

Handling the Text: Pastoral Exegesis

Since the Bible is God’s instrument of change, transformation and grace, what does it mean to faithfully handle God’s Word? How should a preacher study and interpret a passage in order to arrive at a faithful understanding of it? What are the basic steps involved in studying the Bible that will set up the preacher to be ready to prepare a message that will bring transformation to the lives of those who will hear and respond to it? The ultimate goal is not to merely educate, but to see lives changed. This session looks at Bible study with the goal of genuine life change.

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Introduction: A high calling

“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, **rightly** handling the word of truth”.

2 Timothy 2:15

I. Presuppositions in order to approach the Text correctly

- A. The Pillar of Understanding: Truth
- B. The Vehicle of Understanding: Language
- C. The Spoiler of Understanding: Sin
- D. The Key to Understanding: Think and Rely

II. Placing the Text

- A. Genre
- B. Literary Context
 - 1. The whole book
 - 2. Larger section

3. Immediate context

C. Sociohistorical Context

D. Redemptive-Historical Context

III. Understanding the Text

A. Read it, read it and... reread it

B. Gather information (5 Ws & 1H)

C. Identify and understand key words

D. Find connecting words (and, therefore, for, because, but, etc.)

E. Identify comparisons and contrasts

F. Identify other biblical texts that are cited or clearly alluded to

G. Map the text/understand the structure

1. If your text is a narrative, look for the flow of the plot.
2. If your text is an epistle, pay close attention to the relationship between clauses.
3. If your text is poetic, look for parallelism and metaphorical language.

IV. Summarize the Text

“I find the getting of that sentence the hardest, the most exacting, and the most fruitful labour in my study. To compel oneself to fashion that sentence, to dismiss every word that is vague, ragged, ambiguous, to think oneself through to a form of words which defines the theme with scrupulous exactness – this is surely one of the most vital and essential factors in the making of a sermon: and I do not think any sermon ought to be preached or even written, until that sentence has emerged clear as a cloudless moon¹”.

- A. Compel yourself to fashion that sentence

- B. Dismiss every word that is vague, ragged, and ambiguous

- C. Define the theme with scrupulous exactness

- D. Don't move on until that sentence has appeared

Conclusion: Passing on God's ideas

“To make a deep impact in the lives of our listeners for the glory of God our sermons need to build upon the solid foundation of an exegetically accurate understanding of what God was saying through His human writers to their original audiences. Faithful preachers pass on God's ideas to their listeners. They are biblical plagiarists. To do otherwise is to display a shocking lack of integrity and to invite the judgment of God”².

Suggested Readings:

Kent Edwards, *Deep Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishing Group, 2009)
Gordon D. Fee & Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003)
D. McCartney & C. Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing Company, 2002)
Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2014)

¹ J. H. Jowett, *The Preacher, His Life and Work* (New York: Doran, 1912), 133.

² Kent Edwards, *Deep Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishing Group, 2009), 68.