

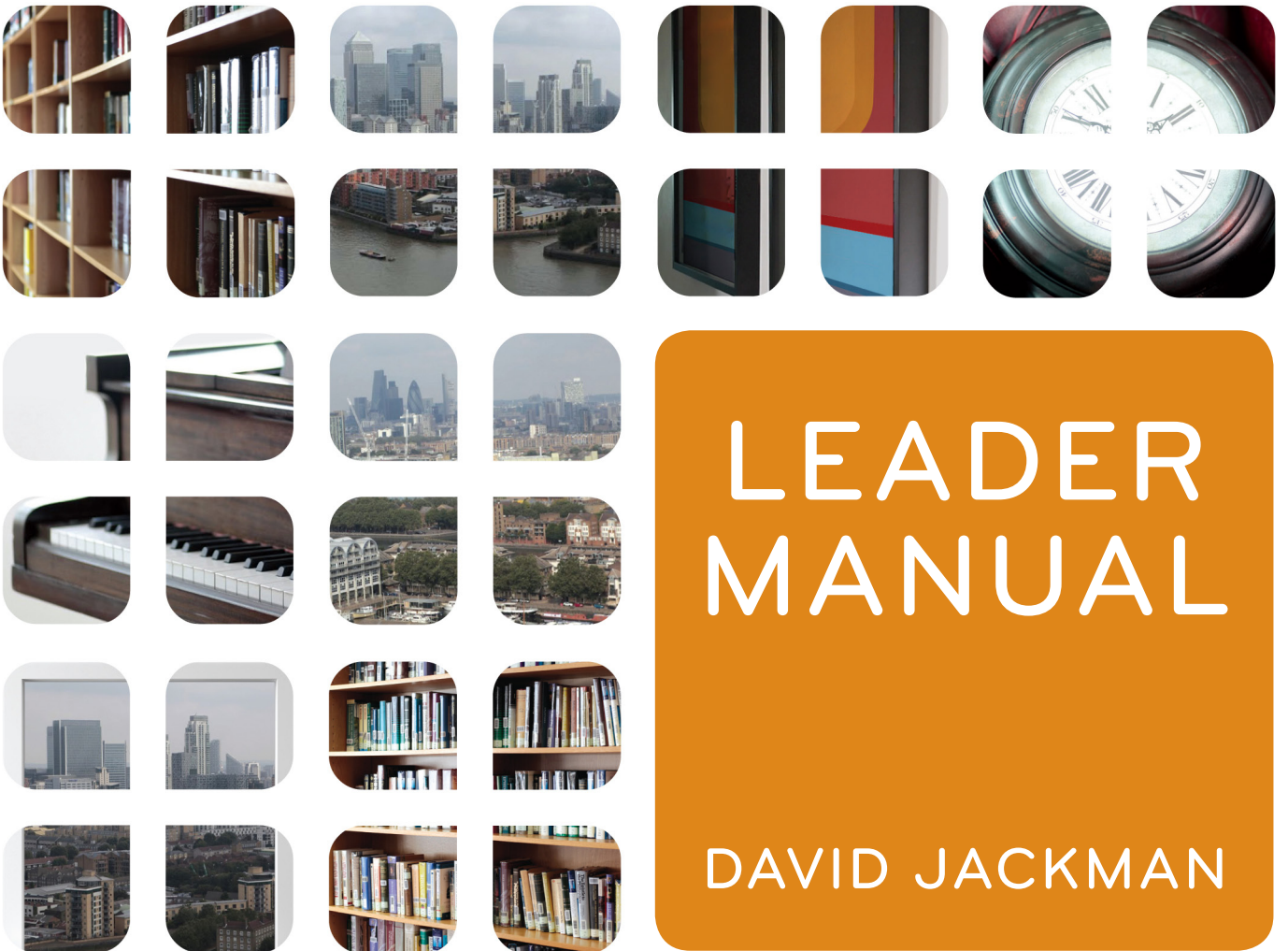


Equipped

TO PREACH THE WORD

MODULE 2

EQUIPPED WITH THE SKILLS



















LEADER
MANUAL

DAVID JACKMAN

MODULE 2

EQUIPPED WITH THE SKILLS

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Manual Design: Diane Warnes. Publisher: The Proclamation Trust.

HOW TO USE THIS MANUAL

As with Module 1, this manual comprises eight training Units. Please complete Module 1 Units 1 to 8 before attempting Module 2. Module 2 starts at Unit 9.

The timings for Module 2 Units are approximately as follows:

3–5 minutes	INTRODUCTION
15 minutes	VIDEO TEACHING BY REV. DAVID JACKMAN
40–80 minutes	DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES
15–25 minutes	HOME STUDY AND PRAYER

This manual contains notes and instructions to help you lead your trainees. You will need to read through the notes and instructions for each Unit in advance to be prepared for the training.

The Home Studies for Module 2 consist of exercises and videos to help develop the skill introduced in each Unit. Briefly describe the purpose of the Home Study to your trainees at the end of each Unit. Emphasise the importance of this home preparation.

Note that the Home Studies for Units 12 to 15 consist of preaching practice. The Appendix provides further details and instructions on how to do this.

If you decide to run this Module over an intensive two-day workshop you will need to leave out the Home Studies for Units 9 to 11, but you should ask the trainees to prepare the talks from the Home Studies for Units 12 to 15 before coming to the workshop, as this preaching practice is an essential element of the Module. Rather than each trainee preparing four talks you may want to divide the talks between them.

Please note that Module 3 will deal in detail with how to preach through the Scriptures and will cover the entire area of understanding and interpreting genres and so that skill is not included in this Module.

Throughout this manual, instructions are in *italics*.

Please note that the page numbers in this *Leader Manual* do not correspond to those in the *Trainee Manual*. Please therefore ask trainees to turn to the Unit number, rather than the page number.

This manual uses the English Standard Version (ESV) translation of the Bible.

All videos can be found at www.proctrust.org.uk/equipped

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:16–17

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply grateful to: John Lumgair and Sim Lumgair of Quirky Motion for the production of the videos; Sam Shammas for developmental editing of the curriculum; Diane Warnes for the manual design; Pete Nicholas, Roo Standring and Robin Weekes for the discussion panels; all who took part in filming at EMA 2016; everyone at The Proclamation Trust, especially Mike Clarkson. Special thanks are also due to Stephen Boon, Julia Marsden, Nancy Olsen, Malcolm Riley, Andrew Sach and Charlie Thomson, each of whose contributions were invaluable.



UNIT 9

STAY ON THE LINE

INTRODUCTION NOTES FOR LEADERS

Welcome the trainees, and pray as you begin this Module that God will equip you and your trainees with the skills to understand and preach his powerful Word with increasing appetite and ability.

Hand each trainee a copy of the Module 2 Trainee Manual or alternatively they can download it from: www.proctrust.org.uk/equipped.

Introduce the Module by saying:

*Welcome again to *Equipped to Preach the Word*. This second Module, as you can see from your manual, is entitled *Equipped with the Skills*. So, this Module is all about how to develop Bible handling skills and moves from the more theological approach of Module 1 to a very practical and pragmatic approach to preaching. We are going to explore various skills that will help us in our study of the Bible and in our preaching.*

Introduce the video by saying:

*For each Unit we will watch a teaching video presented by Rev. David Jackman and then discuss and practise the skill together. We completed Units 1 through to 8 in Module 1, so please open your manual to Unit 9 which is entitled *Stay on the Line*.*

VIDEO NOTES FOR LEADERS

Watch Unit 9

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES NOTES FOR LEADERS

Use these questions and exercises after watching the video. The notes beneath the questions and exercises are not intended as answers to be read aloud—they are notes to help you guide the trainees to develop and practise the skill taught in the video.

1. We heard in the video that: “Staying on the Line—teaching what the Bible is saying without deviation or dilution—is vital for the Bible preacher”. Why is it vital?

Some of the reasons why “Staying on the Line” is vital include:

- ❖ Because God’s living and enduring Word is given for everyone, everywhere, in every generation.
- ❖ Because we are dependent on God’s self-revelation in Christ for our knowledge of and relationship with him, and we are dependent on the Scriptures for their revelation of Christ to us, in both the Testaments.
- ❖ Because the preacher is the channel through whom God’s Word is taught, he is not at liberty to change or distort it according to his own preferences or emphases. He is a servant of the Word (see Luke 1:2, 2 Tim. 3:16 – 4:2, 2 Peter 1:20–21).
- ❖ Because the whole Bible is divinely inspired, to distort or dilute its message in one particular text will inevitably distort or dilute the meaning of other passages dealing with parallel themes or emphases.

- ❖ Because if we teach what the Bible is *not* saying, we shall cause our hearers to put their faith in what God has not promised, or to fail to take seriously what God has spoken. Their foundations will be weak because they are trusting the word of man rather than the truth of the Word of God.

2. In your particular culture and circumstances, what implications will it have for you to “Stay on the Line”?

Depending on your trainees you may want to split them into smaller groups of 2 or 3 to answer this question and pray for one another in light of their answers. In this case, allow 5–7 minutes for them to discuss in small groups and pray.

Given the personal nature of this question it may not be appropriate to ask for public feedback, but ask them to give feedback on the general principles, for example:

- ❖ It may mean that your congregation will be small compared with churches where the preachers have come off the line in order to give their hearers what they want to hear.
- ❖ You may be accused of being “too biblical”, which equates to being seen as too dogmatic or old-fashioned. But we can only understand who Jesus is and what he has done for us through the Bible. And Peter tells us, “you have been born again...through the living and abiding word of God” (1 Peter 1:23). This indicates that we have no spiritual life until God brings us to new birth, in which his essential means is the Scriptures. They are the living and life-giving Word of God and all spiritual progress depends upon that Word dwelling in us richly. As we learned in Module 1: The Spirit of God takes the Word of God to accomplish the work of God. Since, as preachers, we are totally dependent on this living and abiding Word of the living God, we can never be “too biblical”.
- ❖ You may not be promoted within your denominational context if you are seen to be conducting your ministry with the Bible as your ultimate authority.
- ❖ There may be a struggle in your own spirit to stay faithful to God’s Word, since the devil will try to unsettle you, telling you that you are in a minority, that visible ‘results’ are too few, or that it is not worth all the time and trouble you are taking in preparation.

3. We heard in the video that in order to keep from being knocked off the line:

Don’t be more concerned with the interpretation than with what the Bible itself is saying.

Don’t be more concerned with the congregation’s response than with what the Bible itself is saying.

Don’t be more concerned with the structure of the sermon than with what the Bible itself is saying.

How do these concerns knock us off the line and how can we prevent that from happening?

Draw out the following points:

- ❖ If the preacher is too concerned with the interpretation, especially in texts where there are differing views about the meaning of the passage, he may take more time justifying his own interpretation by references to scholarly work or famous preachers who support his view, rather than feeding the flock with the message of the text.
- ❖ If the preacher is concerned with himself and his reputation, he will want to present unusual, inventive interpretations of familiar passages to show how clever he is. What the people of God need is the truth of Scripture straightforwardly taught and applied. Will the preacher love his people more than he loves himself?
- ❖ Will the preacher love his people enough to tell them the warnings and hard teachings of Scripture, even when they don’t want to hear them? Or will he be more concerned to be praised and admired by his congregation because he only tells them truth that is comfortable? Does he love the praise of men more than the praise of God? Draw attention to John 12:42–43.

- ❖ Because the sermon is our own personal construction or creation, we can easily be diverted into wanting it to be perfect in structure. This will make us look for power in the outline, the alliterated points, the exciting or humorous illustrations, the passionate delivery. All of these subtly turn the focus on to the preacher who can become a literary craftsman, even a brilliant communicator; but in preaching it is the spiritual content of the message that matters and that will last, not the human packaging.

4. Preachers can come off the line by either adding to or subtracting from the truth of what the Bible is actually saying. Look at the following examples and identify whether they go above or below the line and why. How would you modify them so that they “Stay on the Line”?

Split into small groups of two or three and work through each example. Each group should choose a spokesperson, ready to contribute comments and ideas from the small group to the larger group when we come back together.

Example 1

Romans 8 verse 37 tells us that we are “more than conquerors”. We are not just conquerors but more than conquerors. We have the power to confront any temptation and conquer it. Our prayers can conquer every fear and doubt. We can and will conquer in our relationships, in our witness, in our businesses. In all of our lives we are more than conquerors.

Example 2

Jesus tells his disciples in Mark 10 verses 23 to 25: “How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!... It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” While it is true that wealthy people often feel little need for religious faith, the picture Jesus uses refers to a small gate in the city walls of Jerusalem, called the Needle Gate, through which a camel could only pass if it first knelt down and all its baggage was removed. It is a picture parable of the humility that wins salvation. Whether we are wealthy or not, we all need to come to God on our knees without all our baggage.

Example 3

When you meet with the trials and troubles of life, do you embrace them and rejoice that they’ve come upon you? 1 Peter 1 verse 6 reads: “In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials”. This verse says you can and should rejoice about the testing and suffering that you face. So let’s embrace our difficulties in this world, let’s rejoice in them, knowing that, as Peter tells us in verse 4, we have “an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for us”.

Allow 10–12 minutes for them to discuss in small groups and then ask for feedback.

You will need to ask for contributions from each group and monitor the responses.

Tackle these examples one by one with your trainees. You may want to ask a trainee to read the example aloud before you ask for feedback.

In the feedback you may want to mention or draw out the following:

Example 1

The preacher has used the term “conqueror” to launch himself well above the line as he preaches a gospel of success, prosperity, and constant victory. But none of what he says actually comes from the text. We read in the previous verses: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, ‘For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.’” So the text talks about the many trials and difficulties Christians face in this life, and shows that being “more than conquerors” does not mean that we somehow conquer them and then no longer have to face them—the text says: “*in* all these things”, not “*in spite of* all these things”. The point is that continuing to be faithful in the face of such suffering is more glorifying to God than being taken out of the difficulties. Godly persistence is testimony to the keeping power of “him who loved us”. Whatever trials and afflictions we experience, and Paul had certainly had his share of them, nothing can separate the Christian from the love of Christ—that is what makes us “more than conquerors”.

Example 2

The preacher goes below the line to make the message more credible, because rich people do enter God's kingdom (biblical examples include Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Solomon, Joseph of Arimathea among others). But the text talks about a camel and a needle, and not a gate. The disciples themselves take the words literally and understand the astonishing message, asking in verse 26: "Then who can be saved?". Jesus is speaking about salvation as an impossibility, a camel literally going through the tiny eye of a needle, unless God intervenes. He says to the disciples in verse 27: "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God." No one can secure his own salvation however humble he may be, or how much "baggage" he is willing to sacrifice. It is all God's work and all of grace.

John Piper says about this teaching:

One thing is crystal clear: a camel cannot go through the eye of a needle. It is impossible. And if you have ever heard anyone say that this is a reference to a gate in the wall around Jerusalem which was so small that a camel had to get down low and take the load off its back, there is no such gate and the context will not allow such an interpretation. Jesus interprets his own meaning in his response to what the disciples ask next. They are astonished and ask... "Then who can be saved?" Now at this point Jesus has the golden opportunity to answer with something like: "The poor can be saved." Or: "Believers can be saved." Or: "Those who follow me can be saved." But he does not say any of those. He follows through with the meaning of what he had just said about the camel and the needle's eye. He says... "With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."... Jesus in essence says, "The point I am making about the rich is true for everybody. This is not a problem with money. It's a problem with the human heart." So he makes the broad general statement: "With people this is impossible." That is, conversion for everyone is humanly impossible. Who then can be saved? Answer: No one—unless God intervenes to do what is humanly impossible.¹

Example 3

The preacher has gone above the line in wanting his hearers to have a super-spiritual experience of rejoicing about, instead of grieving over, the trials they are facing. But the rejoicing in the text doesn't focus on the difficulties. That takes us above the line and seriously underestimates how hard and discouraging life in this world can be, even as a Christian. The rejoicing on the line focuses not on our circumstances, but on the risen Lord Jesus and all that he has accomplished for us. The, "in this you rejoice" is not connected to the "grieved by various trials" but to the previous verses that describe our "living hope" in Christ. Peter is *not* saying rejoice in your worldly circumstances, or rejoice in the pain you feel. He is saying rejoice *in Christ*.

5. Ask someone to read aloud Exodus 3:1–6. How might a preacher today be tempted to go above or below the line? What do you think must be taught in order to "Stay on the Line"?

Look for the following points:

Above the line preaching puts us in the place of Moses and pretends that we need and can have a burning bush experience in which we hear God's voice and know his specific plans for our life: "Any bush, any day, can be a flame with divine presence for us."

Below the line preaching rightly acknowledges that Moses was a unique leader of Israel and that therefore we should neither expect, nor look to create, an equivalent existential experience of God today. But it wrongly concludes that therefore this was a historical event with no real significance for, and nothing to say to, us today.

On the line preaching is much more concerned with God rather than Moses. This text is a classic revelation of the holiness of God (burning fire), the sinfulness of man ("Do not come near"), and the unchanging faithfulness of God (to his promises made to the patriarchs which will find their fulfilment in the person of the Lord Jesus). We do not need Moses' experience but we can know and worship Moses' God.

¹ John Piper, from his message "How to Get a Camel through a Needle's Eye" (April 30, 2000) on desiringgod.org

6. Ask someone to read aloud 2 Corinthians 4:1–7. Split into small groups of two or three to answer this question together: “How does Paul describe the dangers of coming off the line and how to resist them?” Each group should choose a spokesperson, ready to contribute comments and ideas from the small group to the larger group when we come back together.

Do not allow the trainees to use commentaries (including those available online) at this stage. They need to do the thinking for themselves, as far as they can.

Allow 2–3 minutes for them to discuss in small groups and then ask for feedback.

You will need to ask for contributions from each group and monitor the responses.

Some notes on the text to mention or draw out:

There was the danger of losing heart (v. 1) because gospel work is hard, and so are human hearts by nature. There was the danger therefore of wanting to change the message by tampering with God’s Word (v. 2). There was also the danger of using deceitful means in communicating—for example by not telling the whole truth—to trick people into making a response (v. 2).

We resist, as Paul did, by seeing our ministry as a gift of God’s mercy (v. 1). We are simply “servants for Jesus’ sake” (v. 5).

Paul also realises that as the gospel is faithfully and clearly proclaimed, the lack of response is due to the blinded minds of unbelievers which is the devil’s work (v. 4). This can only be overcome by God’s power.

Paul recognises that his work is to proclaim Christ and not himself (v. 5) and Christ is the image of God’s glory. This light is shone by God into blinded minds to bring people to the knowledge of the Lord (v. 6). Only God can open blind eyes.

All we are ever called to be is “jars of clay”—fragile and easily broken, but carrying the light of Christ, God’s “surpassing power” (v. 7). So we should never look to self-glory, which will always knock us off the line, but to glorifying God, by proclaiming Jesus Christ as Lord.

HOME STUDY AND PRAYER NOTES FOR LEADERS

These first Home Studies consist of exercises and videos to help develop the skill introduced in each Unit.

Ask the trainees to turn to the Home Study in their Trainee Manual (as in your Leader Manual the Home Study is identified by being in its own separate window). Briefly describe the purpose of the Home Study to your trainees. Emphasise the importance of this home preparation.

Pray at the end of your time together.

Complete the Home Study yourself and be prepared to discuss it with your trainees.

1. Watch Clip 9. Write down anything you find surprising, encouraging or difficult.
2. Read Jeremiah 29:10–14, which includes the famous verse 11: “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.” How might a preacher today be tempted to go above the line? Are there also dangers of preaching below the line, and if so, in what ways? What do you think must be taught in order to “Stay on the Line”?
3. Watch Discussion Panel 9. Write down anything you find surprising, encouraging or difficult.



UNIT 10



LISTEN TO THE TEXT

INTRODUCTION NOTES FOR LEADERS

Welcome the trainees and pray as you begin this Unit that together you will be listening carefully to what God is saying in his Word.

Introduce the video by saying:

This Unit is called—*Listen to the Text*—and it will help us to begin to think about how we approach any text we are studying.

VIDEO NOTES FOR LEADERS

Watch Unit 10

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES NOTES FOR LEADERS

Use these questions and exercises after watching the video. The notes beneath the questions and exercises are not intended as answers to be read aloud—they are notes to help you guide the trainees to develop and practise the skill taught in the video.

Note that there are three texts to work through in the following questions, which will take some time, but it will be well spent in reinforcing the teaching of the principles in this Unit.

Since this is the first time they are practising the skill, the notes beneath questions 3, 4, and 5 give an example of how to guide the trainees through the texts and so teach them the skill in an interactive way.

You may want to remind the trainees that in this, as with all skills, practice develops competence. If they find the approach a little difficult at first—that is to be expected, so encourage them not to give up after the first couple of attempts.

1. Why is it important to “Listen to the Text”? What are some possible issues that might arise if we do not listen?

Some points to mention or draw out:

- ❏ We shall preach ourselves or our agenda or our culture, rather than the actual content of what God is saying in the Bible passage.
- ❏ We may grasp an outline of what God is saying, but then fill in that outline with our own ideas and end up in speculation and fantasy. If we do not listen ourselves, our hearers will hear the voice of the preacher, but not the voice of God.
- ❏ We may lead people astray if we say what God is not saying. This will lead to them being disillusioned and even leaving the faith when they find the promises, made by the preacher but not by God, are not being fulfilled in their lives.

- ❑ The text will give us the issues that God is concerned about, which are both contemporary and eternal. We do not go to the Bible primarily to answer this world's questions about God. Rather the Bible teaches us how to ask God's questions to the world, so that our thinking is changed to God's perspective.
- ❑ Because God knows exactly what we human beings need to hear, generation by generation, in every place, if we listen carefully to the Bible text and expound it consecutively through whole Bible books, we shall be teaching our hearers "the whole counsel of God".
- ❑ The word of the preacher lasts for a few minutes, but the Word of the Lord endures for ever.

2. What are some practical things you can put into place so that you are able to "Listen to the Text"? Split into small groups of two or three and share your answers. Each group should choose a spokesperson, ready to contribute comments and ideas from the small group to the larger group when we come back together.

Allow 2–3 minutes for them to discuss in small groups and then ask for feedback.

You will need to ask for contributions from each group and monitor the responses.

Look for the following points:

- ❑ Find a quiet place where distractions from noise and other people will be minimal.
- ❑ Turn off your phone and internet.
- ❑ Begin with prayer, asking God to meet you personally as you listen to his Word, so that you are not just studying the text academically, but expecting God to speak to you—to teach, reprove, correct and train in righteousness, to equip you for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16–17).
- ❑ Jot down all the extraneous ideas which may come into your mind as you start to study. They can form a to-do list for you after your time of listening to the text, but don't let them divert you during the process.
- ❑ Write down what you are learning as it becomes clear to you and keep a list of questions and difficulties to return to as the preparation process develops.

3. Please open your Bibles to Matthew chapters 3 and 4. At the end of chapter 3, Matthew has narrated the story of Jesus' baptism, when the Spirit came upon Jesus and the voice of the Father from heaven declared, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased". Listen to the beginning of Chapter 4: "Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil." Let's explore together what this verse is saying and what we can learn by listening carefully to this verse.

The notes below provide an example of how to guide the trainees through the text and so teach them the skill in an interactive way.

Introduce the exercise by saying something like:

We often read this verse as an introduction to the famous temptation narrative, which we already know well, and so we march straight into a sermon about how to overcome temptation by relying on the Word of God. But are we really listening to the text? Is that the reason why Matthew wrote verse 1? Sometimes, careful listening can depend on just one word or phrase in the text. Here, that is the case with the first word: "Then"—"Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil." Why would the Spirit lead Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil *at this point*? Any thoughts?

Allow the trainees to contribute thoughts and ideas, even incorrect ones, then say something like:

You're right to point out that Matthew has just narrated the story of Jesus' baptism and that the word wilderness also has significance. There is a tie Matthew wants us to see between the temptations, Jesus' baptism, and the Old Testament exodus narrative in the wilderness.

Ask someone to read aloud Exodus 4:22–23 and then say something like:

Did you notice how Israel is referred to in these verses? Moses is told to say to Pharaoh on behalf of Yahweh: "Israel is my firstborn son, and I say to you, 'Let my son go that he may serve me.'" Eventually, after the warnings

of the plagues, there came the fateful night when all the firstborn of the Egyptians died as God's judgement struck the land, but the firstborn sons of the Israelites were delivered by sheltering under the blood of the Passover lamb. Then the people were led by the presence of God himself, out of Egypt, into the wilderness, on their way to the promised land. But what happened in the wilderness that prevented them from going straight to the promised land?

Allow the trainees to contribute answers then say something like:

The temptations the Israelites faced in the wilderness led to unbelief and rebellion again and again. They failed to follow, trust, and obey the Lord again and again. So their time in the wilderness did not last forty days and forty nights, but forty years. What then is the connection Matthew wants us to see between Jesus' temptations, Jesus' baptism, and the Old Testament exodus narrative in the wilderness?

Allow the trainees to contribute answers then say something like:

In Matthew the newly attested Son of God faces temptation in the wilderness, but where Israel failed and sinned over and over again, this Son triumphed. In the power of God's Word and Spirit he routs the devil's attempts to seduce, divert, or conquer him and emerges as the perfectly obedient Son, the true son to whom Israel pointed.

Conclude the exercise by saying something like:

Of course we can learn from Jesus' example in overcoming temptation, but that was not Matthew's primary concern in recording verse 1. Rather, he shows that both sons were tested by God's design, and whereas Israel failed, Jesus would never fail. Instead the temptations establish a pattern of obedience and trust that characterised this true Son's entire life and death. Matthew's purpose is to exalt the Lord Jesus as the perfect Son.

4. Ask someone to read aloud James 2:18–26. Ask someone else to read aloud just verses 24 and 26.

Let's explore together what the text is saying and what we can learn by listening carefully to the text.

The notes below provide an example of how to guide the trainees through the text and so teach them the skill in an interactive way.

Introduce the exercise by saying something like:

It is easy to read James 2:18–26 against a strong theological background of justification by grace alone, through faith alone, which can make verses like 24 and 26 seem contradictory to the gospel. Does James disagree with Paul who insists, in various places, that justification is by faith alone? Might we not have written: "For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also *works* apart from *faith* is dead"? We might: but what does the verse actually say? It says: "so also *faith* apart from *works* is dead." Let's listen carefully to James' argument. He uses two Old Testament examples—that of Abraham (in verses 21–23) and Rahab (in verse 25)—what do you think those two examples illustrate?

Allow the trainees to contribute thoughts and ideas, even incorrect ones, then say something like:

Abraham and Rahab "were justified by works" in the sense that they demonstrated their righteous status and right relationship with God by doing good works. James uses them to illustrate his principle that "a person is justified by works and not by faith alone". He is not, of course, denying that a person is justified by faith. Listen to the text! But he is saying that any profession of faith which does not issue in a changed lifestyle of obedience to God's will is dead and useless. James is assuming that a person cannot have real saving faith without works. There is no contradiction with Paul who constantly sees both faith and love as the marks of authentic Christianity. (If needed you can point trainees to Paul in 1 Thess. 1:3, Gal. 5:6, Eph. 1:15, Philem. 5, Col. 1:4).

Ask: "What does verse 19 add to the argument?" and after allowing the trainees to comment, say:

True faith in Christ is far more than an intellectual acceptance of his deity, or mere assent to a credal statement, or doctrinal system. Those things, "even the demons believe—and shudder!". True faith produces good works, or else it is a dead faith.

Conclude the exercise by saying something like:

Many people in the world today, and in our churches also, are relying on a decision they made for Christ years ago, but there has been no evidence of appropriate expression of that faith in life-changing works. The diagnosis of the text is that such so-called faith is in fact a delusion.

5. Ask someone to read aloud Genesis 6:5–9. Ask someone else to read it aloud again. Let’s explore together what the text is saying and what we can learn by listening carefully to the text.

The notes below provide an example of how to guide the trainees through the text and so teach them the skill in an interactive way.

Introduce the exercise by asking something like:

What do we learn about God and about the human condition from verses 5 to 7?

Allow the trainees to contribute thoughts and ideas then say something like:

Verses 5 to 7 are all about the human condition. Note the repetition of “man”. Evil has spread throughout the creation, as the wickedness of the fallen human mind and heart leads to actions of sin. God’s response is grief and pain (verse 6 says God was “sorry” and “grieved to his heart”), and with these a determination to deal with the problem by blotting out man from the face of the earth in an act of judgement. It is a reversal of creation that God proposes in verse 7. This makes the contrast of verse 8 all the more remarkable. “But Noah...”—here is a ray of hope. Here is a man who “found favour” in the Lord’s eyes. What do you think it means that Noah “found favour”?

Allow the trainees to contribute thoughts and ideas then say something like:

Alec Motyer writes: “Taking Genesis 6:8, then, in its preceding context, we meet Noah for the first time as a typical man among men. Like the rest, because he too is part of humankind, he is wicked outwardly and inwardly, a grief to God and under divine sentence. But in distinction from the rest of humankind a grace of God, as unexplained as it is unmerited, has come to him. He has not ‘found’ this grace by merit or effort; rather it has found him.”¹ The indication is that Noah has no claim on God’s mercy or grace, but that the rescue he is about to experience, through the ark, is entirely God’s choice, without reference to Noah’s merit in any way.

“But what of the following context, where we read in 6:9 that Noah was in fact very different from the rest of mankind: in character ‘righteous’, in public conduct ‘blameless among the people of the time’, and spiritually ‘walking’ in fellowship with God?”² Listen again to the second part of verse 9: “Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God.” If we are not listening carefully, what is it tempting to deduce about Noah from the description in verse 9?

Allow the trainees to contribute thoughts and ideas then say something like:

It is easy to read verse 9 as though it is the explanation of verse 8. In other words, God looked all around the human race to find one man and his family worthy of being saved from the flood and he found Noah who was righteous and worth rescuing. But we missed listening to the first part of verse 9 which reads: “These are the generations of Noah.” It is a formula used throughout Genesis as a marker or divider of the text into sections. It could be translated, “This is what was generated”, referring to an outcome, or product. How does that help us to understand verses 8 and 9 together?

Allow the trainees to contribute thoughts and ideas then say something like:

What God’s favour or grace generated was a righteous man who obeyed God’s Word. Noah is certainly very different from the rest of humankind, but verse 9 shows that is because of verse 8, not the other way round. “The introductory heading...compels us to see verse 9 not as the explanation but as the consequence of verse 8 – it is what verse 8 ‘brought forth’ – and, seen in the light of this, the story of Noah preserves the exclusive reality of grace as grace, while at the same time demonstrating that when grace comes (verse 8) it produces the changed and distinctive life of a new man (verse 9).”³

Conclude the exercise by saying something like:

Listening to the text teaches us both that righteousness is the product of grace and also that its reception will always be expressed in a life of practical godliness.

¹ Alec Motyer, *Look to the Rock* (Leicester, England: IVP, 1996), 43. ² *ibid.*, 43–44. ³ *ibid.*, 44.

Use the notes below to discuss the previous Home Study.

In the previous Home Study you were asked to study Jeremiah 29:10–14 to establish what must be taught in order to “Stay on the Line”, and to think about how a preacher might go above or below the line. Share your answers aloud.

Ask a few of your trainees, who are willing, to contribute their answers. You might also like to share the following with them:

“Staying on the Line” means teaching the character of God through this text, brought out and emphasised by all the “I will” verbs: God will keep his promise (v. 10), will fulfil his plans for good (v. 11), will be found by his people when they are repentant (vv. 12–14), and will bring them back to the land (v. 14).

This text is therefore a call to trust in this powerful and faithful God, which will encourage the people to know they have “a future and a hope”. The application for us today is that as we look back on Israel’s history we can see that all this did happen just as it had been prophesied, and so it stimulates us to trust in this same promise-keeping and powerful God. He will bring us home to our glorious eternal future and this hope should energise us here and now. It should also prompt us to be walking closely with God, repenting, calling on him in prayer, and seeking him wholeheartedly.

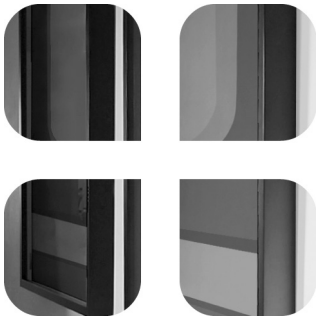
Preaching above the line focuses mostly on verse 11 and paints a glorious picture of God’s wonderful promises of blessing and prosperity for his people in this world—God has plans for our welfare and not for evil; he will give us a hope and a future now; he will hear us when we pray; he will restore our fortunes. Such preaching pays no attention to the fact that the exiles are experiencing God’s judgement on their sin and faithlessness. Nor does it mention the required wholehearted repentance and deep dependence on God alone. Moreover, as the New Testament makes clear, these blessings are not necessarily ours in this world, they are promised to us for the world to come.

Preaching below the line might focus exclusively on the historical context as though the promises God made to Israel have no relevance at all to our lives today. The text then becomes of merely historic, antiquarian interest. The correction is to focus on the character of God as revealed through his promises and to recognise that all he was then, he is to us now, in Christ.

Remind your trainees to complete the Home Study and pray at the end of your time together.

Complete the Home Study yourself and be prepared to discuss it with your trainees.

- 1. Watch Clip 10. Write down anything you find surprising, encouraging or difficult.**
- 2. Read Acts 3:12–16. Practise the skill of listening to the text. What is the text saying and what are the main points of Peter’s teaching?**
- 3. Watch Discussion Panel 10. Write down anything you find surprising, encouraging or difficult.**



UNIT 11

PUT THE TEXT IN CONTEXT

INTRODUCTION NOTES FOR LEADERS

Welcome the trainees and pray as you begin this Unit that your understanding of God's Word will be deepened and enriched.

Introduce the video by saying:

Our skill in this Unit is all about how to put the text we are studying into its context.

VIDEO NOTES FOR LEADERS

*Watch Unit 11*¹

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES NOTES FOR LEADERS

Use these questions and exercises after watching the video. The notes beneath the questions and exercises are not intended as answers to be read aloud—they are notes to help you guide the trainees to develop and practise the skill taught in the video.

Note that there are four texts to work through in the following questions, which will take some time, but it will be well spent in reinforcing the teaching of the principles in this Unit.

Since this is the first time they are practising the skill, the notes beneath questions 2, 3, 4, and 5 give an example of how to guide the trainees through the texts and so teach them the skill in an interactive way.

1. We heard in the video that:

A text without a context is a pretext for a proof-text.

Why is this an important principle and in what ways is proof-texting a danger?

Split into small groups of two or three and share your answers. Each group should choose a spokesperson, ready to contribute comments and ideas from the small group to the larger group when we come back together.

Allow 2–3 minutes for them to discuss in small groups and then ask for feedback.

You will need to ask for contributions from each group and monitor the responses.

Try and draw out all of the following:

Importance

The meaning of a text is determined not just by the words it contains, but by the purpose it is serving in the larger surround of the section, chapter, or book of which it is a part. Anyone can extract a few words from a verse and use them to say whatever they want them to say, but the author's (and therefore God's) intended meaning can only be properly determined by attention to context.

¹ The John Piper quote is from his book *Future Grace* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2012), 119, 120.

Bible words have Bible meanings. We determine the range of meaning of a word by the way it is used in the Scriptures (especially its immediate and book contexts) not primarily from the lexicon.

Context study makes us look beneath what the text is saying to why it is saying it. The author's intention is never just to give information; it is always pastoral, relating to life. So context is a major tool for helping us to teach the intended pastoral purpose of the text.

Dangers

Proof-texting allows the preacher to do whatever he wants to do with the Bible, according to his own agenda, or his own dogmatic framework. Preaching then becomes 'using' the Bible, rather than being under its authority.

Proof-texting isolates texts rather than integrating them. It fails to compare Scripture with Scripture and so tends towards imbalance and overemphasis of the preacher's favourite themes.

Proof-texting discourages the congregation from studying the Bible as God has given it—section by section and book by book. It atomises God's truth and reduces the Bible to an anthology of impressive quotations rather than a coherent guide to the whole of life.

Proof-texting reduces the congregation's confidence in the Bible because they can always find exceptions to the proof-texts and they conclude that the Bible is therefore contradictory or unreliable.

2. We heard in the video that:

Every text we study sits in three contexts and we need to recognise these three biblical contexts and work with each of them. First, each text is situated in an immediate context; this will be the writing which immediately precedes and follows it. This in turn sits in the context of the entire book of which our particular text is a part. And the book sits in the context of the whole Bible and the whole sweep of redemptive history.

Let's trace these 3 contexts—the immediate, the book, and the whole Bible contexts—for the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife in Genesis 39:7–20.

Depending on your group you may want to ask someone to read aloud Genesis 39 if you think they may not be too familiar with it. In any case, get them to look up the passage so that they are working from the text and not from memory.

Tackle each context one by one with your trainees. The notes below provide an example of how to guide the trainees through the exercise and so teach them the skill in an interactive way by using material taught by Dr. Don Carson in many of his talks and workshops.

Introduce the exercise by saying something like:

Don Carson writes: "It would be very tempting to focus on the central verses alone. There are some wonderful things in these central verses:... Call a spade, a spade. Call sin, sin—'how could I do this wicked thing', Joseph says. He doesn't view it as a peccadillo... it's a sin, it's a wicked thing, and it's related to God, it is a wicked thing before God. He's prepared himself and made himself proof against seduction because he has already made some decisions in his own mind: 'I will not go there; I choose to perceive that as wicked; I will not indulge in it; moreover it is breaking marriage, you are another man's wife, you don't belong to me, I don't have the right...' Lots and lots of practical things you can spell out from the text, and that's not bad. But...you remember that a text without a context becomes a pretext for a proof-text, so you want to ask yourself: How does chapter 39 as a chapter work? Is it all about seduction and how to respond to it? Well not really. That stuff that I've talked about is there alright, but how does the chapter begin and end?"² In other words, what can we learn from the immediate context?

Allow the trainees to contribute thoughts and ideas. You may need to prompt trainees by pointing them to verses 2 and 21. Then say something like:

As Don Carson continues: "[Chapter 39] begins with Joseph introduced into slavery—but the Lord was with him anyway. And it ends with Joseph in jail for something he didn't do—and the Lord is with him anyway. So that surely one of the lessons you are supposed to learn from this chapter is: Sometimes God hears us and answers

² Don Carson, transcribed from his workshop "An Introduction to Biblical Theology" on The Gospel Coalition website, thegospelcoalition.org

our prayers and helps us not by removing us from wretched messes that are not our own fault but by adding more grace and teaching us to be faithful, rather than bitter, in the midst of the most painful circumstances. Well those are huge lessons. And so far all I've done is look at the chapter... But what is this chapter doing in the book of Genesis?... What would be missing from the book of Genesis if we lost this chapter? What is Genesis 39 doing there?... You want to see how Genesis 39 is found in *its* context—what is it contributing to the book?”³

Allow the trainees to contribute thoughts and ideas then say something like:

Don Carson continues: “Well because Joseph is in prison...this leads to Joseph becoming ‘prime minister’ of Egypt...which tells us how the people of God came down to Egypt and sets us up for the years of slavery in Egypt before in fact Moses is raised up by God to take them out of the land of slavery. So it is part of filling in the entire narrative. Without chapter 39 it doesn't really make sense. But there is more than that. Because he is ‘prime minister’ of Egypt and saves so many people from starvation by famine, he ends up saving the 70 or so from his extended family when there is no food in Canaan either...and that's how they don't starve to death.”⁴ So, now when you set this Chapter in the context of the whole Bible—in its salvation historical context—what can we learn?

Allow the trainees to contribute thoughts and ideas and after commenting on them add:

Don Carson continues: “Humanly speaking, the reason Jesus was born and the entire Hebrew race was not wiped out, humanly speaking, was because of Joseph... You cannot help but read this chapter...as the preservation of the line... God preserves the line and one of the ways he does so, humanly speaking, is because he has a young man of integrity. And suddenly the act of sexual integrity...is now nestled in a massive structure of the entire canon and elevates the act to significance before God and in redemptive history that brings forth in the fullness of time Jesus himself.”⁵

Remind trainees that the text in context not only helps us biblically and faithfully to approach and understand the text, but also gives us valid application. The meaning and application of a text should always be clearly drawn from the text in its context. Ask the trainees to draw out some applications of the text and then conclude with something like:

Don Carson comments: “It is entirely appropriate to read Genesis 39 as a lesson in moral courage, a case study of a God-fearing man who rightly perceives that an attractive temptation is in reality an invitation to sin against God, and who therefore cares more for his purity than his prospects. Nevertheless, Genesis 39 must also be read in several broader dimensions, each with important lessons... Thus the chapter as a whole demonstrates that sometimes God chooses to bless us and make us people of integrity in the midst of abominable circumstances, rather than change our circumstances... Genesis 39 is part of the march towards Joseph's elevation to leadership in Egypt... Joseph eventually saves many from starvation—including his own extended family, *and therefore the messianic line*. But Joseph could not know all of that would work out as he was going through his misery... But Joseph walks by faith and not by sight.”⁶

3. Even though every text we study sits in all three contexts, not each of the contexts will be equally important for every text. Sometimes the immediate context will define more clearly the meaning of certain words or phrases within the text itself. Psalm 46:10 is often quoted; it reads: “Be still, and know that I am God.” According to the immediate context what does it mean to “Be still”?

Ask the trainees to turn to Psalm 46 so that they are working from the text and not from memory. You may want to ask one of the trainees to read the entire psalm aloud.

The notes below provide an example of how to guide the trainees through the text and so teach them the skill in an interactive way.

Introduce the exercise by saying something like:

Observe that the “Selah” annotation divides the psalm into three parts. Also notice that verses 7 and 11 replicate each other, so that verse 10 is, in effect, the conclusion to the psalm. As always, God is the supreme focus of the text—see verses 1, 5, 7, 8, and 9. In between, both the physical world (verses 2–3) and the political world (verse 6) are in meltdown. What do we learn about God from these verses?

³ *ibid.* ⁴ *ibid.* ⁵ *ibid.* ⁶ Don Carson, *For the Love of God*, Volume 1 (Leicester, England: IVP, 1998), reading for February 6.

Allow the trainees to contribute thoughts and ideas and then say something like:

Derek Kidner aptly comments: “The psalm...proclaims the ascendancy of God in one sphere after another: his power over nature (1–3), over the attackers of his city (4–7) and over the whole warring world (8–11).”⁷ With that immediate context in mind and in view of the rest of verse 10, what does it mean to “Be still”?

Allow the trainees to contribute thoughts and ideas then say something like:

Verse 10 is often thought to be an invitation to passive inactivity—as though we are to just relax and do nothing. But the emphasis of the verse in its immediate context is much more active and determined. We are to stop fighting against God’s sovereign rule in his world and in our lives, to submit to his Lordship, and to recognise that God is God and we are not. This is a call to a positive commitment of our lives and circumstances to our exalted King—a call to active faith, not to letting go. So the significance of “Be still” is much bigger than our own individual circumstances. As verses 8 and 9 (the immediate context) demonstrate, God will be exalted among the nations and in the earth because he is powerful and sovereign. However great the threats, believers will not fear (verse 2) because this sovereign God is their refuge and strength.

Remind trainees that the text in context not only helps us biblically and faithfully to approach and understand the text, but also gives us valid application. The meaning and application of a text should always be clearly drawn from the text in its context. Ask the trainees to draw out some applications of the text and then conclude with something like:

The psalm encourages us to trust God as our defender and enabler even when hostile, threatening circumstances seem to fill our horizon and screen God out. He is our refuge and strength. So we should stop fighting against what God is doing, be still, and actively trust him.

4. Sometimes the book context can transform our understanding of a text. Ask someone to read aloud Jude 24–25. How does putting this text in the context of the book help us to understand it?

Depending on your group you may want to ask someone to read aloud the entire book of Jude if you think they may not be too familiar with it. However, don’t allow your trainees to become diverted by peripheral questions or speculation about the details involved in the book that do not relate to the text under consideration.

The notes below provide an example of how to guide the trainees through the text and so teach them the skill in an interactive way.

Introduce the exercise by saying something like:

Verses 24 and 25 express an overarching confidence in God and his power at the conclusion of this letter. Without the book context the verses could be preached as a comforting: “Don’t worry, everything will turn out fine” encouragement. But the book context sharpens our understanding. What is the book’s concern according to verses 3 and 4 and the examples in verses 5–16?

Allow the trainees to contribute thoughts and ideas then say something like:

According to verse 3 the letter was written: “appealing to you to contend for the faith”. The letter’s concern, verse 4, is with the false teachers “who pervert the grace of God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ”. Verses 5–16 are then full of examples of those who stumbled and fell. The examples are all about those who stumbled by denying God and indulging in their own sinful appetites rather than submitting to God’s sovereign will, and therefore fell under God’s just judgement. Jude’s concern is that the same thing does not happen to his readers. And so, in verses 17–23 Jude applies the message of the earlier verses to their daily lives. Far from being passive and laid back, they are to build themselves up, pray, and keep themselves in the love of God (verses 20–21), actively rescuing those who have been deluded (verses 22–23). With this book context in mind, what is the “stumbling” (ESV) or “falling” (NIV) that verse 24 refers to?

Allow the trainees to contribute thoughts and ideas, even incorrect ones, then say something like:

The stumbling or falling cannot refer to the daily mistakes we make in our imperfect Christian lives (you may want to look up James 3:2). The great assurance of verse 24 is that God is able to keep them (and us) from falling or apostasy. How then do verses 21 and 24 relate to each other?

⁷ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1–72* in Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Nottingham, England: IVP, 1973), 191.

Allow the trainees to contribute thoughts and ideas then say something like:

The assurance of verse 24, that God is able to keep us from stumbling, is balanced by the insistent command of verse 21: “keep yourselves”. The evidence that God is keeping us is that we are keeping ourselves, which means living in the light of eternity, not for the things of this world.

You may want to share this quote with the trainees:

Matthew Henry draws our attention to the fact that the author “concludes this epistle with a solemn ascription of glory to the great God... God is able, and he is as willing as able, to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of his glory; not as those who never have been faulty...but as those whose faults shall not be imputed, to their ruin, which, but for God’s mercy and a Saviour’s merits, they might most justly have been... When believers shall be presented faultless it will be with exceeding joy. Alas! now our faults fill us with fears, doubts, and sorrows. But *be of good cheer*, if we be sincere, we shall be, our dear Redeemer has undertaken for it, we shall be *presented faultless*; where there is no sin there will be no sorrow; where there is the perfection of holiness, there will be the perfection of joy. Surely, the God who can and will do this is worthy to have *glory, majesty, dominion, and power*, ascribed to him, *both now and for ever!* And to this we may well, with [Jude], affix our hearty *Amen*.”⁸

Remind trainees that the text in context not only helps us biblically and faithfully to approach and understand the text, but also gives us valid application. The meaning and application of a text should always be clearly drawn from the text in its context. Ask the trainees to draw out some applications of the text and then conclude with something like:

We can have absolute confidence that God is able to keep us in the faith and to bring us to his eternal kingdom, but we have to persevere in the true faith without compromise. We must guard ourselves, rescue the doubters, and contend for the faith; all the while having the assurance that God will keep us from stumbling.

5. To set the text in the context of the whole Bible is to see how the rest of Scripture relates to our text and to set it within the sweep of redemptive history, in other words in its salvation-historical context. What can we learn by exploring the whole Bible context for the narrative of the feeding of the 5000 in Mark 6:33–44?

Ask the trainees to turn to Mark 6 so that they are working from the text and not from memory.

The notes below provide an example of how to guide the trainees through the text and so teach them the skill in an interactive way.

Ask one of the trainees to read aloud the introduction to the feeding narrative: Mark 6:33–36, then introduce the exercise by saying something like:

The feeding of the 5000 in Mark 6 is presented as a commentary on, or outworking of, Mark’s comment in verse 34: “When [Jesus] went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things.” In the context of the Old Testament can you name some places where this sheep-shepherd imagery occurs?

(Please note that in the accounts of this miracle in Luke and John, the Old Testament background seems to focus more on the miraculous provision of manna in the desert, whereas here in Mark it is the theme of the faithful shepherd that predominates.)

Allow the trainees to contribute thoughts and ideas then say something like:

The picture of the shepherd is of course a major Old Testament revelation of the character of God. Israel is the flock he shepherds and Psalm 23, which opens with those famous words “The LORD is my shepherd”, expounds the glorious implications that follow from this. But the scattered, shepherd-less sheep in Mark 6 also echo the situation described in Ezekiel 34:1–6 (let’s turn to those verses) where we read for example in verses 2 and 5: “Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep?... So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts.” Later in the chapter, since the under-shepherds have become so corrupt and irresponsible, God promises that he himself will come to be their shepherd. How does this Old Testament background help us to understand the feeding miracle in Mark 6?

⁸ From Matthew Henry’s Commentary on Jude, available at biblegateway.com

Allow the trainees to contribute thoughts and ideas then say something like:

The Old Testament shepherd imagery comes to its ultimate fulfilment in Christ. In Mark 6, the promised shepherd has now come to teach the lost sheep of Israel the truth of God's revelation. The feeding miracle is an enacted parable of the spiritual food with which Christ will nurture his flock. What about in the rest of New Testament? Can you name some places where this sheep-shepherd imagery occurs in the New Testament?

Allow the trainees to contribute thoughts and ideas then say something like:

In the New Testament we are given further indications of what the shepherdhood of Jesus means both for Jesus himself and for his designated apostles. So in John chapter 10, Jesus is the "good shepherd" who "lays down his life for the sheep". The cross is the ultimate proof of his shepherd care. And in the light of his resurrection, he is the "great shepherd" who is able to equip his flock with all that they need to do his will (Heb. 13:20–21). Peter can affirm him as the "chief Shepherd" who will reward his faithful under-shepherds (1 Peter 5:4). The shepherding role features in Jesus' commissioning of Peter (John 21:15–17), Paul's instruction to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:28–31), and Peter's own exhortation to the elders (1 Peter 5:2–3). How does this New Testament use of the shepherd imagery help us to understand the feeding miracle in Mark 6?

Allow the trainees to contribute thoughts and ideas then say something like:

For the disciples who distributed what Jesus had miraculously multiplied there was an additional lesson, that their future lives would be devoted to feeding God's people through the revelation of the apostolic teaching which Jesus would pass on to them. Moreover, there is a continuing "shepherding" ministry, passed on by Jesus to the apostles and by the apostles to the local church elders.

(Please note that the last point is included to show the range of connection that is possible and valid. But you do not want trainees to think they must preach all of this. You may want to remind them that the decision on what and how much should be included in any particular sermon will depend partly upon the people to whom they are preaching; i.e. the last point may be more relevant for a group of pastors. You may also want to remind them that we should not seize on one particular doctrinal or theological emphasis in the text and then use it as a springboard for a tour of that whole doctrine in Scripture. This ends up with us preaching our systematic theology rather than an exposition of the particular text.)

Remind trainees that the text in context not only helps us biblically and faithfully to approach and understand the text, but also gives us valid application. The meaning and application of a text should always be clearly drawn from the text in its context. Ask the trainees to draw out some applications of the text and then conclude with something like:

Jesus meets both the spiritual and physical needs of the crowd because of his compassion. This is a parallel to God's shepherd care of Israel. Jesus is the Great Shepherd, whom the Old Testament pointed to and who fulfilled all that the shepherd imagery anticipated.

HOME STUDY AND PRAYER NOTES FOR LEADERS

Use the notes below to discuss the previous Home Study.

In the previous Home Study you were asked to listen to Acts 3:12–16, to work out what the text is saying, and to find the main points of Peter's teaching. Share your answers aloud.

Ask a few of your trainees, who are willing, to contribute their answers. You might also like to share the following with them:

This is the opening of the second gospel "sermon" or presentation in the New Testament. As with Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost (in Acts 2) an event has occurred (in this case the healing of the lame beggar) which provides Peter with the starting point to his gospel proclamation. It is connected to the immediate concerns and interests of the hearers.

Listening shows the important connection that Peter makes for his Jewish audience from "the God of our fathers" to "his servant Jesus" whom God has vindicated in the miracle they have just witnessed. Listening also emphasises to us Peter's point that this miracle has happened not because of the apostles (v. 12) but "by faith in [Jesus'] name" (v. 16).

Listen to the terms in which Peter proclaims Christ—"the Holy and Righteous One" and "the Author of life"—titles which speak of the uniqueness and power of Jesus. This is what the unbelieving Jews "denied" (vv. 13–14)—notice that Peter tells them twice that they "denied" the Christ. Notice also the repetition of the word "you"—"you delivered", "you denied", "you killed". This is in striking contrast to the fact that God has "glorified" this Jesus (v. 13) by raising him from the dead (v. 15).

Listen to how strongly rooted in actual events (history) the gospel is—you killed him, God raised him, we are witnesses (v. 15).

The text is saying that the healed man is living proof of the exaltation of Jesus because his is the name by which healing has come from God, through faith (v. 16). Listening carefully shows that throughout Peter has been exalting the name of Jesus.

John Stott writes:

The most remarkable feature of Peter's second sermon, as of his first, is its Christ-centredness. He directed the crowd's attention away from both the healed cripple and the apostles to the Christ whom men disowned by killing him but God vindicated by raising him, and whose name, having been appropriated by faith, was strong enough to heal the man completely.⁹

Remind your trainees to complete the Home Study and pray at the end of your time together.

Complete the Home Study yourself and be prepared to discuss it with your trainees.

- 1. Watch Clip 11. Write down anything you find surprising, encouraging or difficult.**

- 2. Trace the three contexts (the immediate, the book, and the whole Bible contexts) for Matthew 22:41–46, which records Jesus' confrontation with the religious leaders. How does each of the contexts help us with the meaning and application of the text?**

- 3. Watch Discussion Panel 11. Write down anything you find surprising, encouraging or difficult.**

⁹ John Stott, *The Bible Speaks Today: The Message of Acts* (Nottingham, England: IVP, 1990), 92.



UNIT 12

BE A TIME TRAVELLER

INTRODUCTION NOTES FOR LEADERS

Welcome the trainees and pray as you begin this Unit that God will give each of you a deeper confidence in his authoritative, divinely inspired, eternally significant Word.

Introduce the video by saying:

This video is entitled *Be a Time Traveller*. That is not a skill we immediately associate with preaching, so let's watch the video to find out what a time travelling skill involves.

VIDEO NOTES FOR LEADERS

*Watch Unit 12*¹

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES NOTES FOR LEADERS

Use these questions and exercises after watching the video. The notes beneath the questions and exercises are not intended as answers to be read aloud—they are notes to help you guide the trainees to develop and practise the skill taught in the video.

In the video as well as in questions 3 and 4 the examples of time travelling are all from New Testament texts. This is a deliberate choice since the skills needed to time travel back to the Old Testament are somewhat different. As our intention is to study the Old Testament in much more detail in Module 3, we have decided to limit our exercises in this Unit to two New Testament texts.

Since this is the first time they are practising the skill, the notes beneath questions 3 and 4 give an example of how to guide the trainees through the texts and so teach them the skill in an interactive way.

You may want to remind the trainees that in this, as with all skills, practice develops competence. If they find the approach a little difficult at first—that is to be expected, so encourage them not to give up after the first couple of attempts. To develop as an effective preacher of the Word requires great patience and dedicated practice.

1. We heard in the video that:

Every Scripture owes its origin to a particular moment in time. Every Scripture is written in a particular language with a particular vocabulary and structure that is specific to its author and his audience at that point in history. Every Scripture therefore is culturally and historically conditioned, but that in no way detracts from its unchanging authority as God's infallible Word for us today. What we have to do is to establish its meaning and significance accurately and faithfully to the original text. And that means, that what it meant to the original author and his audience, to them then, will exercise the controlling emphasis over what it will mean to us now. In other words, in our preaching, we need the skill to be a time traveller.

Does that mean that we have to become experts in the culture and ethos of the 1st century world in order to be able to read the New Testament?

¹ The Thomas Brooks quote is from "Christ's Eternal Deity Proved" in *The Complete Works of Thomas Brooks*, edited by Rev. Alexander Balloch Grosart, Volume 5 (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1866), 150–157.

Draw out the following points:

- ❖ The Bible is God's Word for everyone, not just the academic specialist.
- ❖ All the necessary clues for our understanding are contained within the Bible itself.
- ❖ We believe in the sufficiency of Scripture to enable the diligent, prayerful reader to be able to understand and respond to its message.
- ❖ We can be thankful that we live at a time in history when so much scholarly work has been done on the background to both Testaments, shedding further light on their cultural context.
- ❖ As preachers we shall want to be as well-informed as we can be on these matters, but we must never focus on this knowledge over the plain meaning of the biblical text.
- ❖ We should never think that if we do not have access to the relevant books and commentaries we cannot be expository. We shall have everything we need in the text, if we are prepared to look carefully.
- ❖ We can be confident that as we ask in prayer, God's Spirit, who is the author of the text, will illuminate our understanding of its meaning and application today. We have to give our minds to this task, trusting him to grant us understanding.

2. We heard in the video that:

The Word is now complete. Nothing will be, or could be, added to it. Jesus is the complete revelation of the unseen God and the cross is the completion of God's saving purposes. There is a finished work and a completed Word.

How should these convictions shape our preaching?

Split into small groups of two or three and share your answers. Each group should choose a spokesperson, ready to contribute comments and ideas from the small group to the larger group when we come back together.

Allow 2–3 minutes for them to discuss in small groups and then ask for feedback.

You will need to ask for contributions from each group and monitor the responses.

Look for the following points:

- ❖ We shall have confidence in the sufficiency of the biblical revelation to bring men and women to new life in Christ.
- ❖ As we teach the Old Testament, we shall relate its message to its fulfilment in Christ, because he is the focus and centre of all divine revelation. As we teach the New Testament, we shall focus on the grace and glory of God in Christ and so not teach a system of rules and regulations, but always the gospel of the cross as the motivation and empowerment for discipleship.
- ❖ Because God's living and enduring Word was originally given in specific contexts, along the timeline of human history, we shall do all that we can to understand as exactly as possible what it meant to those first hearers or readers, so that we can accurately and faithfully carry its unchanging message into our often very different cultural context.
- ❖ Because we know our task is to "Stay on the Line", we shall be especially diligent not to import today's cultural assumptions into our exegesis of the text. We won't correctly understand what it means to us now if we have not worked hard on what it meant to them then.
- ❖ Our contemporary culture will affect the wording, style, and structure of our sermons because we are preaching to real people in today's rapidly changing world. But the truth of the Bible text, its revelation and teaching, is timeless and when we have understood and analysed its own cultural context properly we shall see the unchanging principles which we must teach from it with even greater clarity.

❖ One of the reasons why we believe in the completed Word is because of the completed work of Christ. He is the perfect revelation of the unseen God (see Col. 1:15) to which nothing can therefore be added. He has fully accomplished God's plan of salvation through his perfect and sufficient sacrifice on the cross, to which nothing can be added. Because Jesus is "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29), no other sacrifice is needed for anyone, anywhere. Nothing else could be added, because no one else could be the perfect sin-bearer (see 1 Peter 2:22–24). So, we need to be careful in our preaching to add nothing to the finished work and the completed Word.

3. Our task is to be time travellers. We have to travel back to the original setting and hear God's inspired words in that time, so that we understand their meaning and significance for the original hearers or readers. Then we can travel forward to our time with an authentic message for us, in and through God's living and enduring Word. Ask someone to read aloud Luke 17:11–19. Let's be time travellers.

Make sure all trainees have the text open so they can refer to it.

The notes below provide an example of how to guide the trainees through the text and so teach them the skill in an interactive way.

Introduce the exercise by saying something like:

At first sight this might appear to be a healing miracle like many others, although its scope of ten men being healed is unusual. But it is unique to Luke and we need to time travel to see why he included it. What is the key point of this narrative?

Allow the trainees to contribute thoughts and ideas, even incorrect ones, then say something like:

The key point is that only one healed leper returned to give thanks to Jesus and he was a Samaritan. What does time travelling back to Jesus' day reveal about the relationship between Jews and Samaritans?

Allow the trainees to contribute thoughts and ideas then say something like:

Time travelling back to Jesus' day reveals that there was a great division between the Jews and Gentiles, and particularly between the Jews and the Samaritans. Indeed, John tells us that: "Jews have no dealings with Samaritans", that's in John 4:9. The Samaritans were the remnants of the northern kingdom of Israel (which was destroyed by the Assyrians) who had intermarried over the centuries and who were in Jewish eyes a mixed race, hopelessly compromised, and alienated from God and his people. Turn to the opening verses of this Gospel. Who is writing this narrative and for whom is it intended?

Allow the trainees to contribute thoughts and ideas then say something like:

Luke is the only Gentile author in the New Testament. He was a member of Paul's mission team and he wrote his Gospel for Theophilus, also a Gentile, "that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught" (1:4). A major theme that Luke's Gospel teaches is the upside-down nature of God's kingdom and that outsiders are being brought by Jesus into that kingdom. Mary's song in chapter 1 makes this point: "he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate" (1:52). God announces the birth of Jesus first to some shepherds, who in Jesus' day were marginalised and disdained. Luke goes on to show how Jesus welcomed and associated with those who were considered the bottom of the social ladder: tax collectors and sinners (15:1), women whom no rabbi would teach (8:1–3, 10:39), Gentiles like the centurion of Luke 7:1–10. It is Luke alone who records the parable of the Good Samaritan (10:25–37). Having now travelled back and explored the original setting, can you see why Luke includes this story of a healed Samaritan leper and what it would have meant to his original hearers or readers?

Allow the trainees to contribute thoughts and ideas then say something like:

This narrative shows not only that Jesus does not discriminate between Jews and Gentiles, but that there is special gratitude expressed by the double outcast—a Samaritan and a leper. As Luke's Gospel is directed to the Gentile world, this would provide a further example and assurance ("certainty") of the welcome into the kingdom which all who put their faith in Jesus as Master and call on him for mercy will receive. Now that we have travelled back and explored the meaning for the original hearers or readers, we can travel forward to our time with an authentic message for us, in and through God's living and enduring Word. Give some examples of what the message from this text might be.

Allow the trainees to contribute thoughts and ideas then conclude with something like:

The leper's humble response of worship, falling on his face at Jesus' feet, is the model response to Christ's compassion and mercy. Luke wants Theophilus, and us, to be certain that the offer of salvation is open to all and that the right response to being brought from death to life is gratitude and worship.

4. Ask someone to read aloud 2 Peter 1:16–21. Again, our task is to be time travellers. We have to travel back to the original setting and hear God's inspired words in that time, so that we understand their meaning and significance for the original hearers or readers. Then we can travel forward to our time with an authentic message for us, in and through God's living and enduring Word. Let's be time travellers.

Make sure all trainees have the text open so they can refer to it.

The notes below provide an example of how to guide the trainees through the text and so teach them the skill in an interactive way.

Introduce the exercise by saying something like:

When we time travel back to the date in which Peter was writing his letters (he probably wrote 1 Peter around the mid-60s AD and 2 Peter about AD67–68), we discover from his first letter that he is writing to Christians who were facing increasing hostility and even persecution because of their belief in Christ and proclamation of the gospel (you can see this from 1 Peter 1:6–7, 2:21, 3:14, 4:14, 5:10). In addition, we know from his second letter that false teachers were perverting gospel freedom into a licence for self-indulgence (we get that from 2 Peter chapter 2), and that there was widespread scepticism and even mockery about the hope of the return of Christ (that's in 2 Peter 3:3–4). Therefore, Peter's concern in both letters is stated in 2 Peter 3:17: "that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability". In 2 Peter 1:14–15, immediately preceding our text, Peter gives a further reason for writing this letter. What is it?

Allow the trainees to contribute thoughts and ideas then say something like:

Peter is writing at the end of his life so that when he has departed his readers will have confidence in the true gospel, its nature, and its life-changing dynamic, of which he is the primary apostolic witness. Having now travelled back and explored the original setting, can you see why Peter says what he says in verses 16–21 of his second letter? Let's look at these verses in detail. Given the widespread scepticism and even mockery about the hope of the return of Christ, how does Peter describe his ministry and why?

Allow the trainees to contribute thoughts and ideas then say something like:

Peter describes his gospel ministry in terms of "the power and coming (Greek=*parousia*) of our Lord Jesus Christ". This refers to his first coming and the power of his majesty witnessed by Peter, but links also to his second coming, which the heretics were denying would ever happen. Peter explains that the first coming has already been witnessed (see verses 16b–18), and the second coming is prophesied and yet to be fulfilled (see verses 19–21). If Peter's readers can have confidence that the first coming was not "cleverly devised myths" but the sober truth of God's self-revelation, then they can have equal confidence in the Lord's return. Why then does Peter take his readers to the Mount of the Transfiguration?

Allow the trainees to contribute thoughts and ideas then say something like:

Peter takes his readers to the Mount of the Transfiguration because there he, along with James and John, received both eye-witness and ear-witness concerning Christ's person (the complete narrative is found in Matthew 17:1–8). They saw Jesus' majestic glory and they heard the voice of God himself identifying Jesus as his beloved Son. On the basis of what they saw and heard, Peter's readers too can believe. Just as God fulfilled his promise in sending the Christ at his first coming, so Peter's readers can have confidence that the prophetic Word of the second coming will also be fulfilled. Its origin was not in the mind of man, but in the Holy Spirit whose inspiration acts as a light in the darkness until the full light of Christ's majesty bursts upon the world when he returns. Therefore, given their situation of persecution and false teaching, what would these words have meant to Peter's original hearers or readers?

Allow the trainees to contribute thoughts and ideas then say something like:

By time travelling we can see why Peter's readers need to have the assurances of our verses in 2 Peter 1:16–21. It is against the background of the churches being under attack—from within (destructive heresies 2:1) and from without (scoffers who ridicule the gospel and the second coming 3:3–4)—that the assurances of our passage shine out. Now that we have travelled back and explored the meaning for the original hearers or readers, we can travel forward to our time with an authentic message for us, in and through God's living and enduring Word. Give some examples of what the message from this text might be.

Allow the trainees to contribute thoughts and ideas then conclude with something like:

The crisis in Peter's day was firstly whether the church would remain true to the whole gospel of God's grace in the Lord Jesus, crucified, risen, ascended, AND returning. But also whether it would keep proclaiming that message without compromise in the face of heresy and mockery. The issues are the same today. Time travelling enables us to teach the essentials of this passage—"the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ"; "his majesty"; that he is God's beloved Son; that the Scriptures are indeed the Word of God; that Christ will return—as the convictions we also need to hold and proclaim, if we are to stand firm amid contemporary scepticism.

5. Watch Clip 12. Discuss anything you find surprising, encouraging or difficult.

This clip is under 5 minutes long and will help to reinforce the points taught in the video and in the questions above.

HOME STUDY AND PRAYER NOTES FOR LEADERS

Use the notes below to discuss the previous Home Study.

In the previous Home Study you were asked to put Matthew 22:41–46 in its immediate, book, and whole Bible contexts, and to show how each helps with the meaning and application of the text. Share your answers aloud.

Ask a few of your trainees, who are willing, to contribute their answers. Tackle each context one by one with your trainees. You might also like to share the following with them:

The immediate context

The immediate context is the final days of Jesus' earthly life where he is in conflict with the religious leaders in Jerusalem—the Sadducees in 22:23–33, the Pharisees here and in 22:15–22, and in chapter 23 teaching the people about the Scribes and Pharisees. These opponents are about to unite to bring about his death. In verses 34–39, immediately preceding our text, Jesus summarises all the law and the prophets as love for God and for neighbour—which is the exact opposite of what the religious authorities are plotting. Our verses provide the last public confrontation Jesus has with the Pharisees and take us straight to the main point and the major contention concerning whether or not he is the Christ.

The book context

All through his Gospel, Matthew has been focusing on Jesus as the long-promised king in David's line, who is not only great David's greater son (1:1; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30–31; 21:9,15) but also the Son of God (3:17; 8:29; 11:27; 16:16; 17:5). The dividing issue between those who are in the kingdom of heaven and those who are excluded concerns the identity of the King. So the question: "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" (22:42) is the key summary question to the whole Gospel.

The whole Bible context

The whole Bible context is introduced by the Pharisees' answer that the Christ is David's son (22:42). This relates back to the promise given to King David in 2 Samuel 7:16: "Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me. Your throne shall be established for ever". As Messianic hope developed through the ministry of prophets like Isaiah, there grew the idea (which was not mistaken, but too simplistic) that Messiah's rule would

be on David's throne and in David's line (see Isa. 9:6–7; Jer. 23:5). But Jesus widens the reference in verse 44 by quoting Psalm 110, a psalm of David. In the psalm the LORD (Yahweh) establishes the rule over his enemies of "my Lord" whom he sets at his right hand, a position of authority and power. Jesus points out that in this psalm, which clearly refers to the coming Messiah, David does not call him "my son" but "my Lord". Clearly then, the Messiah must be more than a powerful human king, even if his ancestry is Davidic. He must be a divine figure if he is great King David's "Lord". That clinching interpretation of a major Old Testament prophecy about the Messiah leaves his opponents silent. Their concept of the Messiah is wholly inadequate and for that reason they are determined to bring about the death of God's King.

Jesus' opponents thought they had the right to pick and choose the ingredients of the Messianic portrait which particularly appealed to them. In the same way, today when we are asked the question: "What do you think about Jesus? Whose son is he? Is he the Christ, the prophesied Messiah?", we must not imagine that we can "choose" the gentle human Jesus meek and mild, as over against the Son of God, the King, the Lord, seated at God's right hand with all power and authority.

Remind your trainees to complete the Home Study. This will be the first Home Study in which they prepare a talk. Explain that for Home Study during the rest of the Module they will be preparing 10 minute talks which they may be asked to present to the group. Explain that the purpose is to get some preaching practice and some constructive feedback to help them improve and progress.

Pray at the end of your time together.

Look in advance at the Home Study notes on pages 29–30 and at Appendix to prepare to lead the feedback on this Home Study.

Using the skills we have explored so far, prepare a 10 minute talk on 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11.

As you prepare, follow the logic of the passage and draw this out as you construct the talk. Listen for the connection words: "But" (verse 4); "For" (verse 5); "So then" (verse 6); and so on. These will help you to find the main points and develop a clear structure through the talk.

Remember to write a theme sentence and an aim sentence as we learned in Module 1.

You may also like to review the Sample Assessment sheet from Module 1. A simplified version can be found on page 53 of this manual.

You may be asked to present this talk when we next meet together.

Note: In order to develop your skills and build confidence, it would be preferable if you did not use commentaries or listen to sermon downloads for the purpose of this exercise.



UNIT 13

SING TO THE THEME TUNE

INTRODUCTION NOTES FOR LEADERS

Welcome the trainees and pray as you begin this Unit that God would grant you and your trainees a deeper understanding of the Bible and how to proclaim it.

Introduce the video by saying:

The video explores why we need to identify the theme tune of the book or section we are studying. It's entitled *Sing to the Theme Tune*—let's explore that skill together.

VIDEO NOTES FOR LEADERS

Watch Unit 13

If the issue arises, you may need to ensure that your trainees don't confuse the theme tune with the theme sentence we talked about in Module 1. The theme sentence of a sermon summarises the core content or idea of the text—what must be preached from the text—in faithfulness to its original meaning. Extend that to the whole book, or section of a book, and you have the theme tune—the central idea that governs and generates the whole entity.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES NOTES FOR LEADERS

Use these questions and exercises after watching the video. The notes beneath the questions and exercises are not intended as answers to be read aloud—they are notes to help you guide the trainees to develop and practise the skill taught in the video.

1. What advantages will singing to the theme tune give us in our preparation and preaching?

Look for the following points:

- ❖ It will enable us to understand the major purposes for which the book we are studying was written and ensure that we are working with the author's intention, rather than imposing our own ideas on the text.
- ❖ It will give coherence to our consecutive expositions through the book. The theme tune will recur at various stages and act as a thread running through the material of the different constituent passages. This will bind the ideas together and help to ensure that the congregation is learning Scripture as God gave it, book by book, and not just as favourite, disconnected units.
- ❖ The theme tune will often present us with a key to open up the detail of a particular text. Reflecting on the big picture will help us to appreciate and understand the detail more richly.
- ❖ The content and intent of each individual sermon will be much clearer and stronger if it is related to the theme tune of the book.

2. Look at the beginning and the end of the book.

Write a theme tune for John's Gospel by examining the beginning John 1:1–14 and the end John 20:30–31.

Split into small groups of two or three to write the theme tune. Each group should choose a spokesperson, ready to contribute ideas from the small group to the larger group when we come back together.

Allow 3–5 minutes for them to discuss in small groups and then ask for feedback.

You will need to ask for contributions from each group and monitor the responses.

Some notes on the texts to mention or draw out:

At the beginning of John, the dominant note is the appearance of the Word (Greek=*logos*) and a great deal is taught about the Word in this prologue: his origin—eternal and divine (vv. 1–2); his role—agent of creation, giver of life and light (vv. 3–5); his mission—to give the right to become children of God (v. 12), to reveal the character of the unseen God (v. 14). It is not until verse 17 that the Word is given a name—Jesus Christ. In between the two major revelatory passages (vv. 1–5 and 9–14) there is a section introducing the necessity of human witness in the person of John the Baptist (vv. 6–8).

The prologue therefore has introduced us to the evidence of who Jesus is: the light shining in the darkness and the Word becoming flesh dwelling among us. This is the substance of the witness of John the Baptist which nevertheless led to rejection by many. But it also led to faith in those who received Jesus and “believed in his name” (v. 12). This in turn produced life as they were born again by the will of God and became his children (vv. 12–13).

At the end of the book John's purpose statement echoes the themes of the beginning. Note the same ingredients—evidence, faith, and life.

In between, the entire Gospel has been the record of evidence, verbal and visual, by which the true identity of Jesus has been revealed. John's purpose in recording these signs has been to lead his readers to “believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God”. And the outcome of that faith is “life in his name”.

The theme tune = the evidence which generates faith in Jesus as the Son of God and which brings with it the gift of eternal life.

All the way through the Gospel the theme tune is playing. What possible explanation for the matchless words and mighty deeds of Jesus can there be other than that he is the eternal Word, the true light, the Son of God? That is why he alone can give eternal life.

3. Look for bookends within a book.

With this in mind, write a theme tune for Luke chapter 15.

Split into small groups of two or three to write the theme tune. Choose a different spokesperson to contribute ideas to the larger group when we come back together.

Allow 3–5 minutes for them to discuss in small groups and then ask for feedback.

You will need to ask for contributions from each group and monitor the responses.

Some notes on the text to mention or draw out:

The chapter, with its three parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son, begins with the Pharisees grumbling about Jesus receiving sinners and eating with them. It ends with the older brother refusing to join the feast in celebration of his sinful brother's restoration. So the chapter, which begins with Jesus being criticised for eating with sinners, ends with the older brother refusing to eat with his brother, a repentant sinner. Table fellowship is a mark of relationship and acceptance, which Jesus offers to all who are prepared to “draw near to hear him” (v. 1). But the Pharisees and scribes, like the older brother, have no time for repentant sinners, since their whole attitude is one of self-righteous entitlement to God's blessings. Identifying these bookends helps us identify the theme tune.

The theme tune = God's special concern is with the sinner, whom he is longing to find and receive and bring back into a right relationship with him.

The theme tune prevents us from reducing the impact of the parables merely to a lost and found narrative. More than that is happening. The emphasis in a parable nearly always comes at the end. This is called "the rule of end stress" and it alerts us to where we should look for the main significance. The sheep, the coin and the prodigal son are not the main focus of interest. The focus is on the seeking shepherd and woman whose finding leads to great rejoicing. Similarly, on the gracious father celebrating the return of his "dead" son. But the third parable also majors on the older brother (who represents the Pharisees) who object to the divine offer of forgiveness to such outsiders.

4. Look for repetition of thought and vocabulary.

With this in mind, discern the theme tune for John chapter 20.

Split into small groups of two or three to write the theme tune. Choose a different spokesperson to contribute ideas to the larger group when we come back together.

You may want to point out to the trainees that they already know the theme tune of John's Gospel following question 2. In this question they will see that playing in a single chapter.

Allow 3–5 minutes for them to discuss in small groups and then ask for feedback.

You will need to ask for contributions from each group and monitor the responses.

If trainees are struggling, you may want to prompt them with some of the notes below.

Some notes on the text to mention or draw out:

The chapter is divided into 4 main sections, each focusing on a resurrection story. Note the repeated emphases: Mary came and saw (v. 1); John ("the other disciple") reached and saw (vv. 4–5); Peter went in and saw (v. 6); John went in and saw and believed (v. 8); Mary saw two angels (v. 12) and she saw Jesus standing (v. 14), and so she tells the disciples: "I have seen the Lord" (v. 18); the disciples saw the Lord (v. 20) and declare to Thomas: "We have seen the Lord" (v. 25); Thomas answers: "Unless I see... I will never believe" (v. 25); Jesus says: "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (v. 29).

The chapter is all about the relationship between seeing and believing. The disciples see and believe, they see the empty tomb and they meet the risen Lord. The same is true for Mary. Is it unreasonable for Thomas to insist on the same treatment? At one level it is not, because he is to become an apostolic witness of the risen Lord, but in this chapter Jesus rebukes him for his unbelief. For Thomas, as for most of us, the old saying holds true, "Seeing is believing".

But there is another way to believe. We are alerted to this in verse 9: "they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead". But as John's purpose statement in 20:31 reminds us, in every succeeding generation faith will be generated by the apostolic teaching and writings. Thomas is rebuked because he did not believe the testimony of the apostles. We believe because they saw. On their witness our faith is built.

So the chapter reverses the normal pattern of seeing in order to believe and instead teaches us that by believing our spiritual eyes are opened. As we believe the evidence and testimony of John in this chapter and of the other apostolic witnesses throughout the New Testament we come to see who Jesus really is (the Christ, the Son of God) and by that believing faith have life in his name.

5. Choose any book of the Bible (preferably one you have read or studied recently) and identify its theme tune. Share your answer with the group.

Allow 2 minutes for them to think of an answer and then ask for feedback.

You may like to list the books with their associated theme tunes on a board so you can see the rich variety that the Bible affords.

You may also want to share one of your own.

These are the ones mentioned in the script:

Genesis: the theme tune is of God's unremitting faithfulness in working out his promises in spite of human sin.

Ruth: the theme tune is the unstoppable providence and gracious provision of God for his people.

1 Peter: the theme tune is the true grace of God in the gospel, which is the solid foundation for Christian perseverance in the face of hostility and persecution.

HOME STUDY AND PRAYER NOTES FOR LEADERS

This is an important moment in the Module as you hear the first 10 minute talk presented. The feedback received may have a profound effect on the presenter and the hearers, so you will want the whole experience to be as well managed and profitable as possible. Please see Appendix for notes and instructions on how to lead the feedback positively and beneficially.

Use the below to introduce the exercise:

In the previous Home Study you were asked to prepare a 10 minute talk on 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11. A volunteer will now present their talk to us. We will then all be involved in the assessment and response, as a vital part of the whole exercise. Please note down the ways in which the talk uses the skills we have explored so far, how the talk differs from your own, and anything that strikes you as important.

Ask a trainee, who is willing, to stand up and deliver their talk to the group.

Before the talk ask a different trainee to read the text aloud and another trainee to pray for the speaker and the hearers, for wisdom, sensitivity, and that the Lord will speak to all through his Word.

At the end of the talk, thank the trainee and then ask everyone to turn to the Sample Assessment sheet on page 24 of their Trainee Manual. Give them 2 minutes to structure their comments and responses to the talk along the lines of the questions on this sheet.

After 2 minutes, ask for comments and feedback from the group. Please see Appendix for notes and instructions on how to lead this feedback time.

Spend no more than 10 minutes on this feedback.

Some notes and comments on the text that you may want to draw out or share during feedback:

Verse 1 introduces the text's subject matter—"the times and the seasons". The next verses show that this refers to "the day of the Lord", the return of Christ. If we look at the text in the context of the entire letter we see that this has been a main emphasis in the letter—see 1:10, 2:19, 3:11–13, 4:13–18. Here the focus is on expectation.

When we time travel back to Thessalonica we see that this was a major preoccupation of the young church in this thriving city. They had turned from their idols to the living God, but this raised all sorts of eschatological questions for them. Questions such as whether Christ might return and some believers miss the event, what would happen to believers who died before the coming, and what the result of his return would be—were causing anxiety and potential division. This helps us to see the reasons for the emphases and structure of the letter and how they would have felt such great encouragement when Paul wrote to them.

Verses 2 and 3 continue the theme of Christ's return and stress its unexpected timing, its suddenness and its inescapability.

"But", verse 4, Christians are not "in the dark" about this, "For" we are children of light, verse 5.

"So then", verse 6, we must be awake and ready—sober and prepared.

"For", verse 9, that day will bring the full experience of our salvation, deliverance from God's judgement and life with Christ.

"Therefore", verse 11, we need to live, and encourage one another to live, appropriately and in the light of eternity.

Listening carefully to those connection words—but, for, so then, therefore—gives clarity about how the passage works and how the argument is developed.

Gene L. Green comments on this text:

The purpose of the whole discussion of this theme is pastoral and not speculative. Paul demonstrates no interest in fueling an apocalyptic perspective in order to hypothesize about the end nor foster escapism. The teaching about final events is meant to inform and encourage them in their daily life and conduct. Clear thinking about the end is designed to help them live as true Christians in the present.¹

Therefore, presentations that get diverted into long speculations about the second coming and its timing, or that focus primarily on theories of eschatological fulfilment, have strayed off the line. Paul's focus is pastoral and not speculative, and so should be the focus of the talk.

In summary: We should live in the certain light of Christ's coming, in faith and love, strengthening one another and anticipating the fullness of our salvation. We should not drift back into the darkness of ignorance or carelessness, but be awake and active, living these days in the light of that great day. Live in time for eternity.

End the exercise with sentence prayers around the group, thanking God for what you have heard and learned, praying home the truth and its applications into your own lives, and praying that the speaker will be encouraged, instructed, built up and better equipped as a result of this time together.

Close in prayer and remind your trainees to complete the Home Study.

Look in advance at the Home Study notes on pages 35–36 and at Appendix to prepare to lead the feedback on this Home Study.

Using the skills we have explored so far, prepare a 10 minute talk on Mark 4:35–41.

Remember to write a theme sentence and an aim sentence as we learned in Module 1.

You may also like to review the Sample Assessment sheet from Module 1. A simplified version can be found on page 53 of this manual.

You may be asked to present this talk when we next meet together.

Note: In order to develop your skills and build confidence, it would be preferable if you did not use commentaries or listen to sermon downloads for the purpose of this exercise.

¹ Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002), 230.



UNIT 14

MAKE THE APPLICATION

INTRODUCTION NOTES FOR LEADERS

Welcome the trainees and pray as you begin this Unit that the Lord would equip each of you to understand and apply his Word with life-changing power.

Introduce the video by saying:

Now that we have listened to the text, put the text in context, time travelled, and sung to the theme tune, it is time for the skill to *Make the Application*.

VIDEO NOTES FOR LEADERS

Watch Unit 14

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES NOTES FOR LEADERS

Use these questions and exercises after watching the video. The notes beneath the questions and exercises are not intended as answers to be read aloud—they are notes to help you guide the trainees to develop and practise the skill taught in the video.

- 1. Some preachers suggest that concern about application in our preaching is unnecessary. They argue that the work of applying the truth is the prerogative and responsibility of the Holy Spirit, which we should not usurp. Therefore we do not need to “Make the Application”. Discuss.**

Some discussion issues to pursue might include:

- ❖ It is true that we should not demonstrate a lack of faith in God’s work and an unjustified confidence in our human abilities. But we must remember that God uses human agency to do his work. Otherwise, there would be no need for preaching at all.
- ❖ Of course we cannot convert anyone; we cannot produce radical change that leads to eternal good. That is the work of the Holy Spirit alone.
- ❖ 2 Corinthians 3:5–6 reads: “Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit.”
- ❖ God has instituted a teaching ministry in the church and commanded the preaching of the gospel to the world. And where he commissions, he equips. The Spirit’s ministry as the Paraclete (see John 14:16–17) is to come alongside as our helper, or enabler, in order that we may serve Christ with competence.
- ❖ When we say ‘make’ the application we are not implying that this is something the preacher creates out of his own mind. Rather, we want to identify the practical life implications inherent in a proper understanding of the text and then intentionally explain and apply them to our situation today.

- ❖ The apostolic examples in both the preaching and writing in the New Testament clearly show that applying the truth to life was the major purpose of their ministry. They were the human agents God used to do this and this is the charge given to the next generation (e.g. Timothy, Titus) and all others ever since.
- ❖ Remember that preaching is never simply conveying information. In Module 1 we saw that the Spirit of God takes the Word of God and relates it through the mind (changing our thinking) to the heart (the control centre of the personality) to activate the will so that the whole person is being transformed in thought, word, and action. This is the end goal of application.

2. We heard in the video that:

Application is built into Scripture.

Application derives from the text in its context, not from the preacher.

Application should be a major concern of our introduction and conclusion.

Application connects the Bible's message to our world.

Application needs to be relational to our hearers.

Application takes us to Christ as the centre of all the Scriptures.

Which of these do you find most helpful and how will they change the way you approach your sermon preparation?

Possible points to draw out:

- ❖ It will mean that thinking out the pastoral implications of the text and applying them to ourselves and to our hearers can never be an additional part at the end of our preparation. Application has to be brought right in to the centre of the process.
- ❖ We shall need to clearly explain how the application flows from the text so that our hearers see the implications and are convinced of them from the text, rather than from our enthusiasm or ingenuity.
- ❖ We may need to give more time to illustrating the application with contemporary examples, rather than concentrating our illustrations on the exegesis. People are often helped by specific examples of how the application might work out in everyday life.
- ❖ We will want to make sure the application is Christ-centred, because the power to change comes only through the life of Christ planted within our souls through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. If we are Christ-centred we shall be grace-focused. The danger, otherwise, is that the application can become a list of do's and don'ts, rules and regulations, which encourage the hearer to try harder, but in their own strength, rather than in dependence on the Lord. We must ensure that our applications point our hearers to Jesus and deepen their dependence on him.

3. Watch Clip 14. Discuss anything you find surprising, encouraging or difficult.

This clip is under 5 minutes long and will help to reinforce the points taught in the video and in the questions above.

4. For each of the texts below three possible applications have been provided. Which one would you use in your particular church culture and circumstances, and why?

Split into small groups of two or three and work through each example. Each group should choose a spokesperson, ready to contribute comments and ideas from the small group to the larger group when we come back together.

The narrative of Gideon and the fleece in Judges 6:36–40

Application 1 = We too should “lay out a fleece” before God in prayer to discern God's will.

Application 2 = In the same congregation, one man's soul is like Gideon's moistened fleece, another like the dry ground—which are you?

Application 3 = God is always gracious and will help us overcome our unbelief.

The story of the miraculous catch of fish in Luke 5:1–11

Application 1 = We need to “put out into the deep”, to venture beyond our comfort zones, if we are to be successful fishers of people.

Application 2 = Jesus is the master of the universe, governing even the areas of life we are most familiar with, so we need to obey and follow him.

Application 3 = If you ‘lend your boat’ to Jesus, like Simon Peter did, he will reward you abundantly.

The statement about temptation in 1 Corinthians 10:13

Application 1 = Don’t think that you are a special case when you undergo temptation. Everybody is tempted, but God will get you through.

Application 2 = Don’t be discouraged when you face temptation. The Lord knows how much you can take. He won’t allow you to sink under it.

Application 3 = Don’t be careless about temptation. There is always a way of escape through God’s faithfulness, but you have to use it.

Get them to look up each passage so that they are working from the text and not from memory.

Allow 6–8 minutes for them to discuss in small groups and then ask for feedback.

You will need to ask for contributions from each group and monitor the responses.

Tackle these examples one by one with your trainees. You may want to ask a trainee to read the example aloud before you ask for feedback.

Some notes on the texts to mention or draw out:

The narrative of Gideon and the fleece in Judges 6:36–40

The third application is God-centred and what God teaches us about his power and grace through the narrative is directly applicable to us today. God is gracious and accommodates himself to Gideon’s as yet undeveloped faith to build him up for the challenges ahead. “Gideon was very specifically asking God to show him that he was not one of the forces of nature (like the other gods), but was sovereign over the forces of nature. Gideon, then, was not looking for ‘little signs’ to help him make a decision. He was really seeking to understand the nature of God... Gideon’s request was for help to build up his faith. God, in his grace, responded (twice!). When we make the same request, God graciously responds: by pointing us to the fullest, final revelation of his character and his purposes—the Lord Jesus. When we, like Gideon, find ourselves doubting God’s promises, or God’s presence, we can ask him to point us again to his Son, saying: “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24). This is what Gideon needed, and received. God will do the same for us.”¹

The other two applications put ourselves into the story, looking for points of similarity with our own situation. In the first, we decide on the fleece we will lay out. We are then in charge, but the story depends on the supernatural activity of God which is not for us to demand. The second application takes a detail of the story and elevates it to a level of interpretation it was not meant to support and which has little to do with the narrative.

The story of the miraculous catch of fish in Luke 5:1–11

The second application focuses on Christ, not on Simon Peter or us. Jesus demonstrates his authority in the area where Simon was the expert, but he acts at Jesus’ Word (v. 5). So the narrative has lessons about the sovereignty of the Lord Jesus and the proper response to him—obedient, humble submission. Philip Graham Ryken observes about this text:

They caught so many fish that their nets began to break, and their boats began to sink. When Peter saw this, he did something very strange. “He fell at Jesus’ knees and said, ‘Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!’” This was strange because Jesus had not said anything at all about Peter’s sin. But when a carpenter shows a fisherman how to fish, he must be more than a carpenter. Peter realized the vast distance that lay between him and Jesus. It was the distance between an unholy man and the holy God.²

This is the story of major change in Peter’s life. He recognises his sin, confesses Christ as Lord, and is given a life-transforming commission. The dangers are to think that we have to replicate Peter, or that we are so unlike

¹ Edited from the Study by Timothy Keller, *Judges For You* (The Good Book Company, 2013), 78–79.

² Philip Graham Ryken, *Discovering God* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 1999), 139.

Peter that the story has minimal relevance for us. The overflowing nets and the call of Peter are wonderful ingredients in the text, but they are unique to the story; whereas the principle of Jesus' power and authority remain true today.

The other two applications take a physical detail from the narrative and spiritualise it into a lesson we should learn. But this is an arbitrary choice of the preacher and leaves much of the narrative and its context untouched.

The statement about temptation in 1 Corinthians 10:13

This last example is a little more difficult and all three applications have elements of truth which commend them. But the emphasis of each is quite different.

If we put the text in context, application 3 is the most faithful and helpful.

The other two applications interpret the verse as being primarily a message of comfort and encouragement. That is certainly there: "God is faithful"; "he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability"; "he will also provide the way of escape". But the context shows that the emphatic note is one of warning. Verses 12 and 14 both make this plain: "let anyone who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall"; "flee from idolatry".

The point of verse 13 is not so much that we are all tempted, but that we will be tempted to think we are immune from certain sins "common to man". And we are not!

In the wider context (vv. 6–11) Paul has been listing Israel's sins—idolatry, sexual immorality, putting the Lord to the test, and grumbling. They committed all those sins in the wilderness and according to Paul in the text have therefore become examples to us, to warn us not to desire evil (vv. 6, 11). They are still sins "common to man" and they still defile our Christian lives and our church communities today. But, according to verse 13, in the faithfulness of God the way of escape is open—but we do need to flee from temptation.

As David E. Garland writes about this verse:

The best option will make sense of it in the context of the warning examples [Paul] has just enumerated and the exhortation to flee idolatry that immediately follows... This verse serves as both warning and encouragement... After the gloomy, threatening examples of Israel, Paul urges perseverance with a note of assurance... When one is tested and places one's trust in God, God provides a way through the testing.³

5. Why is it important that our application is Christ-centred?

Draw out the following:

Because the whole Bible is! Its aim is to bring us to know God personally through Jesus Christ (see John 17:3 linked to 20:31), so that we may grow into his likeness (see Acts 20:32, Phil. 3:8–11, Col. 1:9–10, 2 Peter 3:18) as he restores his image in his people (see 2 Cor. 3:18). Each passage of the Bible leads us to a personal, relational knowledge of God, the Holy Trinity. So, whenever we encounter God, we encounter Jesus.

We are to love God with our whole being (see Deut. 6:5 and Matt. 22:37–40), which means responding to God's self-revelation which is at its fullest and most accessible expression in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. Loving God means believing in Christ, listening to his Word and submitting to his instruction, imitating and following him. So all our sermons should take us to the glories of who Christ is and the wonders of what he has done for us—not in a repetitive and predictable way, but by using each unique text to demonstrate something more of his person and work, and motivating us to love and follow him.

That means that all our applications will be grace-driven, since we know that we can never grow in our likeness to Christ unless he is actively transforming us from the inside out, through the power of his indwelling Holy Spirit.

Remember that the Bible is God's book about God before it is his book about us. We tend to concentrate on our end of the connection process, but that is not the primary focus of the revelation. So we must view every passage of the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, through the lens that is the person and work of the Lord Jesus. We shall also see that Jesus surpasses all the godly examples of Bible characters. He transcends the categories of king, priest, prophet, wise man, temple, sacrifice, and so on.

³ David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2003), 467, 469.

But, we are not to use the Old Testament as a springboard to get to the gospel by the quickest route. We must let each passage speak with its own authentic tone and content, and then apply the interpretative lens of Christ by asking: “What difference does it make to this passage that Christ has come?” So we are not trying to find where Jesus is “hiding” in every verse. We don’t have to bring him in, but to recognise how this particular Scripture, within the sweep of the whole Bible narrative, distinctively points to Christ.

HOME STUDY AND PRAYER NOTES FOR LEADERS

Use the below to introduce the exercise:

In the previous Home Study you were asked to prepare a 10 minute talk on Mark 4:35–41. A volunteer will now present their talk to us. We will then all be involved in the assessment and response, as a vital part of the whole exercise. Please note down the ways in which the talk uses the skills we have explored so far, how the talk differs from your own, and anything that strikes you as important.

Ask a trainee, who is willing, to stand up and deliver their talk to the group.

Before the talk ask a different trainee to read the text aloud and another trainee to pray for the speaker and the hearers, for wisdom, sensitivity, and that the Lord will speak to all through his Word.

At the end of the talk, thank the trainee and then ask everyone to turn to the Sample Assessment sheet on page 24 of their Trainee Manual. Give them 2 minutes to structure their comments and responses to the talk along the lines of the questions on this sheet.

After 2 minutes, ask for comments and feedback from the group. Please see Appendix for notes and instructions on how to lead this feedback time.

Spend no more than 10 minutes on this feedback.

Some notes and comments on the text that you may want to draw out or share during feedback:

As we discovered in Module 1: This is a real storm on a real lake, not a metaphorical one. This is a miracle of power over the created order as Jesus rebukes the wind and the sea, by a word, and there is instant calm.

Look for the text to be set in its context. In the wider context of the book of Mark this is part of the central debate and a sequence of events which occupy the first eight chapters, all designed to answer the question: “Who is Jesus?”. So the question of the last verse—“Who then is this...?”—is central to the purpose of the story being recorded, it is the theme tune of the first half of Mark’s Gospel.

So, the main purpose of the story is to demonstrate Christ’s sovereign power over the creation (the wind and the sea) as irrefutable evidence of his deity. No human being could calm a storm with a word. Only God can do such things; only God has power over nature. Looking at the whole Bible context, the Old Testament makes it clear that only God has power and authority over the wind and waves: see Psalms 65:5–7, 89:9 and 107:23–30. The secondary purpose is to develop the faith of the disciples in Christ’s own person and power as the antidote to their fear.

Time travelling shows that the original readers of the Gospel were being provided with the historical evidence they needed to recognise that Jesus is the Son of God (see 1:1—Mark’s great purpose). The Gospel is the authoritative account which linked them to the real events which had happened in the comparatively recent past. Mark’s intention is that his readers, then and now, will know Jesus’ true identity,

Some presentations may get sidetracked into why the storm occurred, what happened to the other boats, why Jesus was asleep, etc.—that is all speculation.

Other presentations may get diverted into a spiritual comfort homily about how Jesus can calm all the storms of life that we may face. But, the text is about Jesus first, not us. It concerns his identity, not our problems.

Other presentations may go above the line and focus on the disciples in the boat and conclude that: If you invite Jesus into your boat you will never sink. The application then concerns whether or not we have enough faith in Jesus. But faith is not stirred up by our efforts. Listening carefully to the text shows that the disciples were more terrified when they saw the storm stilled than during it. It is the instant ceasing of the wind and the instant calm of the sea (both supernatural) that caused them the greater fear as they begin to wonder about Jesus' identity.

Jesus' miracle is teaching and pointing his followers to who he is—the Lord God who has power and authority over even nature itself. He is not simply a teacher, who may or may not be interested in us (4:38), he is the master of the universe, with even the great elemental forces totally at his control (4:41). The application then is that we should recognise that Jesus is God and submit to his authority as our Lord.

End the exercise with sentence prayers around the group, thanking God for what you have heard and learned, praying home the truth and its applications into your own lives, and praying that the speaker will be encouraged, instructed, built up and better equipped as a result of this time together.

Close in prayer and remind your trainees to complete the Home Study.

Look in advance at the Home Study notes on pages 41–42 and at Appendix to prepare to lead the feedback on this Home Study.

Using the skills we have explored so far, prepare a 10 minute talk on 2 Kings 5:1–15.

Please note that this is only the first half of the story. In the rest of the chapter the focus is on Gehazi, Elisha's faithless servant. The chapter begins with a leper who is an outsider brought in and ends with an insider who becomes a leper and is cast out. However for the purposes of this exercise we will focus only on the healing of Naaman in verses 1 to 15.

Remember to write a theme sentence and an aim sentence as we learned in Module 1.

You may also like to review the Sample Assessment sheet from Module 1. A simplified version can be found on page 53 of this manual.

You may be asked to present this talk when we next meet together.

Note: In order to develop your skills and build confidence, it would be preferable if you did not use commentaries or listen to sermon downloads for the purpose of this exercise.



UNIT 15

BEWARE FRAMEWORK

INTRODUCTION NOTES FOR LEADERS

Welcome the trainees and pray as you begin this Unit that God would deepen your dependence upon his Word and his Spirit.

Introduce the video by saying:

Our next skill is called *Beware Framework*. This is an essential component when we seek to approach and interpret any text.

VIDEO NOTES FOR LEADERS

Watch Unit 15

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES NOTES FOR LEADERS

Use these questions and exercises after watching the video. The notes beneath the questions and exercises are not intended as answers to be read aloud—they are notes to help you guide the trainees to develop and practise the skill taught in the video.

1. We heard in the video that:

Whenever we set ourselves to understand or interpret any text, whether biblical or not, we are unable to approach it without certain preconceived ideas. These preconceived ideas are our framework; our grid; our set of principles, facts, and ideas that we use when we are forming our decisions and judgements. Our framework is personal and unique to us, shaped by our origin and upbringing, the experiences of our Christian faith, the issues occupying our secular culture and so on. Our framework will therefore dictate how we approach, interpret and preach a text. We view any and every text through our framework.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of having a framework?

We would be naïve to claim that we do not come to texts with our own preconceptions, presuppositions, and theological worldviews—our own framework.

Advantages include

- A framework is inevitable but its personal and cultural values will often help us connect with our hearers.
- It helps us to organise our thoughts and enquiries on the basis of convictions we have already worked through. It provides a reference point of certainty when we are seeking to evaluate new ideas or more speculative interpretations.
- It helps us to compare Scripture with Scripture as we use our framework to interpret a specific text against the general background of what we have come to see as the Bible's teaching on similar themes or issues.

Disadvantages include

- The danger for us as preachers is that of uncritically fitting every text into our framework, without even knowing we are doing it.

- ❑ A framework can make us lazy, in that we do not allow the text to speak with its own voice and question our assumptions. Instead of the hard work of analysis, we may be tempted simply to relate the text to a familiar idea in our framework.
- ❑ A reliance on framework means that we are not learning much that is new to us, or being excited in our study by fresh discoveries. We can then become addicted to short cuts in our preparation, which means that our preached material is stale or becomes muddled.
- ❑ A framework easily takes over and drowns the text.
- ❑ Frameworks become predictable and boring to our hearers.
- ❑ Framework preaching is agenda preaching and is therefore impository, and so it lacks authority.

John Kitto comments:

There is no safer or wiser course than to strive to understand what the Scripture *means to teach*, apart from all our notions of the probable, the possible, or the proper.¹

2. Split into small groups of two or three and each share your answer to this question with your group:

“We all have a framework—what do you think are the major ingredients, and strengths and weaknesses of your own?”

Pray for one another in light of your answers.

Allow 5–7 minutes for them to discuss in small groups and pray.

Given the personal nature of this question it may not be appropriate to ask for public feedback, but ask them to give feedback on the general issues, for example:

- ❑ Often veering towards a particular system of theological ideas, or the particular emphasis of a favourite speaker or writer.
- ❑ Having a set of ideas or attitudes we want to inculcate into our congregation.
- ❑ Relying on a group of favourite proof-texts to support our arguments.
- ❑ Overemphasising particular areas of truth because we think they are inadequately covered by others.

3. We heard in the video that:

Our framework is an inevitable factor in our study of every text, but we must not allow it to dictate to us uncritically without our realising what is happening. We need to consciously seek to amend our framework in the light of what we are learning from Scripture every time we preach.

Name some practical ways we can endeavour to do this.

Look for the following points:

- ❑ We need to ensure that our framework is being reduced or developed according to our deepening encounter with the true and living God in his living and powerful Word.
- ❑ Being conscious of our biases will help us reshape them.
- ❑ We should cultivate the discipline of looking up other passages dealing with parallel themes or emphases to the particular one we are studying so that we can check our interpretation and amend both it and our framework accordingly.
- ❑ We should read a variety of other commentaries and books and/or download good talks in order to broaden our understanding of a wider range of issues and the different ways in which other Bible teachers and scholars approach them. We should follow up on the Bible references they provide and commit ourselves to working through the arguments so as to come to our own convictions about these subjects.
- ❑ Ask others to look out for any times we resort to preaching our framework.

¹ John Kitto, *Daily Bible Illustrations Antediluvians and Patriarchs* (Kessinger Legacy Reprints), 133.

4. Watch Clip 15. Write down anything you find surprising, encouraging or difficult.

This clip is 2 minutes long and will help to reinforce the points taught in the video and in the questions above.

5. Philippians 4:13 reads: “I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”

Your framework says that Christ is sufficient for all life’s needs and you want to encourage your congregation to take on new ways of serving and building God’s kingdom. They may think they could never do a particular piece of service (like teaching a children’s Sunday School class; or being involved in open air evangelism) but in the Lord’s strength they can do it. It’s part of the “all things”.

But is that really what the verse is saying? The text needs to question the framework:

Who is the text addressed to and how does that connect to those in our framework?

Do the words and phrases of the text possess the same meanings as those presupposed by our framework?

What is the original purpose of the text and is that purpose reflected in our framework?

Does the text fit in our framework or is it primarily about something else?

Get them to look up the passage so that they are working from the text and not from memory.

Tackle the questions one by one with your trainees. You may want to prompt them from the notes below if they are struggling.

Who is the text addressed to and how does that connect to those in our framework?

The text is addressed to the Philippian Christians who have been in generous partnership with Paul in his gospel work and who continue to be concerned for him (he is in prison, 1:13), but have had no opportunity to give until now (v. 10). In our framework it connects to all believers who have a heart to see the gospel go forward and want to give towards that end.

Do the words and phrases of the text possess the same meanings as those presupposed by our framework?

The phrase “all things” relates primarily to the variety of financial situations Paul had experienced during his ministry, characterised in verse 12 as both “abundance and need”. He says in verse 12: “I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger.” Paul’s point is that he has “learned in whatever situation I am to be content” (v. 11). And verse 13 shows how he has come to that unshakeable contentment—“through him who strengthens me”. Our framework has ranged much more widely than the text.

What is the original purpose of the text and is that purpose reflected in our framework?

The original purpose of the text is to set Paul’s readers’ minds at ease about his needs, as he is writing from prison. In the verses that follow (vv. 14–20) he recounts their past generosity with great thankfulness, including a recent visit from their representative, Epaphroditus, with a sacrificial gift from them (v. 18). This illustrates that Paul’s dependence on God was well justified. Yet his concern is not with the provision for his own welfare, but with “the fruit that increases to your credit” (v. 17). They will experience God meeting their needs, as Paul has through them (v. 19). This is a personal testimony of the apostle from his own experience; it is not about what our congregation can or cannot achieve, as in our framework.

Does the text fit in our framework or is it primarily about something else?

Of course we know that Christ is the ultimate provider for his people, whatever our circumstances, and we can rely on him to provide us, and all his servants, with his divine strength so we can be content whether we are abased or abound. But if we use the text to try to stimulate our congregation to serve in any area no matter what their gifts or abilities—since he will always provide—we have lost the text in our framework.

Instead we need to be encouraged and trust that God will strengthen us to meet all circumstances with contentment. As Alec Motyer writes:

It is finally because of Christ that Paul is contented, and it is Christ whom he offers to us as the means and guarantee of our contentment. For Paul, the person who possess Christ possess all.²

² Alec Motyer, *The Bible Speaks Today: The Message of Philippians* (Nottingham, England: IVP, 1984), 221.

6. Exodus 19:4–6 reads: “You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

Your framework suggests that this is an opportunity to focus on and stress the importance of obedience. Because Jesus himself said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15), we should call our hearers to make stronger efforts to obey the law of Christ, as Israel was challenged in these verses to obey and keep the law covenant.

But is that really what the verses are saying? The text needs to question the framework:

Who is the text addressed to and how does that connect to those in our framework?

Do the words and phrases of the text possess the same meanings as those presupposed by our framework?

What is the original purpose of the text and is that purpose reflected in our framework?

Does the text fit in our framework or is it primarily about something else?

Get them to look up the passage so that they are working from the text and not from memory.

Tackle these questions one by one with your trainees. You may want to prompt them from the notes below if they are struggling.

Who is the text addressed to and how does that connect to those in our framework?

The text addresses the people of Israel who have just arrived in the wilderness of Sinai, 3 months after God had rescued them from slavery in Egypt. On the night before the exodus they had escaped God’s judgement on the firstborn at Passover by placing their faith in God’s sacrificial provision—namely, they had to slay a lamb and put the blood on the doorposts as a sign of their faith. Here they are reminded of God’s rescue and summoned to a life of faith and obedience. The parallels are obvious: Like Israel, we too have been rescued from slavery through the sacrificial death of our Passover lamb, Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 5:7) and we are also summoned to a life of faith and obedience.

Do the words and phrases of the text possess the same meanings as those presupposed by our framework?

There are no major differences. In fact, 1 Peter 2:9 uses identical vocabulary: “a royal priesthood, a holy nation” along with other descriptions of New Testament believers including calling us “God’s people” in the next verse.

What is the original purpose of the text and is that purpose reflected in our framework?

Exodus 19 is a significant revelatory passage about God’s character and purposes, which is necessary before the giving of the law in chapters 20 through to 23, which is itself the expression of God’s nature and will. But these verses are rooted in grace, not law. God stresses that their salvation from Egypt is entirely his work: “You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself.” They were rescued on the basis of the promises made to Abraham, as God had explained to Moses in chapter 3. And the rescue was relational—the Lord has brought them not just to Sinai, but “to himself”. Their future obedience to the law he will give them is the condition by which the channel of grace is kept open and by which they enjoy and experience all that God has planned for their relationship with him, his “treasured possession”. However, the relationship is not established by obedience. It has already been established by God’s choice, his sovereign grace. God did not first give the law and then deliver the people—first he delivered his people, and then he gave them the law. This explains why Exodus 20:1–2 precedes the giving of the Ten Commandments. Grace before law. So, obedience to the law demonstrates the loyalty and love of covenant people for their covenant Lord, but it was never intended to be the means by which that relationship came into existence. This is where the framework obscures the full intention of the text.

Does the text fit in our framework or is it primarily about something else?

Our framework chose to focus and stress only the law aspect of this text and completely missed the grace part. Of course we are right to stress (as Jesus did) that obedience to the Lord’s commands is supremely important. But this text is about both grace and law, in fact the law part only makes sense when we have understood grace. Otherwise two wrong emphases can occur. By focusing only on the law aspect we can give

the impression that Old Testament people were saved by the law, but we are now saved by grace. Secondly, if we do not keep the emphasis of the text on relationship by grace we may end up subtly hinting that law-keeping is a means of earning acceptance with God. If we elevate the commands, and even more our own subcultural rules and regulations, to the most important position we shall be in danger of seeking to add law to grace in a vain attempt to win God's approval. This was never his intention in giving the law. We are not saved by the law, but saved for the law.

Richard L. Pratt summarises this helpfully:

Put simply, Old Testament theocratic Law was designed to glorify God and to benefit Israel. It separated the theocracy from other nations and made Israel God's "treasured possession". The Law of Moses taught Israel how to please and honor God. Moreover, it protected Israel from sin's destructive power and pointed to the way of fruitful living (Joshua 1:7–8). Through the course of time, sin turned the Law into a heavy burden (Romans 7:7–11), but God's expressed purpose in giving the Law was to bless His people.³

HOME STUDY AND PRAYER NOTES FOR LEADERS

Use the below to introduce the exercise:

In the previous Home Study you were asked to prepare a 10 minute talk on 2 Kings 5:1–15. A volunteer will now present their talk to us. We will then all be involved in the assessment and response, as a vital part of the whole exercise. Please note down the ways in which the talk uses the skills we have explored so far, how the talk differs from your own, and anything that strikes you as important.

Ask a trainee, who is willing, to stand up and deliver their talk to the group.

Before the talk ask a different trainee to read the text aloud and another trainee to pray for the speaker and the hearers, for wisdom, sensitivity, and that the Lord will speak to all through his Word.

At the end of the talk, thank the trainee and then ask everyone to turn to the Sample Assessment sheet on page 24 of their Trainee Manual. Give them 2 minutes to structure their comments and responses to the talk along the lines of the questions on this sheet.

After 2 minutes, ask for comments and feedback from the group. Please see Appendix for notes and instructions on how to lead this feedback time.

Spend no more than 10 minutes on this feedback.

Some notes and comments on the text that you may want to draw out or share during feedback:

Listening to the text shows us that although the account begins with a man who could not be further from the God of Israel—he is a victorious pagan general and a leper—it ends with his healing and (v. 15) with his confession: "there is no God in all the earth but in Israel". What produces this change is the Word of the Lord through the prophet Elisha, and the circumstances ordered by the Lord and his free grace which bring this about.

Because of his status, the whole thing is treated as a diplomatic mission, with a message from king to king, but that is all irrelevant and redundant. Elisha intervenes and Naaman is to be sent to him, not to be healed primarily, but "so that he may know that there is a prophet in Israel" (v. 8). The emphasis is entirely on the power of the Lord's Word and the Lord's grace, mediated through Elisha.

There is no deferment by Elisha to Naaman's position, just a command (a word) and a promise to persuade him to obey the Lord and when he does the healing miracle happens and "he was clean" (v. 14).

Beware of presentations that come off the line by spiritualizing the specific physical ingredients of the story and then making them the focus of the application. The servant girl is an important link in the chain, but is not

³ Richard L. Pratt, JR., *He Gave Us Stories* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 1990), 370.

presented as a model for our witness. The immersion in the Jordan is not a picture of baptism as the means of cleansing. The theme tune is all about God's Word, God's mercy, and God's salvation.

In the immediate context, this is one of a series of miraculous events brought about by the power of God's Word through his servant, Elisha. Naaman may be able to defeat the Israelite army, but only because the Lord gave him victory (v. 1), and only the Lord can cure his leprosy and make him clean.

In the context of the book this is a story of grace amidst the judgements that fall on the nation, that end eventually with exile to Assyria and Babylon. This incident takes place at a time where the northern kingdom is drifting further away from the Lord and from his Word. It is a time characterised by national disobedience and unfaithfulness. Even Israel's king reacts in this story in a way that shows his fear and faithlessness. This is in contrast to the faith of the little Israelite servant girl, and eventually of the pagan Naaman.

In the context of the whole Bible, this is an extraordinary example of God's mercy towards a pagan outsider, referenced by Jesus in Luke 4:27 to prefigure his own life-giving ministry beyond the borders of Israel to all the nations.

Much of Elisha's ministry foreshadowed that of Jesus himself who was also able to heal lepers and cleanse those who put their faith in him. But this was entirely dependent on the power of his person mediated through his Word (and note that Elisha acknowledges that Naaman's healing is entirely from God). Ultimately he is the only one who can cleanse and it must be on his own terms and in his own way. The New Testament tells us that it is only the precious blood of Jesus that cleanses us from our sins (of which leprosy is a picture). See 1 John 1:7–10.

Many, like Naaman, find that exclusivity an affront to their pride and storm away in anger, but there is no alternative way to salvation and the mark of spiritual wisdom is to submit humbly to Christ and to trust in his atoning death on the cross as the only way to be cleansed and saved.

The main point of this story is that salvation and a relationship with God is not something you achieve—it is something you receive. You do not need to prove your worth. You just get it. You don't have to go on some sort of quest. You receive it by grace. This is threatening to some people—Naaman being a perfect example... You can tell by the text that Naaman understands himself to be on a quest. He goes with gold and treasure to purchase whatever he needs, ...ready to do some great deed because he is a man of prowess and valor, and with letters of recommendations from his king... Naaman is like all people—if there is salvation, we are going to earn it. We have to prove our worth; we have to bring out our sword; we have to do some great deed; we have to be good people. Naaman expected Elisha to tell him to perform some incredible feat or to purchase his healing at great cost or to recount all the things he had done to deserve it. He surely thinks, "Any idiot can wash in the Jordan River; any child can wash in the Jordan River. What kind of God sets the bar of salvation so low?" The answer is that we have a God so incredibly loving that salvation is all of grace. But that bar is actually not low. Naaman thinks it is too low for him, but it is actually too high for him. There are two things that the offer of free grace demands you give up. It demands and requires that you lose your pride, because you have to admit you are a sinner and need to be saved by grace. It also demands that you give up control of your life. If you could win your salvation or the kingdom or eternal life through some great quest, then you would have your rights. But if you owe absolutely everything to God's mercy, then you owe him everything, your whole life. Pride and control are both characteristics Naaman personified. But he had to give up both of them to receive the free grace that was being offered to him.⁴

End the exercise with sentence prayers around the group, thanking God for what you have heard and learned, praying home the truth and its applications into your own lives, and praying that the speaker will be encouraged, instructed, built up and better equipped as a result of this time together.

Close in prayer and remind your trainees to complete the Home Study.

⁴ This quote is from the "Notes for Teachers on the Text" (written and developed from material by Timothy Keller and Redeemer Presbyterian Church) on the chapter A little servant girl and the proud general, from *The Jesus Storybook Bible Curriculum* by Sally Lloyd-Jones and Sam Shammas, published by Zondervan.

Look in advance at the Home Study notes on pages 48–49 and at Appendix to prepare to lead the feedback on this Home Study.

Using the skills we have explored so far, prepare a 10 minute talk on Hebrews 3:7 – 4:2.

Note that this is a text which relates closely to the subject matter of this Module as it concerns the proclamation and hearing of the Word of God.

Remember to write a theme sentence and an aim sentence as we learned in Module 1.

You may also like to review the Sample Assessment sheet from Module 1. A simplified version can be found on page 53 of this manual.

You may be asked to present this talk when we next meet together.

Note: In order to develop your skills and build confidence, it would be preferable if you did not use commentaries or listen to sermon downloads for the purpose of this exercise.



UNIT 16

ECHO THE BIBLE'S TONE

INTRODUCTION NOTES FOR LEADERS

Welcome the trainees and pray as you begin this Unit that the Lord will continue to develop and equip you in all the skills you have been learning throughout this Module.

Introduce the video by saying:

In this our final Unit the skill is about how to *Echo the Bible's Tone*.

VIDEO NOTES FOR LEADERS

Watch Unit 16

We want trainees at the end of this Module to feel that they have acquired a range of practical skills which they can use with growing proficiency and confidence in their interpretation and exposition of God's Word.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES NOTES FOR LEADERS

Use these questions and exercises after watching the video. The notes beneath the questions and exercises are not intended as answers to be read aloud—they are notes to help you guide the trainees to develop and practise the skill taught in the video.

1. We heard in the video that:

The Bible contains an immense range of emotions and a wide range of tones are expressed by Bible writers towards their hearers. We need to recognise the variety of tones that the Bible's human writers are inspired by the Spirit to employ and seek to emulate them.

How can we get better at "Echoing the Bible's Tone"?

Some points to mention or draw out:

- ❖ As we learned in Module 1, "preaching is the bringing of truth through personality."¹ We want our preaching to emulate the Bible's tone, so that the preacher's personality is a channel for the message. If we are to convey Bible truth accurately we must do that in the Bible's tone since the content and the manner of the text cannot be separated.
- ❖ If the tone that a preacher adopts is not the tone of the text he is preaching, it will always have an intrusive, grating effect. The congregation knows when the preacher is working himself up, by shouting or dramatic body language, and they begin to regard such theatricality for what it is—mere entertainment or emotional manipulation. Similarly, they know when a preacher is trying to ingratiate himself with them by telling a series of funny stories and turning himself into a stand-up comedian. They are no longer sitting under God's Word, but evaluating a human performance.

¹ Phillips Brooks, *Lectures on Preaching* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Company, 1907), 5.

- Echoing the Bible's tone is not about putting on a special voice, or contriving certain emotional responses. It can only be achieved by entering into the heart concerns of the original writer, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and allowing its meaning and significance so to penetrate our minds and hearts that we speak it as God does. The more deeply it affects us, the more powerfully it will affect our hearers through us.
- It is not just the tone of voice, but the attitude of heart that will determine how faithfully we replicate the Bible's tone.

2. We heard in the video:

Don't automatically equate your congregation with the original hearers.

Don't be condescending towards your congregation.

Don't be hostile towards your congregation.

Which of these do you struggle with and why?

Split into small groups of two or three and each share your answer to this question with your group.

Pray for one another in light of your answers.

Allow 5–7 minutes for them to discuss in small groups and pray.

Given the personal nature of this question it may not be appropriate to ask for public feedback, but ask them to give feedback on the general principles, for example:

The attitude of the heart is often revealed in the tone of the voice. When the preacher develops a negative attitude towards his hearers it will be revealed in the way he addresses them—criticising, carping, cajoling. Of course, rebuke is often called for: “Don't be afraid to preach the negatives”. But we are to speak the truth in love, so that biblical rebuke is always with a view towards repentance and restoration, and can only be properly preached with compassion and with grace.

The use of a condescending or hostile tone indicates more about the preacher's problems than the needs of his hearers. It shows that the preacher is losing confidence that if he preaches God's Word in God's tone, God's Spirit will use it to accomplish God's work in the hearers' lives. He is probably beginning to think that it is all up to him, or that his reputation is at stake. So when he loses patience with his congregation, or separates himself from them imagining that in some way he is superior, he is actually revealing his own spiritual immaturity.

Good preaching not only exegetes the text, but also exegetes the congregation to which it is being preached. The preacher needs to enter into their joys and sorrows, identify with their problems and challenges, sit where they sit and feel what they are feeling. That sort of empathy will have a deep effect on the tone of the preaching and will produce a bond of love and warmth between the preacher and the people which God can use spiritually to great mutual benefit.

3. The video identified the following tones:

The tender pleading tone.

The affectionate rebuking tone.

The correcting ironic tone.

The logical persuasive tone.

The penetrating questioning tone.

There are many more tones which we should explore and discern as we study God's Word, for example solemn warning, joyful encouragement, and so on. Choose any text or narrative in the Bible (preferably one you have read or studied recently) and identify its tone. Share your answer with the group.

Allow 2 minutes for them to think of an answer and then ask for feedback.

You may like to list the texts with their associated tones on a board so you can see the rich variety that the Bible affords.

You may also want to prompt the trainees by asking them to identify the tones in the following texts:

Jesus speaking in Matthew 11:28–29

Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

This is the tender pleading tone in the context of judgement, the judgement which would fall on the unbelieving towns where Jesus had done his mighty works.

Go back a few verses and see the other side of the coin in Matthew 11:21–24

Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgement for Tyre and Sidon than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgement for the land of Sodom than for you.

Here the tone is one of solemn warning. Point out to your trainees that the two tones can and do exist in the same context. The warning is uncompromisingly straight: “Woe to you...”; “You will be brought down to Hades”. The solemnity is derived from the terrible consequences of their refusal to repent. But it is followed in verses 28–29 by tender pleading, to turn to Christ, not away from him, while there is still opportunity.

Isaiah 44:22–23

I have blotted out your transgressions like a cloud
and your sins like mist;
return to me, for I have redeemed you.
Sing, O heavens, for the LORD has done it;
shout, O depths of the earth;
break forth into singing, O mountains,
O forest, and every tree in it!
For the LORD has redeemed Jacob,
and will be glorified in Israel.

This is the tone of joyful encouragement. Note that it is rooted in God's forgiving grace in redemption. The exhortation to the whole creation, to rejoice in what God has done for his people, obviously includes the redeemed themselves. The vibrant praise of creation is to be echoed in the hearts of his people in whom God is glorified.

Luke 7:24–27

When John's messengers had gone, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who are dressed in splendid clothing and live in luxury are in kings' courts. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is he of whom it is written, ‘Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.’”

This is the tone of penetrating questioning. Notice how Jesus builds the pressure of his argument that John is unique by a series of questions, the answers to which are also expressed as questions. He is forcing his hearers to examine their own hearts by his insistence. People went out to “see” John the Baptist for a variety of reasons, many because they considered him to be a prophet. Jesus' point is that John is more than that. He is the fulfilment of Malachi 3:1, the Elijah figure who precedes the Messiah.

So the implication of this persistent questioning comes to be: “Who do you think that I am?”. If John is the greatest prophet, it is because he heralds God's King and God's kingdom. The persistent questioning is forcing the people to think through their attitudes and preconceptions.

In his book *Seeing Beauty and Saying Beautifully*, John Piper observes:

Paul chose words that were unusual or metaphorical or emotionally impactful when he could have used words less surprising or moving or stabbing. For example,

- he called loveless speaking in tongues “a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal” (1 Corinthians 13:1);
 - he described our incomplete knowledge on this earth compared with knowledge in heaven as the difference between a child’s stammering and an adult’s reasoning, and as seeing in a mirror dimly (1 Corinthians 13:11–12);
 - he dared to compare the Lord’s coming again to the coming of a thief (1 Thessalonians 5:2);
 - he sought to waken the Thessalonians to his affections by saying, “We were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children” (1 Thessalonians 2:7);
 - in 2 Corinthians 11 and 12, he dared to play on the enemy’s field of boasting, beat them at their own game, then called himself a fool for doing it: “I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast of that” (2 Corinthians 11:21) and “I have been a fool!” (2 Corinthians 12:11);
 - he calls his own weak body a jar “of clay” (2 Corinthians 4:7), and in another place a “tent” (2 Corinthians 5:2);
 - he refers to himself and the apostles as “the filth of the world, and...the offscouring of all things” (1 Corinthians 4:13 KJV);
 - he says that his highest moral attainments without Christ are “rubbish” (Philippians 3:8);
 - he refers to fickle listeners as having “itching ears” (2 Timothy 4:3); and
 - he describes our sins as written in a record and nailed with Jesus to the cross (Colossians 2:14).
- ...All these words are images laden with verbal power and evocative potential.²

You may want to ask the trainees to examine any of the texts John Piper mentions and to identify the tone. You could take 4 or 5 of the references and ask the question: “What tone do you discern in this verse?” You could then share the whole Piper quote with them if time permits.

4. Turn to 1 Kings 19:9 and read the verse (not out loud). In what tone of voice do you think the Lord spoke to Elijah?

As an exercise, ask different trainees to read the verse aloud but with the emphasis on each word in the sequence separately. So: **What** are you doing here, Elijah? Then: What **are** you doing here, Elijah? Then: What are **you** doing here, Elijah? And so on. Discuss what difference the emphasis makes to our perception in each case. Which emphasis most accurately reflects the Lord’s tone?

The tone here is a mixture of gentle rebuke and probing questioning to force Elijah to come to terms with his flight from Jezebel and his expectations of what he might have wanted to achieve through his ministry (see verse 10). The emphasis could be on the word “here”—i.e. What are you doing **here**, Elijah? Elijah had come to Horeb (the mountain where God had revealed himself to Moses in both Exodus 3 and 34) and perhaps expected a similar revelation. Instead, God sends him back to continue his ministry.

If you have time you could encourage the trainees to read the following passages, identify the tone, and then to read them aloud in the tone demanded by their contents:

Psalm 103:1–5 = joyful encouragement.

Hebrews 2:1–4 = logical persuasion mixed with solemn warning.

Galatians 5:19–21 = solemn warning.

Revelation 5:9–14 = joy mixed with awe.

5. Watch Clip 16. Discuss anything you find surprising, encouraging or difficult.

This clip is 4½ minutes long and will help to reinforce the points taught in the video and in the questions above.

² John Piper, *Seeing Beauty and Saying Beautifully* (Nottingham, England: IVP, 2014), 28–29.

Use the below to introduce the exercise:

In the previous Home Study you were asked to prepare a 10 minute talk on Hebrews 3:7 – 4:2. A volunteer will now present their talk to us. We will then all be involved in the assessment and response, as a vital part of the whole exercise. Please note down the ways in which the talk uses the skills we have explored so far, how the talk differs from your own, and anything that strikes you as important.

Ask a trainee, who is willing, to stand up and deliver their talk to the group.

Before the talk ask a different trainee to read the text aloud and another trainee to pray for the speaker and the hearers, for wisdom, sensitivity, and that the Lord will speak to all through his Word.

At the end of the talk, thank the trainee and then ask everyone to turn to the Sample Assessment sheet on page 24 of their Trainee Manual. Give them 2 minutes to structure their comments and responses to the talk along the lines of the questions on this sheet.

After 2 minutes, ask for comments and feedback from the group. Please see Appendix for notes and instructions on how to lead this feedback time.

Spend no more than 10 minutes on this feedback.

Some notes and comments on the text that you may want to draw out or share during feedback:

The main thrust of the passage is to appeal to the readers to act on the Word of God with faith. The tone is one of gentle pleading coupled with warning (3:12) and added to this is the penetrating questioning tone of verses 16–18. This culminates in the exhortation of 4:1, “Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it”. This is clearly the pastoral intention of the passage and needs to be brought out in any application of the text.

This also ties in with the wider book context, which is concerned with the danger of turning away and neglecting the great salvation (2:3) which has been achieved for us in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. The writer seeks to show the superiority of Jesus to all the constituents of the old covenant—he is better than anything that preceded him, because he is God’s final Word and he completes God’s redemptive work (this is the theme tune of Hebrews). But our text shows that it is all too possible for those who have known great privilege in terms of divine revelation to harden their hearts and drift away.

The passage also has an important whole Bible context as the extensive quotation from Psalm 95 makes clear. Using the present tense in verse 7 (“as the Holy Spirit says”) the writer applies the lesson of those verses from the psalm to Christians. The psalm relates the experience of Israel in Exodus 17:1–7, where God provided water from the rock, but the people’s hearts were already hardening and falling away in unbelief. Eventually their whining, ingratitude, faithlessness, and unbelief led to their being wiped out. Listen carefully to verse 12 which connects falling away directly to unbelief.

F. F. Bruce comments on these verses:

The moral must have been plain enough to the recipients of the epistle. For they too had experienced the redeeming power of God, they too had the promise of the homeland of the faithful to look forward to, but one thing could prevent them from realizing that promise, just as it had prevented the mass of Israelites who left Egypt from entering Canaan—and that one thing was unbelief.³

The writer wants to warn his readers about this same present danger but also to give them practical positive instruction about how to counter it. We see these instructions in verses 13–14: the benefit of mutual exhortation in fellowship; the recognition that sin is deceitful (it never produces what it promises); and the determination to hold on to “our original confidence firm to the end”.

Time travelling back to the original 1st century setting can help us to understand the acute danger the church faced as the hostility of the Roman Empire was developing (for example in Nero’s persecutions). Originally,

³ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990), 102.

Christianity had been viewed as merely a branch of Judaism, which was a permitted ethnic religion under Roman rule. But as the Jews increasingly denounced the Christian believers as heretics, Christians became more exposed to the charge of practising an illicit religion. For the Hebrew Christians receiving this letter it must have been an increasingly attractive option to go back under the umbrella protection of their ethnic Judaism to avoid hardship and persecution. But the point of the letter is that there is nothing to go back to since Christ has established a new and better covenant (9:15).

It is not surprising therefore that the theme of perseverance is strong in the whole letter and our passage reflects this. Drifting away has already been referred to (2:1) as a present danger which the readers face and the references to Israel indicate how unbelief brought about a hardening of the heart. Believers need to persist in active faith, holding their confidence firm to the end (3:14b). This means not just listening to God's message but receiving it and acting on it by faith. Hearing will only produce hardening unless there is active trust and obedience and the day of testing will always reveal its true quality.

The writer therefore reminds his readers: "For we have come to share in Christ" (3:14a). This means we have received the benefits of his once-for-all sacrifice in forgiveness and reconciliation and so are entering into the rest which only he can provide (4:9–10). This rest is from any attempt to justify ourselves by our works and culminates in the final rest of our inheritance in the eternal kingdom. This provides another example of why the supremacy of Christ is the theme tune of the letter. No one else can give what Jesus offers. There is nowhere else to go. Christ is our all-sufficient Saviour and Lord.

Everything depends on whether we hear the Word and act upon it in faith, so as to enter God's rest, both in the sense of assurance of salvation in this world and in the experience of eternal rest ultimately in the world to come. To refuse to respond in action is actually to harden the heart, so the challenge to us all is summarised in the quotation of verse 15: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts". The application: Spiritual privilege must be met with personal responsibility. Genuine faith is persistent faith.

Note: You may find that some presentations come off the line or the discussion feedback is hijacked by speculation about whether or not the text suggests that Christians could lose their salvation. Try to deal with that succinctly by saying that the aim of the passage is to warn us personally not to harden our hearts. The biblical doctrine of the eternal security of every believer, on the grounds of God's electing grace and Christ's sufficient work, is not compromised by anything in this passage, or the letter as a whole. However, the New Testament clearly sees apostasy by those who at one time professed faith as a real possibility, and therefore contains frequent warnings not to dabble with sin and not to presume on God's grace. The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints (through God's keeping power) is matched by the teaching that true saints are precisely those who persevere.

End the exercise with sentence prayers around the group, thanking God for what you have heard and learned, praying home the truth and its applications into your own lives, and praying that the speaker will be encouraged, instructed, built up and better equipped as a result of this time together.

MODULE SUMMARY AND PRAYER NOTES FOR LEADERS

The skills we have explored in this Module are:

- Stay on the Line
- Listen to the Text
- Put the Text in Context
- Be a Time Traveller
- Sing to the Theme Tune
- Make the Application
- Beware Framework
- Echo the Bible's Tone

As this is the end of the Module, mention to your trainees that, as with all skills, practice makes perfect. We should develop a pattern of consciously recognising and reviewing each of the skills we have worked through every time we prepare a sermon. But we must not forget that they are tools to be used, not an end in themselves. We should remember also that different tools are used for different jobs. Some of these skills will be of greater use than others in dealing with any particular text. So we should try them all, but not be surprised if we find they are not all of equal value every time.

Remind the trainees that the goal is to be making progress; that we all have a long way to go, but that the Bible is God's sufficient Word, equipping us for our ministries and that his Spirit is our ever-present enabler. We cannot expect to develop any (much less all) of these skills overnight. It may take hours to produce a faithful sermon, but it takes a lifetime to produce a faithful preacher.

Give your trainees 2 minutes to answer the following question (also found in the Trainee Manual):

As this is the final Unit, write down 3 things that you want to work on in your preaching as a result of this entire Module.

Ask a few trainees (who are willing) to share their answers (and write them on a board), so that the group can pray specifically for them at the end. (If the group is small enough, encourage each trainee to share at least one of their answers.)

Remind them that preaching is hard work, calling for the utilisation of all our mental abilities and spiritual maturity, and that our part is to do our best, as it says in 2 Timothy 2 verse 15: "to present [ourselves] to God as one approved, a workman who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth". As we set ourselves to work for God's glory, he will work with us and in us, to equip us to fulfil this ministry.

Remind them that as we think about our progress as preachers, we should realise that it is only a subsection of our total development as Christians, growing increasingly into the likeness of our Lord Jesus Christ. Beyond any preaching skills we may develop, by God's grace, it is greater likeness to Christ that matters most, and most glorifies God.

Encourage the group to pray together, for one another before they leave, using the answers on the board as a basis for the prayers.

Close in prayer using the following, or similar, prayer:

Heavenly Father, we thank you that you have caused all the Scriptures to be written. Increase in us the skills to handle them wisely and faithfully, so that we may ourselves grow daily in our knowledge and love of you, and be channels of your grace as we seek to preach them to others. Help us to listen to your Word and inwardly digest its truth, and empower us by your Holy Spirit to respond in faith and obedience to all that you teach us, and then to preach it faithfully and boldly to those whom you have put in our charge. Equip us with the skills we need and constantly increase them in us, we pray. These things we ask for the good of your church and for the glory of your name, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

APPENDIX

This appendix contains guidance and instructions on how to lead the feedback time after the trainees have delivered their talk.

AIM

Your aim above all is to give considered and honest feedback from yourself and the group, but to do so in such a way that the presenter is encouraged and stimulated to want to improve. There is no virtue in saying something is good when it is not, and no value in allowing poor exegesis, exposition, or application to go unchallenged. The group must not become a mutual admiration society. Most of all you will want to encourage the presenter, but not at the expense of truth and realism. You may need to urge your trainees to prioritise gentle and respectful honesty with each other, speaking the truth in love.

TIMING

The talk should take 10 minutes, so have a timer on hand to indicate when the time is up. You may have to intervene and end the presentation if the speaker does not respond within a minute or two.

SAMPLE ASSESSMENT

Use the Sample Assessment sheet from Module 1 to help you and the trainees to formulate your feedback. A simplified version is printed on page 53 of this manual and page 24 of the *Trainee Manual*. The complete version is also printed on page 54 of this manual for your reference. At the end of the presentation give the trainees 2 minutes to structure their comments and responses to the talk along the lines of the questions on this sheet. During those 2 minutes you should also be reviewing the sheet yourself and discerning which of the questions will be most helpful for you to utilise as you lead the feedback.

FEEDBACK TIME

Try to start the feedback with something positive. You may want to prompt the trainees by asking: “What was the most helpful point from the talk we just heard?” Ask two or three trainees to respond.

You can then ask for feedback along the lines of the questions in the Sample Assessment. Read out an appropriate question and then ask two or three trainees to respond. The questions should identify areas of weakness or errors, and they should be addressed and remedied by referring to the text with the group.

You may want to ask the speaker to share the theme sentence and the aim sentence which were used to shape the sermon. The group can then evaluate and comment. You will remember from Module 1 that:

The *theme sentence* summarises the core content of the text, in faithfulness to its original meaning. It identifies what the essentials are, in other words—what must be preached from this text.

The *aim sentence* summarises the significance of the text in one sentence. It should reflect the original purpose of the text as it focuses on its on-going significance.

AT THE END

End on a forward-looking note by asking “In what way could the sermon be improved?”. This will give the speaker something positive to work on for the next time.

After 10 minutes of feedback you should draw the whole exercise to a close by gathering together the positive reactions from the feedback and briefly repeating or underlining them.

LEADING THE FEEDBACK TIME

You are responsible for the conduct of the group. Try to develop a businesslike attitude, as it is a serious task, but a little humour can often help the exercise along.

Don't allow one trainee to dominate and try not to have silent partners either. The aim is for each trainee to contribute. You may need to encourage your trainees to keep their comments short and focused. Don't let people waffle generally. Encourage them to be precise, with specific reference to the talk. This is much better than general impressions.

Discourage trainees from merely airing their opinions or trying to demonstrate their knowledge. The aim is to help the speaker, not to boost their own egos. Make sure all the comments relate to the Bible text or the talk and don't be afraid to move on to other questions or other trainees if someone is distracting or unhelpful.

Be critical of the feedback and responses as well as of the talk. If the feedback and comments are untrue or unhelpful, ask questions like: "Where do you find that in the text?", "Why do you say that?", "What do other people think?", "How can we help our speaker from that comment?", etc.

Be active in your chairmanship and instruction, but don't force your own view on the group. Give them time to participate. And, don't forget how important the tone of your voice and your body language can be, and how trainees will pick up on these as they give feedback.

Gradually a cooperative, supportive, but honest and insightful culture will develop in the group if you persist with these standards. Pray that this will happen and that the Lord would help you to guide the feedback with honesty, sensitivity, and gentleness.

EXTENDING THE EXERCISE

As the trainees become familiar with the preaching and feedback process, you will probably find that everyone will want their talk(s) to be heard. If you can extend the time, try to hear two talks each Unit. More than that becomes too much for everyone to cope with. If you have two presenters, hear both of them before you invite the group feedback. Otherwise, the second speaker will feel they have to relate to the first and may even try to change their material. Hear them both first and then lead the feedback for each talk separately.

If there is a trainee with maturity and experience in the group, they could be co-opted to help lead, enabling the group to split and more sermons to be heard. You would need to go through the *Leader Manual* notes and the Appendix with the sub-leader before the Unit. However, the feedback session is very important and poor leadership at any point could devalue the exercise.

This exercise will be continued in Module 3, so anyone who has not had a chance to present should be able to do so in the next Module.

SAMPLE ASSESSMENT

SECTION 1: AIM AND STRUCTURE

- Q1 Was there a clear message?

- Q2 Was there a clear structure to the sermon?

- Q3 Was the introduction engaging and appropriate? Did the sermon deliver what the introduction promised?

- Q4 Was there a clear and effective conclusion?

SECTION 2: INTERPRETATION

- Q1 Was the text properly understood and expounded? Did the main points of the text come across clearly?

- Q2 Was the text set in its immediate, book, and whole Bible context? How did that help to clarify the contents?

- Q3 Did the application arise from the text and reflect its main points? Was there a smooth transition from the original hearers then to us now?

SECTION 3: PRESENTATION

- Q1 Were illustrations used effectively to deepen understanding or focus application, or did they distract?

- Q2 How appropriate were the manner of the preacher, the verbal style, and use of language, as well as the pitch and pace and the body language of the preacher?

SECTION 4: GENERAL

- Q1 What was the strongest positive quality of the sermon?

- Q2 What immediate steps could be taken to improve?

SAMPLE ASSESSMENT FROM MODULE 1

Much more detail is given than could be used in any one assessment—but it is designed to provide a range of features and issues, any of which could be profitably employed in a critique. Please pay special attention to the explanations beneath the questions, which will help to develop the use of this assessment in a positive and creative way.

SECTION 1: AIM AND STRUCTURE

Q1 Was there a clear structure to the sermon and if so what were the main points?

This is not designed to impose a particular homiletical pattern or method on the text, but to ask whether the Bible text was in the driving seat and whether the structure of the talk reflected the structure of the original passage with accuracy and clarity.

Q2 Was there a clear message? What was it?

The message should represent the contents of the passage, but presented in a more than merely informational way. A “message” is something deeper and more urgent. It is a communication through the mind, to the heart, to activate the will. So if preaching is designed to change lives, to make us more like the Lord Jesus, in what way did the sermon accomplish that?

Q3 Was the introduction engaging and appropriate? Did the sermon deliver what the introduction promised?

Q4 Was there a clear conclusion? How effective was it?

A strong conclusion will probably drive home the aim of the whole sermon and provide a strong motivation not only to receive and understand what the Bible text is saying, but to put its significance into practice in our lives.

SECTION 2: INTERPRETATION

Q1 Was the text properly understood and expounded? Did the main points of the text come across clearly?

Was the meaning of the text explained adequately, especially the more difficult parts? And as it was expounded, did the hearers have a sense of how it fitted together, its integrity and purpose?

Q2 Was the text set in its immediate and whole Bible context? How did that help to clarify the contents?

The clarification this brings is in understanding the significance of the passage; why it is an important Word of God to our minds and hearts so many centuries later.

Q3 Did the application arise from the text and reflect its main points?

This is an extension of Q2 to ensure that the method was not “impositional”, bringing in the application from the outside. Was there a smooth transition from the original hearers then to us now?

SECTION 3: PRESENTATION

Q1 Was the sermon clear and easy to follow?

Good preaching is intellectually stimulating but it is not complex or abstract. Were the main points stated clearly, explained lucidly and applied cogently? Were the connections between the sections of the sermon explained well, so that there was no loss of purpose or direction as the sermon unfolded?

Q2 Were illustrations used effectively to deepen understanding or focus application, or did they distract?

Q3 Was the talk compelling? What response was being asked for?

This is less about content and more about the preacher’s style. The preacher will be in the foreground and our attitude to him will determine our attitude to the whole talk.

Q4 How appropriate were the manner of the preacher, the verbal style, and use of language, as well as the pitch and pace and the body language of the preacher?

Each of these should be considered and commented upon, since any of these aspects can greatly heighten or diminish a sermon’s usefulness.

SECTION 4: GENERAL

Q1 What was the strongest positive quality of the sermon?

We all need that sort of encouragement so that we take away something from the critique which can act as a stimulus to work at developing our strengths as well as resolving our weaknesses.

Q2 What immediate steps could be taken to improve?

The ‘immediate steps’ stresses that we all need to start somewhere in developing what is a lifelong improvement programme. But it is a long haul—and if the criticisms are too many or too negative it can be confusing and discouraging. Identify an aspect or two that you can work on immediately, and go away hopeful and prayerful, with a desire to be faithful and above all dependent on God himself, who makes us grow.