



DISCIPLESHIP ON THE MOVE

Applying the Story



to your life

If you are going through this curriculum with a small group...

In the past devotions, I have provided discussion questions for every week's devotion. That will not work quite as well with this content. However, this would be a great opportunity to actually practice putting the skills you've learned into practice!

I would encourage your group to read through this whole document to learn some of the skills for applying the text to your life well, and then spend the next 9 weeks practicing reading the scripture passages below together using the tools you've learned. They are all from different genres, different parts of history, and have different themes.

Passages to Study together:

Deuteronomy 6: 1-9
Judges 7
1 Samuel 24: 1-12
Job 5
Psalm 65
Isaiah 53
Mark 8: 22-26
Revelation 6: 1-8
1 Corinthians 10: 14-23

I recommend you studying them individually before you come to small group and then together asking/answering these questions:

1. What genre is this?
2. What part of history is this written in?
3. Who was the audience, and what was the goal of the writing of this book?
4. What words seemed important in the passage? Why?
5. How does this passage relate to the rest of scripture?
6. Where do the themes of this passage overlap with your life?
7. Was there anything you sensed God inviting you to act on as you studied and reflected on this passage?

Introduction

Hello Bridge family,

I've had conversations with many of you in the last six months. Conversations about faith and doubt, conversations about longings and losses, and conversations about the complexities of following Jesus in a busy world that feels more complicated every day.

Through those conversations, I've realized that many of you want to learn and keep going deeper in following Jesus and your understanding of the Bible. Still, schedules are crazy, and consistency in meeting for classes or small groups can often be a challenge.

That's why, for the rest of this year, we're going to bring some mini-teachings to you via email to help you understand scripture better.

If we want to know God and follow God well in the world, we need to know his story, and know his Word, and practice appropriately applying his word to our lives.

So, for the rest of the year, you're going to get one email from me each week. I'll keep it brief, I promise! The e-mails are going to be organized into three parts:

- Reading the Big Story of the Bible: In this section we will explore the important story arcs of God's relationship to humanity through scripture.

The Big Story



- Reading the History of the Bible: In this section we will focus on what was happening historically through scripture to help us understand different books of the Bible in their context.

The Context of the Story

Genres	Origins	Patriarchs
Nomads	Conquest	United Kingdom
Divided Kingdom	Fall of Israel	Fall of Judah
Exile in Babylon	Return	Intertestamental
NT Judaism	Roman Culture	Early Church

- Reading the Bible Alongside Your Life: In this section, we will explore the kinds of questions we need to ask of the scripture text, its context, and the context we find ourselves in if we are going to faithfully interpret and apply the Bible to our lives.

Applying the Story



So, I hope you join me for this journey. If, as you are reading, you have any questions that arise, or want to go deeper, please feel free to reach out to me. I am deeply passionate about helping our church learn about God and explore his Word and then live it out in wholehearted ways in the world – for the glory of God and the good of his creation.

With joyful expectation for the journey,

Pastor Sara Gregory

Applying the Story to your Life

Hey everyone, Sara here.

We've spent a lot of time this year talking about how to read the Bible faithfully, thoughtfully, and with humility. I hope you've found that you now have more tools to help you do that better as you dig into the Word for yourself. If you're still looking for resources, or if these emails have raised questions for you, I would love to talk to you more. Don't hesitate to send me an email, and we can talk over coffee or chips and salsa.

Ultimately though, correctly interpreting scripture does not mean a lot if we don't know what to do with it after we hear it. James 1: 23 says it this way:

Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.

So ultimately, our study of the word is not about the reading itself, it's about how we apply it to our lives. It's about how we live out what we learn in scripture.

Just as there are good tools to use to get at the meaning of the text, there are also good guide posts and tools to use to figure out how to apply scripture to our life and our context. Sometimes the most literal application of scripture is not the most faithful.

For example, Matthew 5:30 says, "If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away." A literal application of that verse is probably not appropriate.

Or, in Exodus 16: 4-28, scripture tells us not to harvest food on the Sabbath. Jesus, however, in Matthew 12:3-8, talks about God's intention for the sabbath- to be for the good of man- rather than following the literal letter of the law when he re-interprets that passage and allows his disciples to pick grain from the fields on the sabbath.

There is not an exact science in applying scripture to every situation, and even different seminaries and schools teach slightly different methods. Which is why, ultimately, we should practice reading scripture humbly and prayerfully- aware of our dependence on the Holy Spirit to help us apply the living Word rightly to our lives.

While there is not an exact science, there are some good tools we can use to help keep us on the right track. I'm excited to spend the next few weeks exploring those with you!

I hope you all have a great week! And I hope you enjoy this worship song below.

It's one of my all-time favorites, and I enjoy this updated version a lot. It's a version of "Knowing You" by Steffany Gretzinger.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I_wC29WxfEY

Praying before you Read

I don't know about you, but I often come barreling into time in the Word.

I bring my baggage with me.

I bring my to-do list, my sense of urgency, my opinions about the world, and my complicated emotions to my quiet moments of seeking God, and if I'm not careful, these things all become the lens through which I read the word.

These experiences and opinions become the funnel (or even blinders) that narrow the questions I ask of scripture and narrow the ways I hear God speak. As humans, this is part of our reality, but there are ways that we can slow ourselves down and ready our hearts to widen our lens.

One of the primary ways is through prayer. In prayer we remember that we do not engage the Word alone, but that the very Spirit of God is our companion, teacher, and guide.

As we come to scripture, we can intentionally pray that God would:

- 1) still our minds and hearts to help us focus
- 2) soften our our hardened hearts
- 3) make us attentive and open to the Holy Spirit's teaching as we engage God's word and
- 4) ask God to help us be willing to humbly surrender and respond to what the Spirit reveals to us as we read.

One of the resources that I often use to prayerfully engage scripture is the Daily Lectio Divina podcast (linked below). This resource starts with prayer and then utilizes the tools of silence and reflection to engage deeply in a short passage of scripture.

This is a great way to prayerfully engage the word even while you're on the move.

If it's been awhile since you spent time in the word, this resource could be a good starting point for you this week.

May the Spirit of God seem like a close companion as you prayerfully spend time in the Word this week.

<https://www.abidingway.life/lectio-podcast>

Scripture Context with Case Study

The next few weeks, I'm going to walk you through some of the things that I do and the questions that I ask when I am trying to understand a passage of scripture. I don't always go through this whole process in my personal time in the word, unless I am reading an especially controversial or complex passage, but I have found these steps helpful to unpack and apply scripture.

The first step I take to interpret scripture is to ask questions about the context of the passage like the questions below.

1. What book of the Bible am I in?
2. What genre of writing is this?
3. Who was the book's original audience?
4. What part of the Bible's historical timeline is this book situated in?
5. What is the author's primary purpose for this particular book?
6. What happens before and after the passage I am reading?
7. How does this passage relate to other parts of scripture?
 - a. Do other passages in scripture address similar topics? Do those other passages raise further questions for you about interpreting and applying this passage? How might you put these passages in dialogue with each other?

I thought it might be most helpful then to give you a type of case study with a passage to see how this works. If you're interested in reading a case study, it is added below.

If this is all the time you have for now, I'll leave you with a worship song: "Lift You High" by Housefires.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e13_fgkVQDU

I hope you have a great week!

Context Case Study

Deuteronomy 7: 11-16

Therefore, take care to follow the commands, decrees and laws I give you today.

If you pay attention to these laws and are careful to follow them, then the Lord your God will keep his covenant of love with you, as he swore to your ancestors. He will love you and bless you and increase your numbers. He will bless the fruit of your womb, the crops of your land—your grain, new wine and olive oil—the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks in the land he swore to your ancestors to give you. You will be blessed more than any other people; none of your men or women will be childless, nor will any of your livestock be without young. The Lord will keep you free from every disease. He will not inflict on you the horrible diseases you knew in Egypt, but he will inflict them on all who hate you. You must destroy all the peoples the Lord your God gives over to you. Do not look on them with pity and do not serve their gods, for that will be a snare to you.

1. **What book of the Bible am I in?** Deuteronomy
2. **What genre of writing is this?** National History: It is meant to help the Israelites understand their past.
3. **Who is the book's primary audience?** The Israelites who had been wandering the desert for 40 years and were preparing to enter the Promised Land. It was also intended for future generations to learn their history.
4. **What part of the historical timeline is this book situated in?** This book follows the Exodus from Egypt and the 40 years wandering in the desert and precedes the Israelites' possession of the Promised Land.
5. **What is the author's primary purpose for this particular book?** To make sure the Israelites know their history, their Law, and the character of their God before they prepare to enter the Promised Land. The author wants the Israelites to follow the Law so that things will go well in the land they are entering.
6. **What happens before and after the passage I am reading?**
 - a. Before: Moses relayed the history of God's people and recited the 10 Commandments.
 - b. After: Moses warns of the dangers of the idolatry of others nations and continues to lay out "if, then" statements about God's blessings and curses.
7. **How does this passage relate to other parts of scripture?** (Note: You don't need to make an exhaustive list)

a. What other parts of scripture address similar topics?

- i. Covenant with Abraham
- ii. The Book of Job
- iii. Jesus' command to love our neighbors and enemies
- iv. Command not to murder
- v. Beatitude that says, "Blessed are the peacemakers."
- vi. Galatians passages about freedom from the law.
- vii. Jesus' empathy for the Samaritan woman, the unclean, etc.

b. How do those other passages raise further questions for you about interpreting and applying this passage?

- i. If we follow God's ways, why do we still suffer? (Job)
- ii. Aren't all nations God's people? Why would a loving God command the Israelites to destroy/kill other people?
- iii. Doesn't God love all people? Why would God inflict pain and disease on others?

c. How might you put these passages in dialogue with each other?

- i. Deuteronomy was trying to set up a society with simplicity and clarity as the people entered the promised land. However, the rest of scripture seems to acknowledge that life is seldom that simple and clear. We probably need to work to read this passage through the lens of Jesus- who welcomed and cared for and healed even people who were not Israelites- rather than assuming that we can apply this directly to our lives now.

Words of the Text

Last week, we looked at questions to ask about the context of a passage. This week, we'll look at what questions to ask of the specific text you are reading.

If any of you are English majors, you have a head start when it comes to this step. Many of the tools that you use when you study literature overlap with asking good questions about scripture.

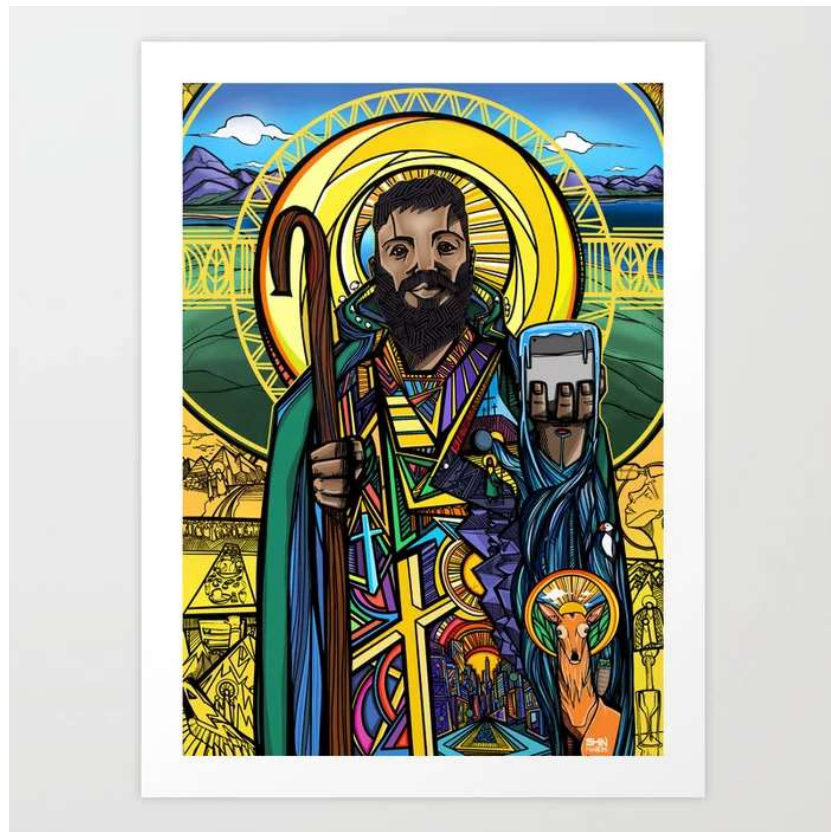
When you start digging deep into a specific passage, you'll want to ask questions like:

1. What words or concepts are being repeated?
2. How do the connecting words (therefore, thus, but, so, etc.) inform what is being said?
3. How is metaphor being used? What are the variety of implications of the metaphor?
4. How is the use of imagery meant to enhance our reading of the text?
5. What are the bigger themes being addressed in this passage?
6. What logic or argument is being used, and how is it working? (This is a particularly important question when you're reading the epistles in the New Testament).
7. What words seem most important?

Now I want to spend a little bit more time on that last question, because for me, word studies have been one of the most insightful and helpful ways for me to understand a text better. One of my very favorite (and free) tools to use when I'm studying a word in scripture is a website called **Blue Letter Bible** (www.blueletterbible.org).

On this website, you can search a verse in scripture, and then go to a specific word and see the Greek or Hebrew word behind it. Then, using the website, you can find all kinds of interesting information about the background of that word and where else in scripture it is used. If you have a favorite Bible verse, I'd encourage you to search it and then play around on the website and get familiar with the tools it offers you to understand the passage more deeply!

As I did last week, I've added a case study below on Psalm 23 for those who want to go deeper. If you need to go now, though, I'll leave you with a piece of artwork entitled "The Lord is My Shepherd" from one of my favorite Christian artists (@shinhappens).



Questions to Ask of the Text Case Study

Psalm 23

1

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

2

He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,

3

he refreshes my soul.
He guides me along the right paths
for his name's sake.

4

Even though I walk
through the darkest valley,^[a]
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.

5

You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

6

Surely your goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord
forever.

1. What words or concepts are being repeated?

- a. Provision
- b. Dwelling
- c. The presence of God with me

2. How do the connecting words (therefore, thus, but, so, etc.) inform what is being said?

- a. This question isn't very applicable to this passage. The only thing I would point out is the "even though" at the beginning of verse 4. This emphasizes the circumstantial challenge surrounding the Psalmist's attempts not to fear.

3. How is metaphor being used? What are the variety of implications of the metaphor?

- a. The metaphor of the shepherd calls to mind a few things:
 - i. God as our leader, provider, protector, corrector.
 - ii. Us as sheep who are dependent.
- b. The metaphor of a journey (walking, darkest valley, right paths, "will follow me." This reminds us that there are both times of rest and dwelling, and there are times that we are moving, exploring, changing.

4. How is the use of imagery meant to enhance our reading of the text?

- a. "Preparing a table" and "my cup overflows" and "anoint my head with oil" engage the senses- taste, smell, touch.
- b. "Green pastures" and "quiet waters" call to mind peaceful places.

5. What are the bigger themes being addressed in this passage?

- a. God's initiation and provision for us- not ours for ourselves.
- b. Safety
- c. The nearness of God.

6. What logic or argument is being used, and how is it working? (This is a particularly important question when you're reading the epistles in the New Testament).

- a. This passage is not functioning as an argument- it's mostly using poetry to evoke emotion and praise.

7. What words seem most important? (see below)

- a. Below, I picked two words that I wanted to learn more about and shared some screen shots of how I used www.blueletterbible.org to do a deeper dive into the words in their original languages.

b. Refreshes (v. 3)

Click on the “Strong #” to see more about the Hebrew or Greek word.

INTERLINEAR BIBLES CROSS-REFS COMMENTARIES DICTIONARIES MISC

SHOW CANTILLATION MARKS Masoretic Text SHOW VOWEL POINTS

23:3 נַפְשִׁי יִשׁוּב יְנַחֵנִי בְּמַעְגְלֵי-צֶדֶק לְמַעַן שְׂמוֹ:

Septuagint Forward Reverse Fwd Inline Rev Inline

English (KJV) [?]	Strong's	Inflected, Root & Transliterated	Parsing
He restoreth PHRASE	H7725	יִשׁוּב שוב šûb	HVoi3ms
my soul: PHRASE	H5315	נַפְשִׁי נֶפֶשׁ nepeš	HNCbsc/Sp1...
he leadeth me PHRASE	H5148	יְנַחֵנִי נָחָה nāḥâ	HVhi3ms/Sp...

SEARCH STUDY DEVOTIONALS HELP APPS & TOOLS MINISTRI

BLUE LETTER BIBLE HELP QUICKNAV ADV. OPTIONS KJV CLICK TO CHANGE

Verse or Word(s) KJV

COPY COPY OPTIONS STRONG'S RED-LETTER

KJV Translation Count — Total: 1,066x

The KJV translates Strong's H7725 in the following manner: return (391x), ...again (248x), turn (123x), ...back (65x), ...away (56x), restore (39x), bring (34x), render (19x), answer (18x), recompense (8x), recover (6x), deliver (5x), put (5x), withdraw (5x), requite (4x), *miscellaneous* (40x).

Outline of Biblical Usage [?]

l. to return, turn back

A. (Qal)

i. to turn back, return

a. to turn back

b. to return, come or go back

c. to return unto, go back, come back

d. of dying

e. of human relations (fig)

f. of spiritual relations (fig)

- to turn back (from God), apostatise
- to turn away (of God)
- to turn back (to God), repent
- turn back (from evil)

g. of inanimate things

A more literal interpretation of this part of verse 3 then may be, “He gives me back my soul.”

c. Goodness (v. 6)

SEARCH STUDY DEVOTIONALS HELP APPS & TOOLS MINISTRI

BLUE LETTER BIBLE HELP QUICKNAV ADV. OPTIONS KJV CLICK TO CHANGE

Verse or Word(s) KJV

COPY COPY OPTIONS STRONG'S RED-LETTER

KJV Translation Count — Total: 559x

The KJV translates Strong's H2896 in the following manner: good (361x), better (72x), well (20x), goodness (16x), goodly (9x), best (8x), merry (7x), fair (7x), prosperity (6x), precious (4x), fine (3x), wealth (3x), beautiful (2x), fairer (2x), favour (2x), glad (2x), *miscellaneous* (35x).

Outline of Biblical Usage [?]

adjective

l. good, pleasant, agreeable

A. pleasant, agreeable (to the senses)

B. pleasant (to the higher nature)

C. good, excellent (of its kind)

D. good, rich, valuable in estimation

E. good, appropriate, becoming

F. better (comparative)

G. glad, happy, prosperous (of man's sensuous nature)

H. good understanding (of man's intellectual nature)

I. good, kind, benign

J. good, right (ethical)

masculine noun

If you scroll down below this word, the website will show you all the other places in scripture that this Hebrew word is used.

The screenshot shows the Blue Letter Bible website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for SEARCH, STUDY, DEVOTIONALS, HELP, APPS & TOOLS, and MINISTR. Below this is a search bar with the text "Verse or Word(s)" and a dropdown menu set to "KJV". To the right of the search bar is a "CLICK TO CHANGE" button. Below the search bar is a secondary navigation bar with icons for COPY, COPY OPTIONS, STRONG'S, and RED-LETTER. The main content area displays a list of search results for the Hebrew word H2896. Each result includes a "TOOLS" button, a reference (e.g., Psa 107:9), and the corresponding verse text. The word H2896 is highlighted in red in the original image.

TOOLS	Psa 107:9	For he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness. H2896
TOOLS	Psa 109:5	And they have rewarded me evil for good, H2896 and hatred for my love.
TOOLS	Psa 109:21	But do thou for me, O GOD the Lord, for thy name's sake: because thy mercy <i>is</i> good, H2896 deliver thou me.
TOOLS	Psa 111:10	The fear of the LORD <i>is</i> the beginning of wisdom: a good H2896 understanding have all they that do <i>his commandments</i> : his praise endureth for ever.
TOOLS	Psa 112:5	A good H2896 man sheweth favour, and lendeth: he will guide his affairs with discretion.
TOOLS	Psa 118:1	O give thanks unto the LORD; for <i>he is</i> good: H2896 because his mercy <i>endureth</i> for ever.
TOOLS	Psa 118:8	<i>It is</i> better H2896 to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man.

Theological Frame

The last two weeks, we have looked at some pretty technical questions to ask of scripture and its context to help us interpret the Bible well. Today, we're going to zoom out a little bit to make sure that we are reading scripture in ways that honor both the witness of the whole biblical narrative, and are in line with teachings of the Church throughout history.

Now, this topic is obviously fraught, because the Church does not believe all of the same things. Denominations have split, and the Church throughout history has changed its mind on some theological topics. So... it's not an exact science. However, there *are* some major statements (creeds and confessions) that churches across denominations and throughout history have continued to affirm- statements like the Nicene Creed, the Apostles' Creed, and the Athanasian Creed.

As we read scripture, we do well to keep the theological truths in these statements as our guardrails for interpretation so that we don't end up in the ditches that the early church already dug us out of.

For example, a few weeks ago, I was having a conversation with a friend who had recently re-read John 3:16. He said, "I just think that God seems like an abusive father- giving his Son over to get tortured and killed to satisfy some sense of justice."

That may seem like a ridiculous statement to you - a misreading of John 3:16. However, that's probably because you understand some of the theology behind the statement.

Those of us who know some theology know that it's not that simple.

God did not sit back and let his Son get tortured and killed.

God is Christ.

Christ is God.

God allowed Godself to be tortured and killed for the sake of humanity.

But that's not in the verse.

That knowledge comes from our theological understanding of the Trinity and of the divinity of Christ- something the early church wrestled with deeply for years.

If we do not ask good questions about the theological framing that helps us interpret passages well, we lose the wisdom of the past and the guidance of the Holy Spirit since the Church's formation.

Below, you'll find a link to some theological questions and resources that you can use to dig into this piece of scripture interpretation. Until then, enjoy this video of the Apostle's Creed being recited in Afrikaans- to remind us that we are a part of a global church who speaks this creed together.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hSU_03f5L7I

Theological Framing Questions

So here are some questions you can ask of your interpretations of a scripture passage.

1. Does what I'm reading sound markedly different than what I have heard the church teach?
 - a. If yes:
 - i. Do some reading on the Church's teaching about this topic through history.
 - ii. What things have other interpreters noticed that you hadn't considered?
 - iii. What things are they trying to avoid or be careful of as they interpret?
 - iv. Are there things that have significantly changed that make this topic in need of further questions or possible re-interpretation?
 1. For example: the church's official statements for a long time supported slavery based on an interpretation of biblical texts. During the abolitionist movement, there were valid reasons to ask if that interpretation had been correct or not.
 - b. If no:
 - i. You could still do some reading to further your understanding of whatever theological topic this raises. Chances are there's even more to know about the goodness of God in this topic.
2. How does my interpretation fit in with the positions of the ecumenical creeds?
 - a. If this topic does not appear in those creeds, it may not be a central doctrine and different churches may disagree about it. If you want to go deeper, you can always research how different people/parts of the church think about this topic.

Personal Context Questions

I am an American, and I am an Iowan.

The first time that I realized that these facts about me significantly impacted my worldview was when I went to seminary in Southern California and made friends with some people from New Jersey, and Alabama, and South Korea, and Nigeria, and Kenya, and Iran, and Panama.

I didn't think it was strange to say, "Ope, sorry about that" when *someone else ran into me* until I befriended someone from a big city on the coast. And I didn't think it was strange to show up 10 minutes early for a tight, 30-minute lunch meeting, until I experienced the beauty of lingering for multiple hours over conversation and food with someone from Kenya.

We have assumptions we don't even know that we have, because we are shaped by our contexts and our experiences. And that's true when we read scripture too.

When we read scripture, we bring our whole selves.

We bring the experiences we've had,

the culture we grew up in, and the sermons we've heard.

We bring the books we've read, the news we've listened to, and the ways we've been parented.

We bring our wounds, our personalities, our disappointments, and our hopes.

We can't help it. They're here with us.

Sometimes, though, if we are not aware of them, these things can keep us from seeing the true meaning of a scripture passage.

Instead of hearing the actual story, we hear the main point from a sermon on this passage that we heard a few years ago.

Instead of seeing the context of the passage, we imagine the story is happening in our context, and we miss the nuances.

So, while you won't be able to completely remove yourself from your worldview and your experiences and your context when you read the Bible, here are some questions that can help you name some of your assumptions and context before you apply a passage to your life too quickly.

- What have I been taught about this passage in the past?
- What tone of voice did I read the dialogue in or what words did I especially emphasize?
- Are there assumptions that I am bringing to this passage because of my context that are not there?

- What am I assuming are the motivations of the characters in this passage?
- How might someone from a different culture, time period, or socioeconomic background hear this passage? (You might even google sermons or blogs from people from another culture or country on this passage to see if they see something different than you.)
- Am I willing to let the Holy Spirit show me new things in this passage?

The more that we practice this kind of self-reflection - and the more we read scripture in communities of people who have different experiences, backgrounds, and cultures who see different things, the more beautiful and multifaceted scripture becomes, and the bigger and more full our picture of God gets.

If you're looking for a way to hear from voices outside your context, this website for The Global Church Project (<https://theglobalchurchproject.com/>) has videos, blogs, and podcasts from leaders around the world. They aren't always doing explicit scripture interpretation, but thinking about scripture in light of the contexts that they are in may help you get a different perspective on some of the texts you read.

May God keep revealing more of Godself to you until we meet again,

Pastor Sara Nielsen

Application

My hope and prayer is that the questions and the resources I've sent you in the past few weeks will make this "application" part of reading scripture even more rich for you.

I have found that the more I know about the context of the passage, the more I know about the original language, and the more aware I am of my own reactions and assumptions when I read scripture, the more fertile soil there is through which the Holy Spirit can speak.

So, after we've considered the context of the passage and named our assumptions going into it, it's time to turn our attention to what the Holy Spirit might be speaking *through* this passage into our lives and our current context.

Now, the Holy Spirit speaks to all of us in different ways, so you'll learn to notice *how* the Spirit speaks to you through the text as you spend more time in the word, but here are a few questions you might ask yourself if you're feeling stuck or unsure what the Spirit might be speaking.

- What character in this passage did I resonate with? Why?
- What word or phrase resonated with me? Why?
- What action or characteristic of God/Jesus/the Spirit is most compelling to me in this passage?
- Where do the themes in this passage overlap with my life right now?
- Do I feel especially convicted by anything in this passage?
- Do I feel especially comforted by anything in this passage?
- Is there an action step that I sense God is trying to get me to take in the next week in response to this passage?
- Does this passage remind me of another person, topic, or area of society that I might be invited to pray for?

God's Word is living and active - speaking across cultures and times and languages - to instill in us a deeper love for God and our neighbor, and to keep molding us to look more like Jesus, by the power of the Spirit.

So be expectant this week as you read, because God may just use this time in his Word to do something important in your life.

Here is one of my favorite worship songs that helps me increase my expectation for what God wants to do through my time in his word: "Waiting Here for You." This version is by the Worship Initiative.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8pj8_Hs01gA

Prayer/Surrender

A prayer for the conclusion of your scripture reading:

Holy God,

My deepest desire is to
see Your Kingdom come
in me and through me to
the world around me.

So, I loosen my grip right now
on my need for control,
my disordered desires,
and my preconceived assumptions
about what you are calling me to do.

I surrender my agenda,
my self-interest,
my judgment,
and my distractions.

I acknowledge again my need for you.

On my own, I have neither the understanding,
nor the will
to faithfully move from your Word
to fruitful action.

So I acknowledge again that

Holy Spirit, I am dependent on you
to be my teacher.

Holy Spirit, I am dependent on you
to convict and comfort me.

Holy Spirit, I am dependent on you
for the capacity, courage, and love
needed to faithfully respond
to what I have just read.

Holy Spirit, I am dependent on you
to bear fruit in me and through me,
that Jesus Christ may be glorified.*

I am open,
my God,
to how you would
ask me to respond.

Amen.



Pentecost by Makoto Fujimura (@iamfujimura)

*Ok, I was planning to just write the prayer, I really was. But I couldn't resist a brief teaching moment. You'll notice that the prayer above has a significant portion that is prayed directly to the Holy Spirit. That's because this is the member of the Trinity that we believe is most directly at work when we come to scripture, and when we are living out what scripture says. The Holy Spirit is our teacher, our convicter, our empowerer and the bearer of good fruit in the life of a follower of Jesus.

Community

I used to live with a house full of roommates and their pets (and a variety of other creatures in the attic... but now's not the time to talk about that).

One of the things that happens when you live with that many people is that you become aware of other people's blind spots.

For example, some people do not realize that someone else is always cleaning up their dishes that they left on the counter. Some people do not realize that their music is loud enough to be heard down the street. Some people stop seeing the dog/cat hair that has accumulated across the floor.

If you talked to all my old roommates, I'm guessing they could tell you all my blindspots as well.

One of the gifts of community is that we help each other see things we would not see otherwise.

That's why it's so important to read and study the Bible in community. This is not to discount the importance of personal quiet time or personal study of the word, but something different happens when we read scripture together. We catch each other's blindspots.

You've heard me advocate this before, but it's important enough that I'll keep saying it- we need to read scripture together with people who have different perspectives and different experiences than we do so that we keep being made aware of our blindspots.

We need to read scripture with people from different generations, different cultures, different lifestyles, different professions. We need the corporate wisdom and knowledge that comes from listening to *all* of God's people - not just the ones we agree with and who represent our tribe - because God is bigger, and more complex, and more beautifully multifaceted than we can see on our own.

Ephesians 3:10 says it this way,

"His intent was that now, through the church, the **manifold** wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms."

That word, manifold, can also be translated "variety" and it has the connotation of looking at a jewel from lots of different angles.

We read scripture together, and we worship in community, because we need other people to help us fully see and know God.

Action

I've confessed this to you before, but I'll do it again...

I am a nerd.

I love to read. I love to learn. I love to think.

In fact, I can spend hours, even days, stuck in my head- thinking about the right thing to do without ever actually doing anything.

Now, not everyone is wired like me. For some of you, action is much more natural. But after spending weeks giving you things to learn and to think about and to read about, I want to make sure that I say very clearly:

Following Jesus is not primarily about how we think or what we believe.

It is about how we live and act *because* of what we believe.

Jesus tells this parable in Matthew 21: 28-32:

“What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work today in the vineyard.’

“‘I will not,’ he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.

“Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, ‘I will, sir,’ but he did not go.

“Which of the two did what his father wanted?”

“The first,” they answered.

Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.”

Giving the correct answer without taking the right action does not make us faithful followers.

So, I wonder this week after all you have learned and read and thought about, **what action is God inviting you to take?**

Is there a step towards sacrificial love for a spouse, or a friend, or even an enemy that God is inviting you towards?

Is there an indulgence, or indulgence, or distraction that God is inviting you to let go of?

Is there a step of faith that requires courage and trust that God is inviting you towards?

May God give you the clarity, courage, and strength to act as he calls you.

To close, here is one of my favorite songs from the album "Work Songs" by The Porter's Gate. It's called "Your Labor is Not in Vain."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bPj3Kf7Dorw>

Wrapping Up

As we finish up this series, I am reminded of one of the truths that we talked about at the very beginning:

The purpose of this collection of books is **to tell us about the character of God and his relationship to the world and humanity.**

That is why we read and study: to know our God.

I believe that as you read and study these words that you will discover a God who is the very best picture of perfect love.

I believe you will discover a God who is gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

I believe you will discover a God who defies the boundaries we place around him and surpasses the words we use to describe him.

I believe you will discover a God who is more powerful and more gentle, more majestic and more humble, more beautifully complex and more wise than you could imagine.

And my prayer for you is that by digging deeper into the story, the context, and your own assumptions, that your life will be changed.

For the glory of God and the good of his creation.

Let it be so.

I'll leave you with another of my favorite worship songs: "You Are Worthy of It All." This version is sung in Korean (but it has subtitles in English so you can worship along)- reminding us of our participation in worship with the global church to the praise of the God of all creation.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5D1kYYguHCE>