Oftentimes, but not always, the message for us today is quite different than the message to the

original readers. We write this Message for Today in 5-18 words.

For example, in Numbers 21, we read that the Israelites rebelled against God and Moses, so God sent fiery serpents, and the Israelites were saved by looking at a bronze serpent that was lifted up. Our Original Message Statement could be: The Israelites were forgiven and healed from snake bites by looking in faith at the bronze serpent. In John 3:14-15 we read, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life." So considering the Whole Story, our Message for Today becomes: By looking in faith to Jesus who was lifted up for us, we can be forgiven of our sin and receive eternal life. *Note: The Message for Today flows out of the Original Message Statement.*

Exercise: As a group, pray and then read Deuteronomy 8:3 to come up with a message for today.

- Observations
- Asking Good Questions
- Context: Dt 8:1-6
- Original Message Statement
- Whole Story Reflection: *How does this passage help tell the Whole Story in the Bible? How does the Whole Story help us shift from the original message to today?* (Matt 4:1-4; Jn 6:35)
- Message for Today

Exercise: In groups around your tables, pray and then read 1 Samuel 8:4-7 to come up with a message for today.

- Make 5 Observations of the text.
- Asking Good Questions
- Context
- Original Message Statement
- Whole Story Reflection: *How does this passage help tell the Whole Story in the Bible? How does the Whole Story help us shift from the original message to today?* (Lk 1:32-33; Jn 18:35-37; Rev 17:14)
- Message for Today

Exercise (if there is time): As a large group, pray and then read Colossians 1:15-18 to come up with a message for today.

- Make 5 Observations of the text.
- Asking Good Questions
- Context: Colossians 1:13-14
- Original Message Statement
- Whole Story Reflection: *How does this passage help tell the Whole Story in the Bible? How does the Whole Story help us shift from the original message to today?* (Jn 1:1-3; Gen 1:1)
- Message for Today

Step 7: Application

The last step in Careful Bible Study is the application of what we have studied to our lives and the lives of our listeners. This is a very important part of our study. If we neglect this part of Bible study, we will fail to profit from all the work we have done in carefully studying the text to understand what God has said in His Word. We want to do more than just know the content of the passage. We want to see transformation through God's Word, by His Spirit. Someone has said that there is only one meaning for any text but there may be many applications.

God's Word itself gives us some further guidance on how to apply His Word to our lives. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness that the man of God might be complete, equipped for every good work." These 4 purposes of the Word can be thought of as providing a guideline about how we should apply the Word to our lives.

In our study we are being careful to understand what the Word rightly teaches. Then we need to ask, "How am I not like that?" That is what is meant by reproof. Next, we can ask, "How should I change?" "What does the Spirit want me to change in my life in response to this?" That is what is meant by correction. Finally, we can ask, "What specific practical steps do I need to take to respond to the Spirit? When will I do this?" Acting to make changes begins to train us to walk righteously. Each of these steps should be a part of the application process.

It can be helpful to make 4 boxes and write in answers to each of the questions as we seek to apply the Word to our lives. We call this the "4 Square Worksheet". We can fill in the 4 boxes shown on the worksheet with answers to each of the 4 questions.

4 Square Worksheet	
×	Teaching: <i>What is RIGHT in God's Word? What does this verse teach about God?</i>
×	Rebuking: <i>What is WRONG (lacking) in my life compared to this?</i>
×	Correction: <i>What SHOULD I do in response? What does the Spirit want me to do differently in response to this? What will I do differently?</i>
➤	Training: <i>HOW will I do what I need to do? What steps will I take to obey? When will I do this?</i>

Exercise: In groups around your tables, pray and then re-read 1 Samuel 8:4-7.

- After reading the text, review your Message for today to see if you've missed anything about what it says about God.
- Ask how you are not like the message for today?
- State what you should do in response to the text.
- State one or two practical steps you will take today in order to obey the text.

Exercise (if there is time): As a large group, pray and then re-read Colossians 1:15-18.

- After reading the text, review your Message for today to see if you've missed anything about what it says about God.
- Ask how you are not like the message for today?
- State what you should do in response to the text.
- State one or two practical steps you will take today in order to obey the text.

Step 8: Staying on the Line

“Staying on the Line” is a simple but extremely valuable tool for Bible study. A Christian must identify what God has said in the text they are studying and say nothing more nor less than what that text is saying. This tool is illustrated by a simple line, which represents what God’s Word actually says:

No!

● **Yes!** ● **God's Word**

No!

To go above the line means that we add something to what God has said in His Word. It means to say more than God has said or to say something different than God has said. All of us are guilty of occasionally adding our ideas to what the text of Scripture says. We do that when we assume certain things are true and add them to what the passage teaches. Perhaps it is something we have always believed or have been taught. It might be true but the passage we are studying does not say it. To add to what God has said is a very serious error. We are substituting our ideas for His.

We can also go below the line and say less than what the Bible says. We do this by skipping, ignoring, or explaining away things that we read that we do not like or understand. Sometimes our culture blinds us to what the Bible says and causes us to miss some of its teaching. At other times, we may not study as hard as we should, and we miss some important things that a passage is teaching. If we only read our favorite passages or our favorite verse in the passage, we are doing less than what the Bible teaches. One of the ways to avoid this danger is to make a regular practice of reading and teaching through whole books of the Bible.

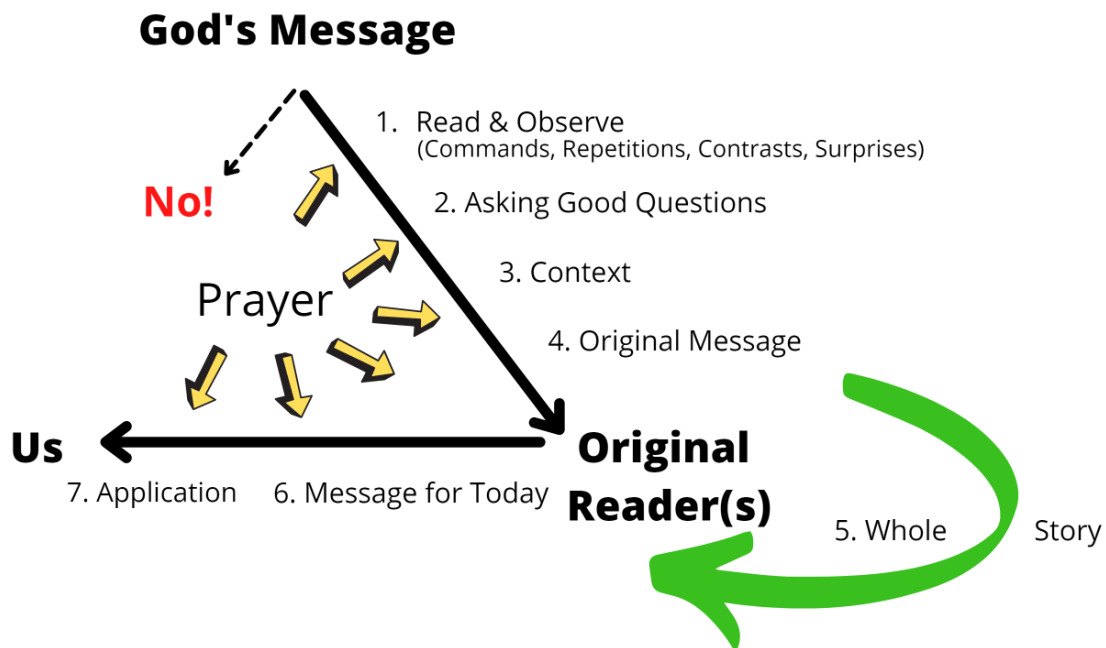
Careful Bible study is not something learned in a few hours or even years. It takes a lifetime of diligent work to come and understand the Scriptures. May this encourage you to continue to learn and study as you seek to serve your church well. And may God be glorified in all we do as we work together to spread the knowledge of his Word and, therefore, the gospel of Jesus Christ to all people.

Conclusion: Sample Study - Genesis 4:1-16

Now it is time to put all these skills to work in a sample study. Complete the following exercise

Exercise: As a large group, pray and then read Genesis 4:1-16 aloud.

- After reading the text, walk the Bible Pathway as a group, writing your observations on the board.



- Pay careful attention to how you “turn the corner” and arrive at the message for today.
- What application do you make of this text?