

# THE LONG WAY AROUND

*taking the scriptures from history to today*

## I. TEXT TO TODAY

- A. **Our ultimate goal** of studying the bible is to take the text written in the past and apply it to all of life, today.
- B. **Potential error:** If we are quick to move from text to today we will be in danger of **applying** the text foolishly. The error of foolish application **emotional, "me" driven** conclusions.
  - 1. example: quoting Jesus' words in Luke 12:19, "Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry," and trying to pass it off as Jesus' philosophy of life. The context, in which Jesus tells a parable, teaches the exact opposite of what those words suggest. As the storyteller, Jesus is putting words in the mouth of a foolish rich man, a character who receives judgment from God for living out that hedonistic philosophy.
  - 2. so what we need is a way to take the text, understand the context (both historically and theologically) and apply it to today wisely. Rather than one quick, errant step that leads to foolishness we take three important steps that leads to wisdom. We call it the Long Way Around.

## II. STEP 1: OBSERVATION (WHAT DOES IT SAY?)

### A. Exegesis

- 1. Theologians call this first step of OBSERVATION exegesis. It means that we let the text speak for itself (rather than eisegesis, meaning that we take a preconceived idea and make the text say what we want). we cannot know the meaning of the text unless we understand it's context. Therefore we say that Context is King. To rightly understand the context, we ask ourselves "**what does this text say?**" More specifically "what did it mean to them (original audience) then (original setting)." To determine context we must:
  - a) examine the text before and after the text (immediate context) and
  - b) determine how the specific text fits the whole story of God. The general principle is to go from **Big to Little** (Story -> book -> section -> paragraph -> sentence -> word)

### B. Interact

- 1. The careful studier of God's Word interacts with the text at this step by gathering data, summarizing it's meaning and outlining the basic message to "them then."

2. Helpful tools and categories to understand for this step include:

**a) Genre**

- Law
- History/  
Narrative
- Wisdom  
Literature
- Poetry
- Prophecy
- Apocalyptic
- Epistle/  
Letter

**b) Facts (5W&H) - Who, What, When, Where, Why & How**

**c) Grammar/Dialogue/linguistics**

- Structure
- Parts of  
speech  
(verb/noun,  
etc.)
- Tense (past,  
present,  
future)
- Repeating  
words/  
phrases
- Transitions  
(therefore,  
since, so  
etc.)
- connect/  
compare/  
contrast  
(and, like,  
but etc.)

**C. Potential Error:**

1. If we skip this step and go straight to the life, death, resurrection and reign of Christ we will detach the text from history and be in danger of

***spiritualizing the meaning.***

a) example: Taken out of its historical context, the Parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10 is spiritualized this way; the man who is robbed is Adam, Jerusalem is paradise, and Jericho is the world. The priest is the Law, and the Levites are the Prophets. The Samaritan is Christ. The donkey is Christ's physical body, which bears the burden of the wounded man (the wounds are his sins), and the inn is the Church. The Samaritan's promise to return is a promise of the second coming of Christ. (see Origen's commentary on Luke 10)

### **III. STEP 2: INTERPRETATION (WHAT DOES IT MEAN?)**

#### **A. Theological Reflection**

1. In the first step (observation) we asked the question **"what does this text say?"** In this step we take what the text says and ask the question **"what does the text mean?"** We reflect on what the text tells us about God and why God wants us to know that.

#### **B. Gospel Lense**

1. Theological reflection will always lead to revelation of how God makes Himself known by way of "the Gospel." The Gospel message ("God saves

sinner”) culminates in the **life, death, resurrection and reign of Jesus**.

Christ’s work on the cross is what all of the OT points forward to and what everything since then looks back on.

### C. Interact

1. The careful studier of God’s Word interacts with the text at this step by:

**a) Formulating questions** (What do you find puzzling/curious/notable?)

**b) Answering questions**

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|--|---|
| • Check translations (word for word, paraphrase) | • Word Study (Concordance, Study Bible, Atlas, Commentary ) |
| • Cross-references                               |   |
| • Secondary sources                              |   |

### D. Potential Error:

1. If we skip this step and go straight to TODAY we will detach the text from the gospel and our application will be simply **intellectual and moralistic**.
2. example: In John 8, the Pharisees bring a woman to Jesus for having violated the moral code. They were correct in that the woman had sinned. But, in their moralism, they could not see grace. Jesus showed them grace in forgiving the woman (John 8:11), and He advised the Pharisees to focus on their own sin and seek forgiveness for themselves (verse 7).

## IV. STEP 3: APPLICATION (SO WHAT?)

### A. Wisdom

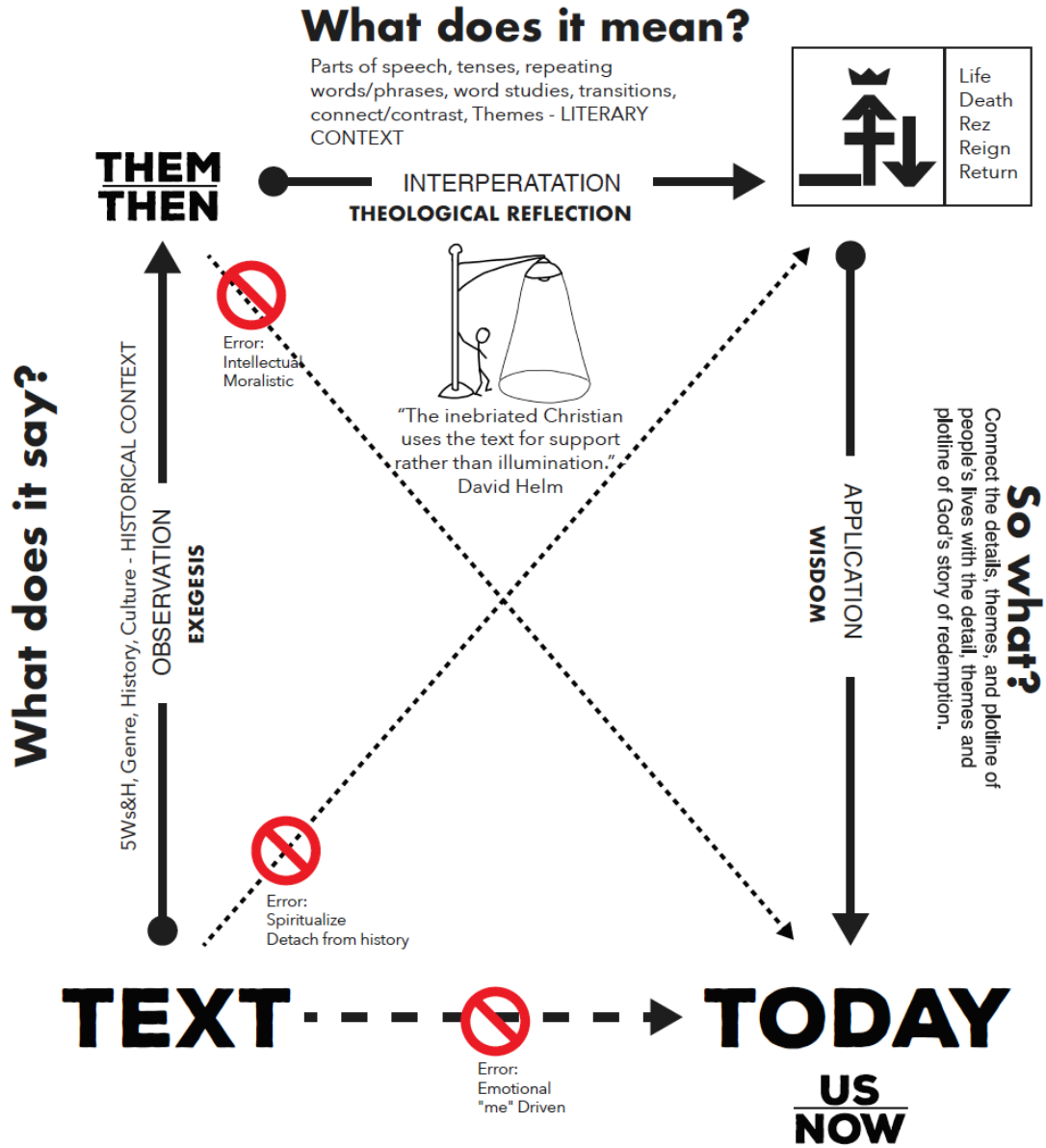
1. Biblical application leads to wise living and is the fruit of rightly understanding God’s Word. Wisdom is the skill of loving God practically. In the APPLICATION step we ask the question “So what?” Why does this text matter and what are the implications for us TODAY?

### B. Interact

1. To answer this questions we thoughtfully connect the details, themes and plot lines of our own lives with the details, themes and plot line of God’s Story of Redemption.
2. The goal is to identify areas of Belief and Unbelief in our own heart. Helpful questions to consider for this purpose are:
  - Sin to confess?
  - Promise to claim?

GRACE CHURCH

- Truth to pursue?
- Command to obey?
- Error to avoid?
- Challenge to face?



## **I. STAY IN THE WATER**

### **A. Principle:**

1. We want to be “people of The Word of God” not just “people who refer to The Word of God.”
2. Be patient, ask questions, expect the answers to be revealed, by the Spirit, through careful meditation.

## **II. TEXT OVER FRAMEWORK**

### **A. Principle:**

1. We must let the Bible shape our frameworks rather than letting our frameworks shape our ‘interpretations’ of the Bible

### **B. Explanation:**

1. Whether Calvinism or Arminianism, politically left or right, therapeutic or prosperity driven, cultural and social, we all have frameworks— ideas and frames of mind that we bring to the text.
2. Our own experiences, training, and desires bring them to the foreground every time we open the Bible. Some frameworks can be helpful. Others are not. In order to get at the meaning of a text, we must let the text be sovereign.
3. We must adjust the framework rather than fall into the trap of ignoring or bending the text until it says “what we want it to say.” We must hear it for “what it says.”
4. Strategies: identify your own frameworks (ideological, political, theological, etc.), constantly approach the text with fresh eyes, consult many different translations of the Bible (e.g. dynamic, literal, paraphrase)

## **III. STAY ON THE LINE**

### **A. Principle:**

1. We must stay on the line of Scripture, never straying above it or below it.

### **B. Explanation:**

1. We are often tempted to require more than the Scriptures, venturing into religious pietism and expressing a zeal that becomes a kind of legalism. We judge others who do not maintain our extra-Biblical traditions and standards. In so doing, we add to the Scriptures.
2. We can also be tempted to dip below the line into liberalism and pragmatism, ignoring both the content and point of Scripture. In so doing, we subtract from the Scriptures.

3. We must commit ourselves to saying nothing more or less than the Scriptures say. It is a matter of obedience (Deuteronomy 4:2).

**C. Strategies:**

1. Consider the text in light of both extremes, anticipate how those who furthest above and the furthest below might treat the text, test consistency of your reading with the rest of Scripture

## **IV. MELODIC LINE**

**A. Principle:**

1. Identifying a simple, true statement that summarizes or echoes everything in the book will help us identify the author's intended message and help resolve questions that come from the text.

**B. Explanation:**

1. Books of the Bible and the Bible (as a whole) have a coherent, sustained message—or big idea—similar to the unique melody of a song. It is waiting to be heard. It unites the whole book, big theme and big aim, concisely stating what the whole book is about.
2. Every passage will, in some way, be related (directly or indirectly, as support or even contrast) to the melodic line. Our task is to listen well enough and long enough to hear the melody.

**C. Strategies:**

1. read and reread, identify a top and tail, find a purpose statement or thesis statement, find repeated words and phrases and ideas (notes).

## **V. STRUCTURE (BONE AND MARROW)**

**A. Explanation:**

1. Every text has a structure. This structure will reveal an emphasis.
2. The emphasis must shape our understanding. We must find the organizing principle of the author and let it dictate the shape and emphasis of our understanding. This is the skeleton.
3. We must get the 'bones' straight in order to have a healthy understanding. We must find and understand the emphasis that the author—the Holy Spirit—put into the text.
4. Only then will we see the "life" of the passage. Look at the text with x-ray eyes in order to see its skeletal structure.

**B. Strategies:**

1. Use a literal English translation of the Bible, read and reread and read out loud, look for repetitions or clear thesis statements (sometimes in the form of a rhetorical question), identify your text type as discourse (look for grammar, key words, transitional words, chiasmus, verbs), narrative (look for plot, surprises, setting, characters, comparisons and contrast), or poetry (look for grammar, comparisons and contrasts, imagery, changes in who is speaking, parallelism)