

REFRESHING BIBLICAL STUDIES FOR PREACHING AND TEACHING

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Studying the Bible week in and week out for preaching and teaching, the pastor can find himself falling into dry routine. How to refresh? Here are three suggestions:

I. Update Your Study Tools: A pastor's library of reference tools tends to be frozen in time to those he used when he was in school. It may be a matter of familiarity, knowledge or money, but keeping up to date with reference tools does not come naturally. Yet, not keeping up to date is to miss out on the ever increasing wealth of Biblical studies study aids. Here's a quick checklist for you.

If you graduated from seminary before 2000 you would have missed the newest edition of Bauer with its greatly improved formatting and presentation of true definitions (Walter Bauer, Frederick W. Danker, F. Wilbur Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd rev. ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). The newest dictionary of Biblical Theology and what should become a standard reference work on New Testament Background are probably not on your shelves (T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, eds. *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001; Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter, eds. *Dictionary of New Testament Background*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

If you left seminary before 1995, you would not have met Daniel Wallace's very complete and helpful Intermediate Greek Grammar (Daniel B. Wallace. *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) or a fascinating dictionary on Biblical imagery from "Aaron's Rod" to "Zion" (Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, Tremper Longman III, eds. *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998). And, a theological dictionary of the Old Testament (equivalent to Colin Brown's *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*) would have escaped your notice (Willem A. Van Gemeren, ed. *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*. 5 vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997).

None of IVP's key New Testament dictionaries (Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, I. Howard Marshall, eds. *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992; Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, Daniel G. Reid, eds. *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993; Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids, eds. *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997) would probably be on your study shelves, if you had graduated in 1990 or before. And you would probably not be using the helpful cultural background resource by Craig Keener (Craig S. Keener. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993).

If your seminary diploma is dated 1985 or before, Louw and Nida, the very helpful, linguistically informed New Testament dictionary (Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*. 2 vols. New York: United Bible Societies, 1988) would probably also be missing from your library.

Decide on a yearly budget for books and develop a strategy for strengthening your reference tools. Keep alert for advertisements of new products; judiciously assess them with the aid of book reviews; and keep your tool box stocked with the best tools for uncovering the truths of God's Word.

II. Consider Upgrading to Computer-Assisted Bible Study. Hypertext will make the Greek, Hebrew, and English version texts readily available in a form which may be worked with for study—pop-up definitions and parsing to facilitate ease in translation and analysis, search engines for specialized concordance work and grammatical analysis. The Biblical Studies reference tools available either as software or on the Internet will bring the work of many scholars to your fingertips. Here are some suggestions with website addresses:

Exegetical Resources--Original Languages:

Gramcord—a GRAMmatical ConCORDance which can perform a virtually unlimited variety of lexical and grammatical searches. See www.gramcord.org

Bible Windows 7.0 and Bible Works 5—offers both the ability to work in the original languages and the ability to view reference works. See www.silvermnt.com; See www.bibleworks.com

Biblical Studies Resources:

Logos Bible Software Series X—an electronic library which offers access to a large number of Bibles and reference books. See www.logos.com

The Essential IVP Reference Collection—an electronic library of thirteen dictionaries and reference works. See www.ivpress.com

Zondervan Computer Reference Tools—has bundled (*Zondervan Bible Study Library—Professional, Scholars Edition*), as well as stand alone resources—*Expositor's Bible Commentary for Windows*; *Zondervan Theological Dictionaries for Windows* (DNNT; DOTTE) See www.zondervan.com

Internet Sites

CIU Library (www.ciu.edu/library). See subject resources—Biblical Studies for helpful links.

Biblical Studies Tools (www.biblestudytools.net). Older (public domain) commentaries and dictionaries.

III. Tune Up Your Study Method: Diagnosis is the key to tuning up a car's transmission and it is no different with the practice of Bible study for preaching or teaching. Take some time to write out from memory the steps you normally take in studying a passage you are going to preach or teach. Be as specific as possible about the types of study you normally do (more specific than—"read the passage. . . take notes . . . read commentaries"). Take the following overview of a comprehensive exegetical method and compare it with the steps you normally take. In the light of this comparison, to what would you give more attention? What would you start doing that you are not doing? How would you vary the order of your study steps, and why? What else would you look into doing differently?

Preparation of the Preacher/Teacher and the Text

Spiritual Preparation: Pray for mind and heart open and submissive to the message of the passage.

Text Preparation

- Prepare a finished translation (from the Greek or Hebrew) of significant portions of the text.
- Prepare a visual representation of the flow of thought of the passage (Mechanical Layout).

Exegesis of the Text

Survey

- Establish the wording of the text (text criticism) as needed, as indicated by Greek New Testament or “pew Bible.”
- Raise questions and make observations about the content of the passage in terms of historical, literary, theological, interpretation/application, and homiletical or didactic appropriation.

Analysis: Historical

- Introductory Matters: How does background information about the origin of the book (author, audience, composition-occasion & purpose) help you understand the passage’s content?
- Historical-cultural-religious Details: Research historical-cultural details from the passage to see what light they shed on its meaning.

Analysis: Literary

- Context: What is the position of this passage in an outline of the book? What is its role in its immediate context (two paragraphs before and after)?
- Genre: What genre and subgenre does this passage participate in (e.g., epistle, narrative, hymn, parable)? How does an understanding of the form and use of the genre help you understand the passage’s message better?
- Syntax–Grammar: What do the various uses of the grammatical features of the passage (e.g., for Greek, Structure: conjunctions–coordinate, subordinate; Verbs: tense, voice, mood, mode; Cases; The Rest: definite article, particles, pronouns, prepositions) contribute to the meaning of the passage?
- Syntax–Rhetorical Features: What meaning is the writer communicating through the features: word absence, word order, word arrangement, word figure, special forms of emphasis, in the passage?
- Word Study–Focus the Meaning and Illumine the Meaning: What is the precise meaning of a word in the passage based on a profile of the range of meaning by the author and study of its use in that particular context? What light does source (use elsewhere in Biblical revelation) or contemporary background (use elsewhere in ancient culture) use bring to its use in your passage?

Analysis: Theological

- Biblical Theology Themes: What other passages in Scripture contain parallel or contrasting themes which will help you understand your passage?
- Systematic Theology: What area of systematic theology does your passage support, and how?
- Remaining Interpretational/Theological Difficulties: What problems for

understanding does this passage continue to present? What are the range of solutions? Which one do you choose, why?

Synthesis

- Exegetical Outline: Make an outline of the passage which represents its flow of thought.
- Biblical Coherence: What is the main message of the passage? How does it further the purposes of the book? What is its role (foundational or developmental) in the progress of redemption as presented in the progress of revelation?

Interpretation/Application: How may the message of the passage be applied to today (principle, situation, implementation) by way of . . .

- Communication: What vocabulary, images, illustrations from today's culture will communicate the message?
- Correction: What in the passage is "bad news" to today's culture, because it judges ideas, beliefs, values?
- "Capture the Significance": What in the passage is "good news" to today's culture, because it speaks to a felt need the culture is addressing wrongly or not at all?

Homiletical or Didactic Appropriation: Gather all results of your study, reflect on it, and frame a sermon or lesson, together with its outline.

Now try your revised study method for, say, six months to a year. Then, stop and reassess.

Continuing refinement and enrichment of method should lead to continuing refreshment in the all important work of being a servant of the Word ministering to the servants of God.

This method is taken from William J. Larkin, *Manual of Greek Exegesis for Communicator's of the Word* (CIU Bookstore, 2002). Available from the CIU bookstore.