

## D5 - The Hermeneutic - Principles (part 2)

### How to Study the Bible

#### **Principles for Interpreting Scripture (and for controlling ourselves):**

This might be surprising to consider, but interpreting Scripture involves self-control as much as it does following good rules for interpretation. When we study God's Word, there seem to be endless temptations in our minds to run from the words on the page before us to other ideas we've heard or learned before, concepts taught in a book we read, our own experience, maybe even other Bible passages, etc. The next thing we know, we are making decisions about what the passage means, but we left those words on the page long ago and arrived at a foreign destination that may not resemble the passage we originally considered.

What would you think of someone doing that to your own words in a love letter you wrote to your spouse? They started with your words, but then perhaps they were reminded of a scene in a movie that really impacted them and so they ran with that idea about love, and so forth. Finally, where they end up may actually have very little to do with your original words of love for your spouse (all while they are holding your letter in their hands)! It would be right for you to say to that person - "Control yourself with my words! Please don't run off somewhere else to get at the meaning of my words!"

And we must extend to God the same courtesy whose words and meaning outlast all others! Above all we should control ourselves with His words. To do that well, we should put some guidelines before us and around us that will help restrain us so that we don't quickly leave His words on the page we're studying to get to other interesting ideas in our heads. The guidelines or rules or principles below can help restrain us as we consider our great God and Savior's words to us.

*(The following material is heavily borrowed from Joel James, "How To Study The Bible," with permission.)*

#### **1. Prayerfully Position Yourself under the God of the Word!**

The following "sample prayer" reflects the kind of heart-attitude believers should have toward the reading and studying of word of God. Hopefully it also serves as an example of a desire for self-control before the God of the word.

##### ***Heavenly Father,***

I intend this time in Your Word to be a prayerful expression of worship of You, desire for You, love for You, need of You, and dependence on You. Your word tells me that as God You are set apart from Your creation in holiness. You are also high above all things and Sovereign in Your reign over all things,

including my life. Yet how tenderly you stoop toward Your creatures to show love and compassion and countless kindnesses. Your perfect provision sustains all that You have made and glorifies Your great name. You are worthy to be worshiped and I desire to see more of You in Your word! My pursuit of You through Your word and prayer is only possible through Your Son Jesus Christ, who is my Savior. So I approach You through Him, my Substitute and High Priest - the One whom I love but have not yet seen. His death in my place has secured for me this place before Your throne to express my need to You. So . . .

***“Why have I prayerfully come before You with my Bible open?”***

**I have Your Word open before me because** You have revealed Yourself there more clearly than any other place and I long to know You better. I desire to see You in all Your glory in the pages before me. I simply and humbly draw near to You to study You. Nearness to You through these pages of Scripture is my good.

**I also have Your Word open before me because** I need to learn more of the nature of my sin and fallenness before You, so that I might better understand what danger I truly was in and what dangers still lurk within me through my indwelling sin. I need to see both the sin that provoked Your righteous wrath toward Your Son and Your grace that moved You to act as Savior toward me in Jesus. If I do not fight to have Scripture’s view of my sin today, I will easily be duped by sin’s deception and become unaware of or indifferent to sin’s nearness to me. I then will be vulnerable to sin’s entanglements. Sin at that point can then become familiar, even tolerable to me. Finally, sin can then become a delight to me. Before I know it I will be in a position of weakness with sin. I will be in the fight of my life to be free from its entanglements, or may even no longer desire to be free from its entanglements. If I do nothing today concerning my view of sin, my view of sin will only grow dangerously cloudy.

**And Your Word is open before me so that** I might undergird my life again today with Your saving heart and motive in the gospel of Your Son, who overcame the penalty of my sin and the power of my sin to enslave me. I am here to rehearse Your bedrock promises in the gospel to my soul. There are treasures in the gospel of Jesus that I have yet to discover in my own life and I long to find them and be nourished by them. If I stagger today under the weight of my sin, the gospel will buoy me and provide me the gospel rest I need. And if I’m in a moment of gospel growth and success, rehearsing the gospel will lead me to humbly acknowledge that all the credit and praise goes to You.

**Finally, I have Your Word open before me to** study what righteousness and holiness of life looks like for one who has been made into a new creature in Christ. In the new man You have created not only a desire for obedience but also a Spirit-dependent equipping within. I need to consistently feed those new God-given desires in my new condition so that they grow. I also need to continuously express my dependence upon the Holy Spirit in this fight for obedience. If I do not study this righteousness and holiness of life and what the blessings of obedience are, I should not expect my desire for obedience to grow. Indwelling sin will do everything possible to quench that desire. By Your grace and power, as I see holiness of life placed in front of me in the commands of Scripture, I will increasingly align my life and behavior with what pleases You.

I desire my heart and mind to be full of You because of what these pages reveal to me about You in all Your greatness. I long for You to spill out of me into my home and wherever You lead me today. All who come into contact with me today must interact with a one whose heart has drawn near to You and is striving to obey You. Their best hope for salvation or for growth in the gospel will come from one who has searched for You in Your Word and gazed upon Your Son in the gospel and who walks by Your Spirit.

***In Christ's name I pray,  
Amen.***

## **2. Expect a Coherent Meaning!**

When was the last time you communicated so as to NOT be understood? When was the last time you were NOT eager for your spouse, children, employees, boss, students, teacher, etc. to understand you? And when was the last time you intended to communicate two equally, valid meanings with the same set of words, expecting your hearer to discern that you intended more than one meaning? Language and communication are gifts from God which allow us to make unseen ideas within us understandable to others. And language and communication are gifts from God to clearly communicate one meaning at a time, sentence by sentence. We all communicate in order to be understood in these ways. When people speak, we listen expecting to find one coherent meaning at a time.

The Bible can be understood because God meant it to be understood.

*"I am the Lord, and there is none else. I have not spoken in secret, in some dark land. . . I, the Lord, speak righteousness, declaring things that are upright,"* Is 45:18-19. The Lord expected the offspring of Jacob to understand Him because His meaning in His words were not in secret or un-findable. They had only ever been out in the plain sight of Israel. He communicated so as to be understood!

*"The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law,"* Dt 29:29. God has not communicated everything He knows or has planned to do for man. There are still secret things that belong to Him. But there are revealed things that belong to man. In other words, God expects that man understand those things God has revealed to man. God does not hold us accountable to understand what is still secret to Him, only that which He has revealed. And notice the extent to which God expects understanding: "that we observe all the words of this law." The revealed things of the Law that God gave through Moses was so clear it could be obeyed. It had to be obeyed!

That doesn't mean that every page of Scripture is easy to understand, or that no effort will ever need to be put forth to discern the meaning of God's word. Peter assured his readers that Paul's words were difficult to understand at times, 2 Pt 3:15-16.

So, we read and study God's word expecting to discover one coherent message after another, from one passage to another, even though it may take some study and patience. Again, we expect to discover one meaning in each text, not several. That is exactly what we expect of others when we communicate to them. We count on that and enjoy that basic understanding about words and their meaning. Above all we should extend the same courtesy to God and His words. The Bible can be understood because God meant it to be understood.

### 3. Hold Fast to the Normal Use of Words and Language!

We read and study the Bible following the practices we consider normal for any other important document. When a husband comes home from work and finds a note on the counter letting him know the light bulb in the hallway is out, he doesn't read the note in a way that concludes spiritual darkness is welling up in the house. Rather, he reads the note normally and puts a new bulb in the hallway. That is the normal interpretation of the note and that was the intended, normal meaning. We have to read our Bibles the same way.

Again, this practice is known as the Literal-Grammatical-Historical method of interpretation. Normal reading or interpretation means statements are assumed to be literal unless it is evident the author was using a figure. For example, when Jesus said, "I am the door," (Jn 10:7-10) we do not conclude that Jesus is made of wood and swings on hinges. We naturally understand our Lord was using imagery in His communication. Our minds intuitively see that the literal meaning is unlikely and we accept it as a figure of speech.

But even when interpreting figures of speech, it is good practice to begin with the literal meaning to get the author's point: What is a door? What purpose does a door serve? Having asked that, then we should ask: What was Jesus trying to communicate by suggesting His metaphoric resemblance of a door? The literal or normal use of an actual door guides the meaning of the figure: Jesus is the entrance or gateway to eternal life.

Also it is important to understand that the Author and the context get to determine the meaning of any metaphor or figure of speech, NOT the reader. See Jn 10:6! The controlling line of authority for the meaning is always in the words and the context the author spoke from.

### 4. Understand the Purpose of the Accommodation of Revelation!

What is meant by "the accommodation of revelation?" It simply means that sometimes God accommodates what He has revealed so that our finite intellect can grasp His meaning. God revealed His truth in terms that human beings can understand.

One of the clearest ways God did this (that is easily overlooked) is that He wrote Scripture in well-known human languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. He did not speak in some lofty, far-off language which belonged only to superior intellects.

Also, when God's word speaks of infinite or divine concepts, it does so in terms we can relate to. For example, 2 Chr 16:9 says "*For the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth. . .*" That doesn't necessarily mean that God the Father, a spirit being, has physical eyes as we do. He doesn't. But God knew that eyesight is the most perceptive of the human sense, therefore He described His infinite perceiving abilities that way. Accommodation means God stoops to our level, describing Himself in ways we can understand. His point in doing this is never to cloud His intended meaning; only to make His meaning clearer.

Isn't this similar to what parents do with toddlers just learning to speak? They accommodate their language to a more simple structure for the purpose that their children will understand what they are trying to communicate. Parents don't do it so as to make their meaning obscure or indiscernible to their children.

## **5. Read the Passage/Book Repeatedly To Make Observations!**

Here are some sample questions to ask and steps to take as you read and study Scripture. Notice these questions lie at different levels - "macro" levels (the whole level, the Bible, the book under consideration) and "micro" levels (the specific passage or verse under consideration). This is where the bulk of your time is going to be spent in study and interpretation. Do not give up here too quickly! Keep your backside in the chair!

*What kind of book are you reading?*

*Where does it lie in your Bible? What difference does that make?*

*What do you know about the author (and the Author!) from this book in particular?*

*What do you know about the audience? Are there any important characters named who need to be identified?*

*What do you know about the setting (historical, geographical, cultural, etc.)? Do you need to look at a map? Understand units of measurement, currency amounts in light of today's currency? Etc.*

*Why was the book written?*

*What do you notice as you read and reread the entire book?*

*What was the point of the passage immediately preceding the passage you're studying?*

*Read the passage over and over again. Try hard to not assume you know what it says (Consider printing out a double-spaced text of the passage with wide margins to write your many observations and questions on.).*

*As you read, ask yourself, "What is this passage saying?"*

*Read EVERY WORD in the passage (read each sentence multiple times, each time emphasizing a different word).*

*Write down every question that comes to mind (What does this word mean? Why are the words in this order? To whom do the pronouns refer? Etc.)*

*Read the passage in several other versions (Notice where the differences are in translations. Why do they differ in the way they do?)*

*What do you think the key words and phrases are? What in the text supports your conclusion?*

*What words do you not know that you need to look up in a dictionary?*

*Are any figures of speech used?*

*Are there any contrasts or comparisons being made?*

*What words or phrases indicate that a transition is being made? What kind of transition in thought is it?*

*What is the main clause and subject and verb of that clause?*

*What are the dependent clauses in your passage?*

*How are all the clauses related to the others?*

*Give thought to how the passage you're studying fits in with what you've already learned about the book.*

*How does this passage fit in with what comes before and after it?*

*What point is the author/Author trying to make?*

*What stands out to you?*

*Do you need to adjust any ideas you've formed thus far?*

*Start considering important things like: What have you learned about God in this passage that must fuel your worship of Him (after all, you are a worshiper of the God whose words you are studying!)? What have you learned about the Christian life that makes you eager to pursue godliness in His strength? What have you learned about the nature of sin that you want to confess and repent of or be more watchful for? Etc. These kinds of considerations in your observation can help you to maintain a worshipful, teachable heart as you study.*

## **6. Understand the Relationship between Interpretation and Application!**

There is an important relationship between the interpretation of a text and the application of it to the reader's life. Like two back-to-back runners on a relay team, interpretation of a passage "runs" its leg first on the page of Scripture and then hands off the "baton" so that application can "run" its leg into the life of the believer. Interpretation is NOT application, and application is NOT interpretation. Though both need one another greatly, they must each take their proper space and role in their relationship. Interpretation of a passage must be established first so as to understand the meaning of the text, then application(s) can be made.

Interpretation is the understanding of the truth intention of the author (see definitions above). Or, more simply put, interpretation finds the meaning the author intended in his historical situation. The application is the various ways that one may need to live in light of that meaning in the passage. It is important to understand what both interpretation and application are, and are not.

Consider how the following example might reveal how jumbled up Christians can think about these important parts of Bible study. Jesus said, "**Love one another,**" Jn 15:12. A wife studying that might think in response, "That MEANS I need to love my husband better." But is that what JESUS really MEANS in Jn 15:12 as He speaks to His disciples? Or has the wife conflated how she believes her life must change with what JESUS means in Jn 15:12? If her view of what that passage "MEANS" is right, she might get upset with other women in the church who also try to love her husband better (that is the MEANING she claims)!

This sloppy use of "means" (when "applies" might be the better thought) opens the door for even more wrong statements like, "Well, that's what that passage MEANS to you, but what it MEANS to me is. . . ." An avalanche of wrong thinking about interpretation and application is now underway.

Jesus is the only one who MEANS anything in those words in Jn 15:12! He is the Author of those words! It is the reader's responsibility to interpret carefully so as to grasp His ONE meaning in the text. Then, the reader must carefully think of the implications and applications that are necessary in life.

The MEANING of Jn 15:12 is a command from Jesus for His disciples to live out a selfless concern for others. A woman reading or studying that MEANING may pursue an APPLICATION that involves her living more selflessly with her husband. That APPLICATION, however, is not the MEANING of that passage.

Here is what Joel James says about the relationship between the meaning of a text and the application that arises from that meaning:

“Interpretation and application must always be kept separate. Here is one way to do that. Let’s assume you are studying Romans 12:1-2. Re-write in your own words those two verses. Start every sentence with the words “Paul said. . . .” Make sure you write only what Paul actually said to the Romans in that verse. That is the interpretation. From that interpretation, you can develop appropriate applications for your present situation.

Example: Rm 12:2 - Do not be conformed to the world: WRONG APPROACH: “To me that MEANS we shouldn’t watch cable. In fact, this verse MEANS all cable is evil. If you have a cable subscription you’re not a Christian. That what Paul said to the Romans, you know. . . .” Notice how that is just one mixed, swirled fusing of meaning and how the person believes life should be impacted as a result. RIGHT APPROACH: Interpretation: Paul said the Roman believers should not follow the same patterns of thinking and living unbelievers do. Application: Something that influences me to think like an unbeliever is watching cable. To keep from being conformed to worldly thinking I should be more discerning about what I watch on cable or even avoid watching it all together. . . .”

Notice the two, crisp, clear steps: First interpretation, then application. What Paul said and meant for the Romans is related to but not equal to how you are to act based on what he said and meant. One interpretation can lead to many legitimate applications; just make sure you actually find the one meaning of the text first before you start multiplying applications.”

## **7. Linger Longer in the Text (Context, Context, Context)!**

Most students of the Bible study the Bible because they are after something very important and good. They are looking for a meaningful application or encouragement from the Bible that will speak to them in whatever situation in life they are currently facing. Certainly God intends His words to impact our hearts as we walk through life’s daily events. But how we get to those necessary applications and implications for living is everything.

This is especially where we need self-control as we read, study and interpret Scripture (with the hopes of living out a meaningful application). It is possible to get in such a rush to obtain the application for our lives in our study that we race through the holy words and phrases and clauses, hastily looking for that which satisfies the application “itch” we desperately want “scratched.”

The problem is, we can scratch the application itch we feel in illegitimate ways with God’s word. Perhaps God never intended His words we’re studying to scratch the application itch we’re feeling in the way that we are trying to use His words. Or perhaps God intended those words to scratch a completely different application itch altogether.

It is possible for hurried interpreters to walk away from the Bible, satisfied that an application itch was scratched, but God not be satisfied with how His words were handled. What’s the solution? Linger longer in the text and context. Doing so may delay getting the scratch for the application itch we feel, but it will be a far more satisfying and edifying scratch, knowing that God’s words and His meaning were handled in an honorable way.

Perhaps some examples of how a hasty glance at God’s word can lead you to interpretations, applications and implication that are unwarranted will be helpful. Consider a couple of absurd examples

first to make the point. With a quick glance at Ph 2:3a one will see the imperative “do nothing.” If we don’t linger longer in that sentence to examine the impact of the rest of Paul’s words, we might quickly (foolishly!) walk away with an unwarranted justification for laziness (“Do nothing!!”).

The same silly thing could be done with Ph 4:6a, “Be anxious.” Is that a justification for worry? Of course not. Lingering just a little bit longer reveals a much better interpretation of Paul’s meaning which then paves the way for correct application - God’s meaning through Paul serves your heart much better and “scratches” your “itch” better than the quick glance ever did or could.

You might think you’d never do something like those examples which so clearly missed God’s point in the text. Maybe not. But what about the way that many Christians view Jer 29:11? That verse has become a favorite “sound bite” for Christian memes and calendars.

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans for welfare and not for calamity.”

Joel James writes,

“This verse is often quoted as if it were a general promise to all believers. However, even a cursory examination of Jer 29 shows that this was part of a letter sent by Jeremiah to the Jews exiled in Babylon. Reading further, you find that this promise was part of God’s plan to restore the nation of Israel in the future. The ones to whom Jeremiah was writing and the specific situation - exile and promised restoration - limits the meaning of this verse. It is definitely not a sweeping promise that believers will have an easy and calamity-free passage through life (Jeremiah himself was hated, harried, thrown in prison, kidnapped, and martyred for his faithful preaching - it certainly didn’t apply to him!). Context determines meaning.”

Lingering longer clarifies this. And quickly skimming through a passage because we are eager to make an application positions us to miss the intended meaning entirely. Legitimate applications can never exist without the solid interpretations underneath them. This takes more time than you might think.

Again, self-control and discipline is needed in this. Train yourself to want the original author’s meaning MORE THAN a quick, meaningful “scratch” for an application “itch.” Your life must change and be influenced by God’s word! But that must happen the right way way with an honorable use of God’s words. You will be far more satisfied by the legitimate application that arises from proper interpretation. And God will be glorified by your carefulness with His word.

## **8. Give Grammar and Syntax More Weight in Interpretational Decisions!**

When trying to communicate what is inside us, we don’t select the top five words that describe our inward thoughts and simply speak those words in a list form. That would communicate something of what is within us, but that is not how meaning is conveyed. Language does not convey meaning merely at the individual word level. Rather, we learn at an early age to connect words together, arranging them thoughtfully, so that the meaning we intend to communicate comes forth most clearly.

Some words that we tie together, when analyzed in isolation, seem very insignificant (“the,” “a,” “and,” etc.). But when all of our words are considered in their relationship to one another - from the seemingly most



insignificant words to the most colorful and descriptive words - our meaning is conveyed and we are understood.

A verse in Scripture does not say more or less than what the rules of language make it say. The meaning we intend through our words, the meaning God intends through His words is bound up in the grammar and syntax of the words. Grammar rules (like subject-verb agreement) and syntax (how the words and phrases are related to one another) help convey the meaning of the verse. The more familiar a student of the Bible can be with grammar and syntax, the clearer the meaning intended in the passage will become.

## 9. Be Careful with a Word's Meaning!

At the proper place and time, it is appropriate to isolate words in your study of Scripture in order to define them accurately. As you do this, keep in mind the historical appropriateness of the definitions you might seek. One of the great dangers a Bible student faces is reading a modern view of a word or concept into an ancient, biblical word. To read a definition of "slavery" or "slave" drawn from the slavery in the early days of our country's practice of slavery, will not meet the definition of Paul's use of "slave" in the New Testament. It is historically inaccurate to read this more recent slavery concept into Paul's statements, because both "versions" of slavery are not entirely equal. This is called totality transfer: totally transferring another century's meaning of a word into a first century word. Always make sure your word definitions and interpretations are appropriate to the historical situation. Example: Is our culture's use of the word "grace" equal to the way Paul used "grace" in the New Testament?

Key words within the passage under consideration must be defined accurately. To do this, it is helpful to consider the other uses of that word in the Scripture - FIRST by the same author and then by others. If there are multiple meanings possible for the word, the immediate context ALWAYS determines which meaning the author intended in the passage. If you are studying in the New Testament, the Old Testament background of the word must be considered.

You can accomplish much in word study with just an exhaustive English concordance and some persistence. If you look at every use of a word, you'll naturally see its range of meanings, its nuances in different contexts. However, today there are also many excellent, usable lexicons, theological word books, and commentaries that provide scholarly explanations of biblical words for the average Bible student. Get them and use them!

Here are some examples of how a word's meaning is determined by its context, or, how a word usually doesn't have only one rigid meaning that must occur in every context in which it is found.

"Called" = Rm 8:29-30 vs Mt 22:14

"Flesh" = Jn 1:14 and Gal 2:20 vs. Gal 5:16-17, 24

"Fear of the Lord" = Ps 19:9 and the rest of the Psalms and Proverbs

What the author intended in his specific context determines what a word means. Not other contexts. That's how it works with you and your use of words, and that's how it works with God and His word!

## 10. Compare/Contrast Your Passage with Other Passages!

There is an important balance to maintain when studying Scripture. The Bible was written over a period of 1500 years by more than thirty human authors, yet the Bible agrees with itself amazingly so - or not so amazingly when you consider its one divine Author, God! Because Scripture was breathed forth by God who knows everything and never lies, the Bible does not contradict itself.

That means passages that are more difficult to understand can be clarified by turning to other passages in the Bible. But also, just because the one Author of Scripture never disagreed with Himself from one passage to the next, that doesn't mean that every single passage says the exact same thing, or has the exact same meaning. The unity of the Bible doesn't demand each passage have exactly the same meaning. That is why you must be careful when you "cross reference" in your study. Each passage must speak for itself and then be lined up next to the other passages and considered in that string of passages. What is the overall message being communicated by God in each passage and then through the string of passages?

Therefore, we must avoid the practice of taking our conclusions from one passage and forcing it onto or into every other passage in order to "harmonize" them. That can lead to bad and even dishonest theology. In a study of the word "justification" in the book of James, it would be wrong to cross reference Paul's use of "justification" in Galatians or Romans and read James' meaning into Paul's (or vice versa). Each passage must stand on its own. The meaning of "justification" in James gets to be determined by James and his context. The meaning of "justification" in Galatians or Romans then gets to be determined by Paul and his context. Neither meaning overrides the other. Both speak forth what God intended to communicate concerning justification. It is the interpreter's job to get to the harmony in God's mind the right way concerning justification (it doesn't come by making both passages say the exact same thing).

So compare your passage with other passages, but be careful. Let each passage say what it says, and then compare and contrast!

Notice where this step of interpretation takes place in the list (closer to the end than the beginning). Discipline yourself to stay in your passage longer. If you find yourself quickly wanting to turn away to another passage in order to define your passage, slow down! Study a little longer before you turn the page!

## 11. Compare/Contrast Your Interpretation with Other Interpretations!

It is good for a student to check his understanding of a passage against the interpretations of Bible scholars from prior ages of Christianity. It is impossible to know all the geographic, historical, and interpretational issues in a passage - information Bible scholars spend a lifetime accumulating. Bible dictionaries, commentaries, and other Bible study tools can shorten that process from a lifetime to five minutes!

Notice where this step of interpretation takes place in the list. Almost at the end. Not at the beginning. There is a reason for that. As a rule it's best to do your own study on a passage, and then compare it with someone else's. Sometimes you'll need to use Bible dictionaries and commentaries early in the study

process to get a handle on a certain word or theological concept. That's certainly acceptable. However, avoid the trap of opening a commentary and reading it as if it were the Bible.

Work on a passage all you can, looking up specific words or concepts you don't understand. Once you've done all you can to process a text and its meaning, then use good commentaries to fill in the gaps and correct errors. Rather than read the results of someone else's analysis, analyze the passage yourself. You'll understand the message of the text and apply it better if you do.

One of the things you're doing when you turn to commentaries is watching another believer wrestle with the same text you are. Maybe they wrestled with it over a hundred years ago while in an entirely different cultural situation than you. But watching them handle and interpret that passage in their situation may open your eyes to things you want to consider or pitfalls they fell into that you want to avoid.

How does your interpretation compare and contrast with what others have concluded? Where is your thinking different than theirs? Why is your thought different? Is there something to change now in your interpretation? Or is there something more to investigate?

Be careful to not become so commentary dependent that you never develop your own skills to interpret Scripture. You can do more than you think! It may take more time than you think to truly grasp what God intends in the Scripture before you. Do not expect the meaning in God's word to come to you as fast as McDonalds hands you your food in the drive through. Do not expect the meaning to be accessible as fast as the microwavable dinner you pull out of the microwave. Keep your backside in the chair a little longer. Plan for longer seasons of uninterrupted study!

## **12. Prayerfully Summarize the Meaning of the Passage the Best You Can!**

At the end of your study, you'll most likely have a lot of assorted ideas and conclusions about the passage you've been studying. They may be on several different pieces of paper or docs on your laptop. That's when it is time to prayerfully sit before your passage and try to summarize the one meaning that God intended in the passage before you.

There are certainly many important details swirling around. Some of them are supporting details. But only one of them is the main idea. Using all of the steps above, this is what you are running toward in your study (sometimes crawling toward!). Prayerfully try to summarize the one point of the passage into one sentence. That will be the fruit of all your analysis that examined each little part of the passage. God used those parts and pieces not to communicate many meanings in your passage, but only one. Try to put it all back together in a way that accents the one meaning He intended.