

Bible Handling for Women: 23 May 2022

Introduction

Read II Timothy 3:16-17. Why is it so important that we learn to handle the Bible correctly?

1. Orientate

You need to know where your passage fits in the Bible. There is a distinct story line to God's word, sometimes summarised like this:

Creation → Fall → Redemption → Restoration

I prefer:

Pre-old covenant → Old covenant → Trans-covenant → New covenant

But they're not very catchy or memorable headings!

What is more, there are different genres in the Bible. There's narrative; there's poetry; there's apocalyptic; there's letter; there's wisdom literature. There are slightly different ways of understanding each genre. For example: you typically get more picture language in poetry than you do in narrative.

In addition to knowing where your passage fits in the Bible, you need to know how it fits in the Bible book which it's part of. It's brilliant to have the flow of the book in your mind and to know why the book was written; if that's impossible, it's important to know what happens immediately before and after it.

To help you orientate yourself, you could ask the following questions.

- Where does the passage fit in the flow of the Bible's story?
- What sort of writing is the passage?
- Where does the passage fit into its book? What happens just before it? What happens just after it?

Have a go: ask these questions of Luke 6:27-36.

2. Observe

You need to look carefully at the passage itself. Read it through several times. At this point, you're just trying to take in the passage in broad strokes; you're not trying to understand every little detail.

Matt Searles likens this stage in the process as a bit like taking in scenery. Say you're standing at the top of the Boston Stump and you're looking out over the wonderful Fenland scenery. You see fields, hedges, trees, cows, turnips, tractors, the Maud Foster Mill, the Bubblecar Museum, etc. You're not studying these bits of scenery in minute detail: you're just taking them in.

You could ask the following questions.

- What does the passage seem to be about?
- Are there any pointers to the main message of the passage? Is there repetition? Are there turning points? Are there narrator's comments? (Genesis 39 is a great example of what this looks like)
- Are there any words or ideas which you don't understand? If so, look them up!

Have a go: ask these questions of Luke 6:27-36.

3. Understand

You now have a good picture of what's in the passage in your mind. Now you need to try to understand its main point in as much detail as you can.

To take Matt Searles' analogy again, here's what you're trying to do. You're trying to work out which of the features you're seeing from the top of the Boston Stump is the most significant: maybe the Maud Foster Mill. And then you're trying to study that feature in a lot more detail. That may involve coming back down the Boston Stump and getting a bit closer to the Mill. You want to get to understand as much as you can about the Mill and what lies around it.

You may want to use a commentary at this point to help you to understand things. You might want to talk to someone else. You might want to listen to a sermon on it. You might want to use things like concordances and Bible dictionaries to get under

the skin of the passage. Typically, a commentary is going to be the most helpful thing: the pastors can help you choose one if you want a bit of guidance.

You could ask the following questions.

- What did the writer of the passage want his original readers to take away?
- What, then, is the main point of the passage?
- What do you learn about God here?
- What other doctrine does the passage teach?

Have a go: ask these questions of Luke 6:27-36.

4. Apply

What you've done so far is called exegesis. You've studied the passage and you've come to understand what it means. You've done the major part of the work.

But you don't want to leave it there. You want to apply the message of the passage to your heart and to the hearts of those you're studying the passage with. You don't just want to know what the passage means; you want to know what the passage means to you.

You could ask the following questions.

- What lessons can you learn for your life today from all this?
- How should the passage make me think differently?
- How should the passage make me act differently?
- How should the passage make me feel differently?
- What specifically do I need to change in response to this passage?

Have a go: ask these questions of Luke 6:27-36.

5. Ask

Finally, if you want to do a Bible study on the passage with someone else, you'll need to come up with some good questions you can work through together.

What you don't want is closed questions which just demand a yes/no answer. You don't want questions which are so easy that answering them is embarrassing. You don't want questions which are so hard that you need a theological degree to be able to understand the questions, let alone the answers.

Some good ways of doing this are:

Use scenarios. For example: "A friend of yours is struggling with covetousness. How might this passage help her?"

Imagine quotations. For example: "A friend of yours says this: 'I don't think the Bible is too concerned about my thought life. After all, thoughts don't hurt anyone, do they?' How might this passage show that she's wrong?"

Try to ask questions which get to our attitudes and feelings. For example: "What is most attractive about the Christian life from this passage?"

Earth your questions in real life. For example: "What would a church look like if it really kept to the truths taught in this passage?"

Have a go: what questions could you ask of Luke 6:27-36?

Conclusion

All of this sounds a bit scary. But it's not as difficult as it sounds. The more often you do it, the more natural it will feel. Please don't think that it's beyond you – because it's not!

Have a go: try to follow this whole procedure on Luke 7:1-10.