

PRACTICES OF A HEALTHY CHRISTIAN

TARGETING THE WORD OF GOD FOR FAITHFUL APPLICATION

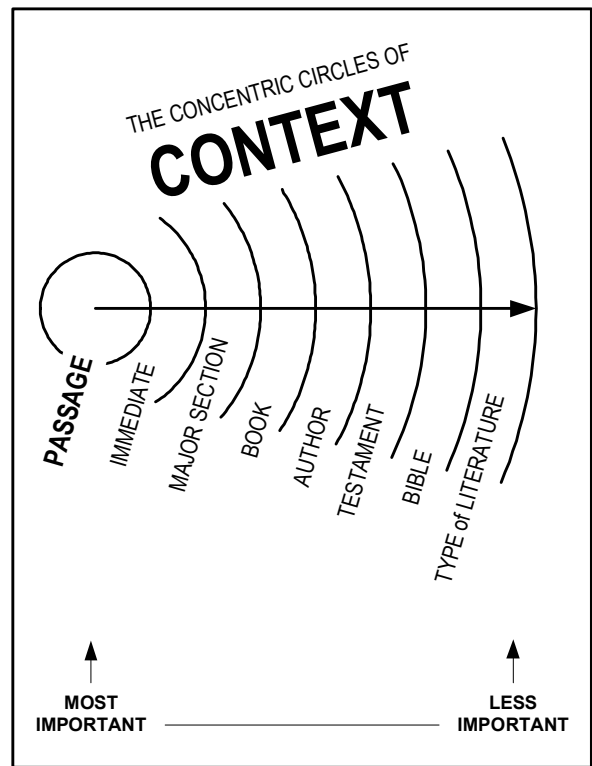
1. **A HEALTHY CHRISTIAN READS THE BIBLE AS THEY WOULD ANY OTHER BOOK.**
 - a. Their key goal: to understand what the author's intention was.
 - b. A helpful pattern of study:
 - i. Begin with an overview of the passage in the context of the major section or book. Answer the question, "What seems to be the author's **PURPOSE** for including this passage in the whole flow of his work?"
 - ii. Zoom in on the specific passage you are studying. What **PIECES** of the puzzle of the author's intention do you need to understand better? What words do you need to know how the author would have defined them? What backgrounds would the author have in mind? Are there things that the author seems to assume that the original readers would have understood?
 - iii. Trace the thought-flow of the author and gain the **PERSPECTIVE** of the passage. As you put the pieces together grammatically, how do the findings support (or contradict) your proposed purpose for the passage (see above)?

2. **A HEALTHY CHRISTIAN READS THE BIBLE PERSONALLY AND PASSIONATELY.**
 - a. The key goal: to understand and apply what the application principles and practices are for us today.
 - b. Some helpful reminders:
 - i. The Bible is God's Word, revealing what He wants you to know and do.
 - ii. Always be seeking how the Lord wants you to apply the principles of the text into the practices of our lives. Don't be too quick to dismiss their value for you personally.
 - iii. Seek to summarize what the original readers would have understood:
 - (1) Seek first to understand what the application **PRACTICES** would have been for the original readers. What would they have understood that the author wanted them to do or not do?
 - (2) Secondly, determine what application **PRINCIPLES** the author used to support (provide foundation or grounding for) the practices he wanted to see in the original readers' lives. For example: Don't lie to each other (the practice) because we are members of one another (the principle).
 - iv. Determine if the author intended the **PRINCIPLES** to be Time-less or Time-bound and the **PRACTICES** to be Trans-cultural or Culture-bound (see the FLOW-CHART TO GUIDE OUR STUDY AND APPLICATION OF SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES).
 - (1) If the practices are trans-cultural, then they should be carried out in all cultures.
 - (2) If the practices are culture-bound, but the principles are time-less, then . . .
 - (a) they would be God's will for a similar culture today.
 - (b) we should ask what would be the expression of the principle in our current culture.
 - (3) If the evidence is that the practices are culture-bound and the principles are time-bound, then we have a historical account that God wants us to know but without a mandated application for our day.

3. **A HEALTHY CHRISTIAN LETS THE EXPLICIT TEACHINGS INTERPRET THE IMPLICIT.**
 - a. "The Analogy of Faith" = No single statement or obscure passage of one book can be allowed to set aside a doctrine which is clearly established by many passages.
 - b. 2 Peter 3:16b (ESV) — "There are some things in them [Paul's letters] that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures."

4. **A HEALTHY CHRISTIAN REALIZES MOST IMPORTANT TO KNOWING THE MEANING OF A TEXT IS FOUND IN ITS CONTEXT.**

- a. The most important context is that of the passage itself, broadening out in layers to less important contexts (see THE CONCENTRIC CIRCLES OF CONTEXT).
- b. The context of the type of literature (genre) gives us guidelines for seeking the author's intention. These types include: Prose, Poetry, Narrative, Wisdom, and Apocalyptic.
 - i. Note the presence of parallelisms in biblical poetry. (Hebrew poetry used parallelism not primarily rhyme or meter).
 - ii. Seek to understand the historical narratives by the teaching passages (The rule of thumb: The epistles should interpret the Gospels and Acts).
 - iii. Note the difference between a proverb and a promise (the proverbs present principles that are true "all things considered" and not simplistic promises).
 - iv. The use of symbolism in apocalyptic literature (like the book of Revelation) is open to lots of interpretive fancy. We should emphasize the theological underpinnings of the material and be cautious with the predictive prophecy elements.



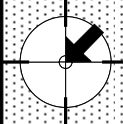
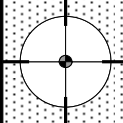
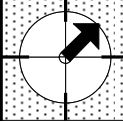
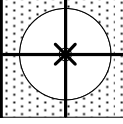
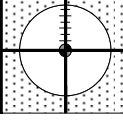
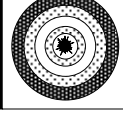
5. **A HEALTHY CHRISTIAN IS VERY CAREFUL IN USING WORD STUDIES.**

- a. Remember, we are looking to understand what the author meant by the words he used.
- b. We want to avoid quarreling about words, especially when some try to force these words to contradict the obvious meaning of the text (see 2 Tim. 2:14).
- c. Do not apply the range of possible meanings to a specific passage. The author probably did not intend to give us a multiple choice option of choosing the meaning.
- d. Do not assume that the history or root of a word's meaning is the determining factor in what the author intended when he used the word. Look for the meaning at the time the passage was written.
- e. Do not read back into the text the meanings for a word that did not occur until later in history.
- f. Do not assume that a word always has one meaning that fits every context in the Bible.

6. **A HEALTHY CHRISTIAN IS ON GUARD AGAINST THE FACT THAT THEIR HEART WILL BE THE PRIMARY SOURCE OF HERESY.**

- a. They realize that dull hearts and closed ears and eyes are more of a problem than lack of grammatical understanding (see Matthew 13:15).
- b. They understand the temptation to elevate our experiences (including our dreams and visions — see Jude 8 and Colossians 2:18) over the Word.
- c. They resist the old nature's tendency to engage in foolish, ignorant controversies (1 Tim. 6:4-5 and 2 Tim. 2:23) through irreverent babble (2 Tim. 2:16) and so-called "knowledge" (1 Tim. 6:20).
- d. They recognize that the lure of so-called "knowledge" can lead people into always learning but never arriving at the knowledge of the truth (2 Tim. 3:7). And that such devotion to trivia promotes speculations but not true stewardship from God (1 Tim. 1:4).
- e. They know that a spirit of rebellion turns us into heretics. Our unwillingness to submit to the authority of Scripture and of biblically ordained leaders (see 2 Pet. 2:10) are signs of hard hearts. This hardness leads to ignorance (Eph. 4:18).
- f. They grasp that it is always easy to slide over to one side of an issue and miss the biblical balance point. For example, they avoid mis-using passages that speak of disciplining ourselves and twisting them to promote asceticism (Col. 2:23). They equally avoid turning the grace of God into a license for sensuality (Jude 4).

HELPFUL QUESTIONS FOR TARGETING YOUR STUDY OF A BIBLE PASSAGE

PURPOSE <i>of the passage</i> 	Who is the human author of this Scripture passage? What do we know about him?
	To whom is the passage addressed? What do we know about them?
	What is the author's purpose in writing this passage? Is it to warn? Admonish? Discipline? Instruct? Encourage? Inform? Something else?
	Is the passage addressed to a specific circumstance or situation? If so, what is it?
PIECES <i>of the passage</i> 	What are the words or phrases in this passage that seem key? Can you define them as the author would have?
	Are there words that have a technical or semi-technical definition from earlier Biblical writings?
	Does the author of this book use this word elsewhere in his writings? If so, does its use there shed light on the usage here? Remember, a word can sometimes mean different things in a different context.
PERSPECTIVE <i>of the passage</i> 	Are there conjunctions that could be clues to the flow of the author's thought? Such as "and," "but," "since," "therefore," "in spite of."
	Can you see and follow the flow of thought in the passage and summarize it in one sentence?
	Do you have a sense of how God want us to use this passage? As a promise or assurance? A command? An example? A sin to avoid? A warning to heed? A truth about Himself, or the Church, or some other key topic? (What is the evidence from the context of the passage?)
PRINCIPLES <i>of the passage</i> 	How would you interpret the meaning of this passage, summarizing your work with the purpose, pieces, and perspective of the passage)? What is the evidence from the text to support your conclusions?
	How would you summarize the application principle for a believer's life today (what is the significance of the text for all believers, not just the original readers)?
	How might you use a tree (an ocean, an ant or bee, the sky . . .) to illustrate the application principle? How might you diagram (illustrate, demonstrate, or act out) this application so that it could be understood by a ten year old?
PRACTICE <i>of the passage</i> 	What actions steps could you choose that would be specific applications (practices) of the meaning and significance (principle) of this text?
	What practices could you apply to your own family? To your interaction with non-Christians? To your ministry as an edifier (up-builder) of brothers and sisters in Christ?
	Are there further areas of study that you are nudged toward because of this study?
	Do you have an example from your life (or someone else's) that would demonstrate how this principle works out into the daily practice of life?
PACT <i>of the passage</i> 	Based on the understanding of the meaning of the passage (the author's intention) and the significance (application principle), what potential practice will you commit to applying this coming week? Write out the change you intend to make in your attitude and/or behavior for Christ's glory.
	Share with some brothers and sisters in Christ, perhaps in your small group, what your pact of specific application is. Encourage them to check your work of studying the Bible (as detailed above). Ask them to pray with you and to hold you accountable by asking, "How's it going?"

A FLOW-CHART TO GUIDE OUR STUDY AND APPLICATION OF SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES

(with a focus on Time-less vs. Time-bound Application Principles and Trans-cultural vs. Culturally-bound Specific Practices)

