*Session 11*

*Literary Context*

Focus on *inside* the text

what surrounds words and passage

Context determines meaning.

**Circles of Context**



Klien, W.C. Bloomberg, and R. Hubbard, Jr. *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. Dallas: Word, 1993. Page 162.

1. Reasons to study literary context:
2. Shows the flow of thought
3. Provides a more accurate meaning of words
4. Shows how different sections of the Bible are related to each other.
5. Challenges:
   * + 1. Keep the whole book in mind
       2. Think about the larger themes
6. **How to Study the Context**:
7. Identify the limits of your passage: where it begins and ends
   * + - 1. Look for major shifts in the topic of discussion.
         2. Shifts in audience that is addressed.
         3. Change in literary type or genre.
         4. Change in key words and repeated themes.
         5. Change in verbal characteristics (tense, person, and number).
         6. Shift in time and place.
         7. Transition words like “so,” “therefore,” etc.
8. Determine the purpose of the book as a whole

Book Survey:

1. Two ways to read:
   * Rapid word for word reading
   * Scanning/skimming
2. Read the entire book in one sitting, without stopping
3. Goal: to observe and not to interpret
4. your ideas and impressions may change as you study more
5. What is the primary subject matter of the book?
6. *Biographical*: about a *person*
7. *Historical*: about *events*
8. *Chronological*: organized by *time*
9. *Geographical*: movements in and through *places*.
10. *Ideological*: contains and develops *ideas*
11. Give each chapter a title
    * + - 1. Preferably one word, not more than three
          2. Picturesque or descriptive words if possible
          3. Words taken directly from the text; not a paraphrase.
          4. No duplication or similarity of titles.
          5. Words that tell you where you are in the book.
12. Study the Structure:

Divide book into 3-5 sections

Label each section

1. Look for major shifts in topics.
2. Think about how a unit might be structured
3. Go back to your chapter titles and update
4. If it is easier to identify sub-units, do this first and then force yourself to combine them into larger groupings until you have only 3-5 main units.
5. Use a variety of formats to help you with this: outlines, charts, graphs, story plot highlights.
6. Focus on the chapter or section immediately before and after your passage. Develop a simple three-point outline
   * + - 1. previous section
         2. study section
         3. following section.
7. Questions to ask:
   * + - 1. What is the purpose of the passage in its context? How does your passage fit in the 1) immediate context, 2) context of the book, and 3) context of the entire Bible? If your passage was missing from the context, what would we not know?
         2. How does your passage contribute to the flow of thought (the logic) around it?
         3. What is the genre of the book in which your passage is found?
         4. How does the literary genre influence the meaning? For example, if your passage is part of a narrative (story), what part of the plot does it have? There may be multiple layers to the plot, so what part does your passage have in this?
8. Work from outside circles to inside circles then back out.

1. Intertextuality

How one text quotes another

Most common: NT quotes the OT

Studying how one part of the Bible quotes another part:

1. Determine what passage is being quoted or referred to
2. Check the context and meaning of the original passage
3. Determine how the author is quoting the other passage

**Big Ideas**

1. Literary context studies how a passage fits into the passages around it.
2. The Circles of Context shows the passage, immediate context, book, books by the same author, the same testament, and the whole Bible.
3. Studying the context of a passage helps us understand the thoughts of the original author and keeps us from misinterpretation.
4. Doing a book survey and rereading the surrounding context is a good process to studying the context.
5. Intertextuality studies how one passage quotes another text.