

D5: The Hermeneutic

Honoring the Lord (and controlling ourselves) in our Bible Reading:

INTRODUCTION:

1. Prayerfully Position Yourself under 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.***

(Much of the following material relies heavily on Joel James' "How To Study The Bible." Used with permission.)

2. Expect a Single, Clear Meaning!

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

4. Read the Passage/Book Repeatedly To Make Observations!

*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? (your favorite concepts and words do not automatically make a word the key word in the passage; who gets to determine what the key words are?)
What words do you not know that you need to look up in a dictionary?
Are any figures of speech used? How do I know it is a figure of speech?
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 carefully read.

5. Understand the Relationship between Interpretation and Application!

6. Linger Longer for Better Life-Impact from the Bible!

7. Give Grammar and Syntax More Weight in Interpretational Decisions!

8. Be Careful with a Word's Meaning!

9. Compare/Contrast Your Passage with Other Passages!

10. Prayerfully Contemplate What You Have Just Read!