Dig and Discover
HERMENEUTICAL
Principles

LEADERSHIP RESOURCES TNT TRAINING

The Core Principles
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Welcome!

You're holding a booklet that contains the “Dig and Discover” hermeneutical principles taught by Leadership Resources International as part of TNT (Training National Trainers), a training program designed to “encourage and equip pastors around the world to teach God’s Word with God’s heart.”

Even though this booklet is designed to explain hermeneutical principles, what we desire for you to understand more than hermeneutical principles is Scripture itself. Remember that hermeneutical principles are simply tools. We explain them only to help you better read, study, and understand the message of God’s Word, as you fully depend on the illumination of His Spirit in prayer.

And as you study God’s Word, keep in mind that the ultimate purpose and goal of studying the Bible is not knowledge, but worship. Our desire is not simply for your mind to be filled with information about the Bible. Instead, our prayer is that your heart would be transformed through its message by the Holy Spirit and would overflow in worship as you come to know God more through the person of Jesus Christ.

May God indeed do this in your heart. May He bless your study of His Word, cause you to love Him more each day, and help you live out His Word in thankful, trusting obedience - all in praise and glory and honor to Him.
What Does It Mean to “Stay on the Line”?  
- Staying on the line illustrates the task of the teacher or preacher to discover what God’s Word says and to be faithful to it.  
- The line itself represents what God actually says in His Word:
  - To go above the line means to add something that is not really there – to say more than what God said in His Word. It leads to error, often in the form of legalism.  
  - To go below the line means to leave something out that is there – to not be wholly true and faithful to the truth of what God’s Word is saying. It often leads to liberalism and license.  
  - Staying on the line may be compared to the promise witnesses in some courts of law must make: “I promise to tell the truth, the whole truth [not to go below the line], and nothing but the truth [not to go above the line].”

How Important Is This to God?  
- Since the time of Moses, God has made it clear that His spokesmen are to say what He has said – nothing more and nothing less (Exodus 4:10-16; Deuteronomy 4:1-2; 1 Samuel 3:1-4:1; Proverbs 30:5-6; Ezekiel 3:1-11; Jeremiah 1:4-19, 23:9-40; John 7:16ff; 8:28-29; 12:29-50; Revelation 22:18-19).

How Important Is This to Our Preaching?  
- God’s words are beyond compare. Throughout the Bible, we see His words are powerful, certain, and good; only His words can give life. We want people to hear God’s voice rather than ours – His truth rather than man’s opinions and ideas. We need to experience the transforming power that comes only through His words.

What Does Staying on the Line Require?  
- Committing ourselves to God  
- Carefully discerning and understanding what God's Word actually says  
- Communicating it faithfully in our teaching, preaching, and living

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**The Principle:** We must let the Bible shape our frameworks rather than letting our frameworks shape our interpretations of the Bible.

**What Do We Mean by “Text” and “Framework”?**
- The text is any passage from the Bible that we might study and preach or teach.
- A framework is our basic way of understanding things. It affects how we read and understand the text.

**More on “What Is a Framework?”**
- A framework is a person’s basic way of understanding what he knows. It is the underlying thought structure that shapes our understanding about everything. Our framework organizes all of our thoughts and ideas and holds them all together in a way that makes sense for us.
- Everyone has a framework. It develops over time by our parents’ teaching, our education, culture, personal experience, and our place in history— even our reading of the Bible.
- During our lives we encounter new information. We have to figure out how it fits in with our previous understanding of things. In the end, we either decide to ignore or reject new information, or we accept it and allow it to reshape our framework.

**Frameworks Affect How We Read the Bible.**
- When we sit down to study the Bible, we bring our framework with us— including the way we see and understand God, man, sin, Christ, suffering, redemption, and many other important things.
- Frameworks, in and of themselves, are not necessarily bad. They are necessary in the process of reading, understanding, and communicating the Bible. However, they can wrongly influence the way we understand the text.

**The Text Should Rule Over and Shape Our Framework.**
- We believe that the Bible is from God (2 Peter 1:21), inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16a), true and reliable (Matthew 5:17-18), and sufficient for our faith and practice (2 Timothy 3:16b).
  Yet we often do not recognize when our framework overpowers the way we understand the text, and sometimes, even when we are aware of it, we are unwilling to let go of our framework.
- In order to rightly understand God’s Word and preach it faithfully, we must let the text rule over and shape our framework.
- Where there is a difference between the text and our framework, we must ask God to help us recognize it and allow the text to shape our understanding.

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Genre

What Is Genre?
“Genre” is a word that refers to the type, or kind, of literature, or written material, that we find in the Bible. We know the different kinds of genres by differences in literary features like the style of writing, the form, the content, and the purpose of what is written.

How Does Understanding Genre Help Us?
- Recognizing the genre helps us know the characteristics of the kind of literature we’re reading. And understanding the characteristics of the literature helps us read and interpret it correctly – to understand what the author’s purpose was in writing and what he wanted to convey.

Why Is Genre Important?
- “Genre is the key to understanding what sort of information a Biblical author is trying to convey.”
- “Until you know the purpose and kind of a text, what it intends to say or convey, you don’t know how to read it properly” (C. S. Lewis).
- Recognizing the genre and characteristics of a text gives us certain clues, even understood rules, for how to read and interpret the meaning of a text.

Different Genres in the Bible
There are many different literary genres found in the Bible. Below are some of the major genres generally recognized in the Bible. Although whole books of the Bible are usually associated with certain genres, each book of the Bible can contain within itself different genres or even subgenres – more specific classifications of literary genres.

Distinctive Use of Language
One important difference we see among the genres is the way each one uses language to express its message. Below is a spectrum that compares different genres and general characteristics of the kind of language each one uses.

Types of Berries
Understanding and interpreting different genres of Biblical literature is like understanding different varieties of fruit. Imagine finding three different types of berries. One can be eaten, another used as medicine, and another used as a dye. By observing the shape, seeds, leaves, and color of each berry, you can confidently identify each one and use them for the right purpose while avoiding harm.

Asking Good Questions

The Importance of Asking Good Questions
Asking good questions helps us, first, to observe and understand what the Bible is actually saying. Then, good questions help us dig deeper to discover the heart of the message of God’s Word so that we may be faithful to it and transformed by it.

What Is a Good Question?
- A good question asks about something that may not be obvious in the text but is essential for understanding the author’s intended meaning.
- A good question is one that leads us down the path the author wants to take us.

How Do We Ask Good Questions?
Begin by asking the basic questions of observation. Then, go deeper with questions that help us understand the intention and meaning of the author’s message.

▶ Basic Questions of Observation
Begin by asking questions that open our eyes to what the text actually says:
- What does the text say? (Keep asking this most basic observation question)
- When did this happen? Who are the characters involved? What places are mentioned?
- What are the important connecting or transition words?
- Are there any comparisons or contrasts?
- Are there repeated words or ideas?

▶ Essential Questions that Go Deeper
Go beyond the basic questions to ask good questions that help us understand why the author wrote what he did:
- What does the author say?
- How does the author say it?
- What is the tone?
- Why does he say it here? Why in this way?
- What is surprising about it?
- How does it point to or speak about Christ?
- What is it saying as a whole?
- Why did the author say this? What response did he hope to see from his readers?
- What is the response God is looking for in our hearts and lives today?

The Attitude of the Heart in Asking Questions
Three attitudes of the heart are essential in our pursuit to know what God’s Word is saying and in helping us develop the skill of asking good questions.
- Curiosity. Ask questions with the curiosity of a child.
- Discernment. Learn to ask questions that go beyond obvious answers.
- Perseverance. Keep working and asking questions in order to understand.
Traveling Instructions*

The Principle:
- In order for us to understand how to apply God’s Word to our lives today, we first need to travel back to understand the message expressed through the author in the original context.

How Does Traveling Instructions Work?
- (1) Not Taking the Direct Route. We are often tempted to read God’s Word and try to apply what is said directly to our lives. But God first spoke through the heart of an author to readers in a different time and place. And so, instead of taking a direct route from God’s Word to our lives today, we first need to travel back to consider what that author was saying to the original readers, and why.
- (2) Hearing the Intent of the Author. We must travel back to listen to what God was saying through an author in the original context – the literary context of the message of the book, the historical context of the background situation, and even the biblical context of the overall story and message of the Bible. And while there are many aspects of context which we could explore, we want to focus our attention on those aspects which help us understand what the author was saying, why he said this to these people, and what response he desired from his message.
- (3) Applying the Message to Us Today. The end goal of Traveling Instructions is application. After we have discovered the author’s intended response to the message he gave, we can then travel to our day and ask how that response would be seen in our lives and in the lives of the people where we live and minister.

Why Is Traveling Instructions Important?
- If we take the shortcut and try to immediately apply God’s Word to our lives, we risk misinterpreting what God was saying through His Word, missing the way God intends for us to respond, and misleading the people to whom we minister.
- However, when we do take the time to travel correctly, we discover the wonder of God’s heart expressed through the original context, and the transforming power of His Word for our lives today.

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What Is Structure?

- The structure of a passage (or a book) involves: (1) the *parts of a passage* – the units of thought that contain the major ideas of the passage, and (2) the *connections of thought* that hold the sections and major ideas of the passage together.

Why Is Structure Important?

- Seeing the structure helps us identify the major ideas of the passage as well as how an author has designed the development of thought between them. Seeing the structure helps us see the direction the author’s thoughts are taking us.
- Structure is important for our preaching and teaching because we want to make sure that the way we arrange the ideas in our teaching reflects the way the author arranged his thoughts in the passage. An awareness and understanding of structure in the Bible brings a clarifying power to our preaching.

How Do You Find the Structure of a Passage?

1. **Look for patterns and shifts in thought.** As you read the passage, what kind of patterns do you see that point to the major ideas the author is trying to convey? Also as you read, look for shifts in thought or a change in direction. These can be detected by a change in patterns.
   
   Look especially for:
   - Repetitions
   - Progressions
   - Contrasts and comparisons
   - How a passage begins and ends
   - Key transitions or summary statements

   Also look for:
   - Commands
   - A story’s climax and resolution
   - Questions asked and answered

2. **Divide the passage.** After seeing the patterns and transitions in thought, divide the passage into sections that contain the major ideas. Write down the verse numbers for each section.

3. **Describe the major ideas.** State the major idea of each section of the passage in one complete sentence.

4. **Find the connections of thought between the major ideas.** How does one major idea connect or lead to the next? How do all of them connect together and reveal the direction of the author’s thoughts?

(Seeing the structure leads naturally to discovering the main idea. In light of what you find about the structure, ask, “What is the main idea of this passage?”)
What Is the Main Idea?
- The main idea is the main point or the central message of a passage (or a book).

Why Is Finding the Main Idea Important?
In Scripture:
- It helps us clearly discern the message God intends us to hear through a passage of Scripture.
- It helps us see the focal point around which other ideas in the passage are organized.

In preaching and teaching:
- It helps us remain faithful to what God is saying in His Word.
- It becomes the focal point around which everything in a sermon or lesson is organized.

Finding the Main Idea Involves . . .
- Observing clues in the text. Look for:
  - Connections between the way a passage begins and ends
  - The repetition of important words or ideas
  - A summary verse
  - Conclusions or purpose statements (that begin with words like “therefore” or “so that”)
- Finding the structure of the passage.
  - Consider how the development of thought points to the main idea.
- Asking two summary questions about the passage:
  1. What general idea is the author talking about?
  2. What specifically is he saying about that idea?

Finding the Intended Response
- Looking for the main idea causes us to ask, “What did the author say?” Looking for the intended response leads us to ask, “Why did the author say it?”
- Simply ask: In light of the message of this passage, what response did the author desire to see in the lives of his audience? In other words: What transformation was God seeking to accomplish through the words of the passage in the life of the listener? . . . What was the intended response?

How Do We State the Main Idea?
The main idea can be stated in two different ways:
- A “descriptive” main idea – in terms of what is described in the passage
- A “teaching” main idea – in terms of a timeless principle which reflects the specific message of the passage but also incorporates the transformational thrust of the intended response for our lives today

The statement of the Main Idea should be:
- Complete – not a title, but a complete sentence (with a subject and verb)
- Concise – short enough that listeners can remember it
- Specific – including some of the distinctive ideas of the passage
What Is Biblical Theology?

- Biblical theology is a way of looking at the Bible that helps us see...
  1. the big picture of the overarching story of the Bible and how each smaller piece (the individual passage or book we are studying) fits into that overall story
  2. how each part of the story points to Christ, since the overarching story about God and His purposes and plan is fulfilled in Christ

(1) The Overarching Story

- First, Biblical theology helps us see the connection between each smaller part (the passage or book we are studying) and the whole.

The Bible is like a rope. A rope has many strands, but there is one rope. The Bible has many themes, and Biblical theology helps us to see how each of those themes is woven together into one story with one message.

- Biblical theology helps us also see the development of the story and message of the Bible, until all is fulfilled in and through Christ.

(2) Fulfillment in Christ

- Biblical theology also helps us to see how every part of the Bible – not just the New Testament, but the Old Testament as well – is focused on its fulfillment in Christ.

The Old Testament Points to Christ

- In Luke 24, Jesus explained that “everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled” (24:44). So when we preach from the Old Testament, we can preach Christ because all of the Old Testament as a whole is pointing forward to Christ.

Main Highways on a Map

We may think about the Bible as a map, and on that map we see that all roads in the Old Testament lead to Christ. Not all roads are the main highways. The main highways are those passages from which a direct connection to Christ can be clearly seen. But there are many boulevards, avenues, side streets, and alleys that are not on the main highway, though they eventually connect to it.

We may be studying a passage that is on a side road off of the main highway. The important question to ask is: How does this passage get me to the main highway? Or, How does this passage connect with a main theme that points me towards Christ? How does this passage aid my understanding of Christ and what He has done? Questions like these will help us know how the Scriptures point to Christ.

The New Testament Explains Christ

- While the Old Testament prepares the way for and points to Christ, the New Testament reveals and explains who He is.
- Ask: Is the New Testament author looking back at an Old Testament promise about Christ? If so, how does the author understand it? How does the author see the implications of Christ’s coming and ministry on this side of the cross and resurrection? Is the author pointing us forward to the promise of Christ’s return and the future of His kingdom? If so, what does he say about it?