

The book cover features a black and white photograph of a hand holding a Bible. The hand is positioned in the lower-left quadrant, with the fingers gripping the edges of the book. The Bible is held open, and its pages are visible, though the text is not legible. The background is a dark, textured surface, possibly a wall or a piece of fabric, which adds depth to the image. The overall composition is simple and focused on the central theme of grasping the word of God.

second edition

# Grasping God's Word

A Hands-On Approach to Reading,  
Interpreting, and Applying the Bible

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WILEY

# Unit 1

**Textualism, originalism, strict constructionist, constitutionalist, Jefferson, philosophy, and Supreme Court Justice Thomas**

1. The Interpretive Journey
2. How to Read the Book—Sentences
3. How to Read the Book—Paragraphs
4. How to Read the Book—Discourses

# The Interpretive Journey

- **Introduction**

"Constitutionalism is descriptive of a complicated concept, deeply imbedded in historical experience, which subjects the officials who exercise governmental powers to the limitations of a higher law. Constitutionalism proclaims the desirability of the rule of law as opposed to rule by the arbitrary judgment or mere fiat of public officials.... Throughout the literature dealing with modern public law and the foundations of statecraft the central element of the concept of constitutionalism is that in political society government officials are not free to do anything they please in any manner they choose; they are bound to observe both the limitations on power and the procedures which are set out in the supreme, constitutional law of the community. It may therefore be said that the touchstone of constitutionalism is the concept of limited government under a higher law." David Fellman

# Why Hermeneutics?

2 Peter 1:3 seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to **life** and **godliness**, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.

Hermeneutics helps people confidently understand the word of God.

# What is so tough about interpretation?

The facts and the Bible are the same for everyone.

The difficulty is:

There is an ocean of history separating us from the biblical audience- culture, language, time, situation, and covenant.

It is not a harmless novel to sit around and discuss.

Truth is at stake!

# Approaches to interpretation

- Intuitive or “feels-right” – Jeremiah 17:9 Is this a safe approach? How do you spot this in action?
  - “When we lack the will to see things, as they really are, there is nothing so mysterious as the obvious.” Irving Kristol
- Spiritualizing – Jer 3:15 “give to his church pastors according to his own heart, who should feed them with knowledge and understanding.” Excerpt of Jeremiah from a popular book. Below the obvious meaning is the real meaning. Rev. 20.

# What is the accurate consistent approach?

Grammatical-historical/Authors intended meaning - It can also be called the literal method. This does not mean woodenheaded literalism or letterism, which exaggerates strict letters of a text to make something out of them, i.e. in a grinding literalness that will not be sensitive to figures of speech, a figurative meaning intended.



# Assumptions concerning the Stadium

–Exposition – the expounding of a text in written or oral form

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–Biblical Exegesis – the process used to determine what the text of Scripture itself says and means.

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–Hermeneutics – the rules that ensure the exegete uses gain meaning. It ensures the one does not read something into the text.



– Assumptions:

- The Bible is God's communication of himself and his will to us.
- We do not create meaning; rather, we seek to discover the meaning that is already in the Bible.
- Theological principles revealed in specific passages of the Bible are applicable to both the biblical audience and to Christians today.
- We can use the *principlizing bridge* to cross the river of differences.

# More Assumptions

- The Bible is God's communication of himself and his will to us. (The Bible is spiritual not mystical it speaks reasonably, logically and with distinct purpose)

- We do not create meaning; rather, we seek to discover the meaning that is already in the Bible.
- Theological principles revealed in specific passages of the Bible are applicable to both the biblical audience and to Christians today.



- The author of the Bible intended one meaning with many applications and humans can understand it. (To say otherwise is to accuse God of imperfection or is incapable of communicating with His creation.)

– **Four Steps: (To Understanding a text)** To turn a text into godliness is a journey. Hermeneutics is the law that keeps the journey accurate. This is the best approach to understanding Hermeneutics because it takes the study out of purely theoretical into practical.

### 1 – Grasping the Text in Their Town

*What did the text mean to the biblical audience?*

### 2 – Measuring the Width of the River

*What are the differences between the biblical audience and us?*

### 3 – Crossing the Principilizing Bridge

*What is the theological principle in this text?*

### 4 – Grasping the Text in Our Town

*How should individual Christians today apply the theological principle in their lives?*

- **Example—Joshua 1:1-9 Revelation 20 Galatians 6:16**

- *Step 1 What did the text mean to the original audience?*

The Lord commanded Joshua, the new leader of Israel, to draw strength and courage from God's empowering presence, to be obedient to the law of Moses, and to meditate on the law so that he would be successful in the conquest of the Promised Land.

- *Step 2 What are the differences between then and now?*

We are not leaders of the nation Israel (although some of us may be leaders in the church). We are not embarking on the conquest of the Promised Land. We are not under the old covenant of law.

– *Step 3 What is the text telling us that is transcends time?*

To be effective in serving God and successful in the task to which he has called us, we must draw strength and courage from his presence. We must also be obedient to God's Word, meditating on it constantly.

– *Step 4 How should we apply this principle?*

- Spend more time meditating on God's Word
- Obey God when he calls you to a new and demanding ministry, trusting in his presence to empower you.
- Focus on God's presence to bring you new courage and strength in your present ministry situation.

- **The Journey and *Grasping God's Word*: Outline for the 10 Weeks**

Unit 1 – Learn how to observe and read carefully

Unit 2 – Contexts: Now and Then

Unit 3 – Meaning and Application

Unit 4 – Journey through the New Testament

Unit 5 – Journey through the Old Testament

# How to Observe the Book—Sentences

- Introduction – Open the Bible and observe!
  - A large part of Hermeneutics is observation.
  - Superficial reading means that you will always be tied to your previous understanding.
  - Serious reading allows you to hear God as you dig deeper into his Word.

# Observations

1. Natural and Supernatural
2. Refrain from interpretation or application. Do not ask what this text can do for me.
3. What does it say? Where is it found? Is it found anywhere else, and, if so, does that throw light upon the statement here? Bombard the passage from every conceivable angle and simply milk it for all it is worth.

4. Hermeneutics begin! Come up with answers to the right questions. Weight everything through a set of hermeneutical principles. Then formulate what the passage means.

Problem: Sometimes people jump to conclusions before adequate observations based on favorite scholars or dogmatic assertions of what the text has to mean.

- Serious or careful reading

- Serious reading means looking at the big picture and looking at the details.
- Context! Context! Context!

A text without a context is a pre-text for an poor proof-text!



- Things to look for in sentences:
  - Repeating words and phrases (“world”)
  - Contrasts (“gentle answer” vs. “harsh word”)
  - Comparisons (“soar on wings like eagles”)
  - Lists (fruit of Spirit)
  - Causes and effects (“wages of sin is death”)
  - Figures of speech (“The Lord is my rock”)
  - Conjunctions (“therefore” in Romans 12:1)
  - Verbs (where the action is)
  - Pronouns (“our Father in heaven”)

# How to Read the Book—Paragraphs

- Things to look for in paragraphs:
  - General and specific (“live by the Spirit” – fruit)
  - Questions and answers
  - Dialogue (conversation between Jesus and Peter)
  - Purpose statements (“God so loved that he gave”)
  - Means (“by the Spirit put to death the misdeeds of the body”)

- More things to look for in paragraphs:
  - Conditional clauses (if ... then)
  - Actions/roles of people and actions/roles of God
  - Emotional terms (“I plead with you brothers”)
  - Tone (“You foolish Galatians!”)

- Conclusion to Observing sentences and paragraph's

- Observe first, apply later.

- Write down your observations.

“A pen is a mental crowbar.”

- Howard Hendricks



- The Bible is God's love letter to you.

Read it carefully!

# How to Observe —Discourses

- Introduction to Pericope or Discourse
  - The Bible is more than a random collection of unrelated words and disconnected sentences.
  - The Bible is a story with themes that run through paragraphs to form discourses.
  - “Discourse” – a unit of connected text larger than a paragraph
  - We need to see not only the smallest details, but also the larger patterns and themes.

- Things to look for in discourses:
  - Connections between paragraphs and episodes
    - Repeated words or themes
    - Logical connections (e.g., cause and effect) Matt. 18:20
    - Characters and their actions
    - Time sequence
  - Story shifts: major breaks and pivots
    - Where does the story take a new turn?
    - Where does the topic change?
    - Does a verb change signal a break?
    - Do you see a pivotal episode in a longer story?

- More things to look for in discourses:

- Interchange

- Is there a switch back and forth between two stories?
- Is the author trying to contrast or compare the characters in the two stories in some way?

- Chiasm

A I got up this morning,

B got dressed

C and drove into town.

D I worked hard all day,

C' returned home,

B' put on my PJs

A' and went to bed.

- **Review**

- Interpreting and applying the Bible is like a *journey*.
- A *river of differences* separates us from the biblical audience—culture, language, time, situation, and covenant.
- We begin to build a bridge across the river by discovering what the text meant to the biblical audience.
- This calls for careful *reading and observation* of sentences (Chapter 2), paragraphs (Chapter 3), and discourses (Chapter 4).

- What if we bypass observation and move straight to application?



- To hear from God in clear and exciting ways, we must look carefully at what God communicated and not put words in his mouth.