

## Session 1: Beginning The Interpretive Journey

*Why is the Bible such a difficult book to read? And how should we approach some of the challenges that it poses? This first session looks at the journey we go on when interpreting Scripture, and the tools that can help us navigate from the original context to applying it in our world.*

## Beginning the Interpretive Journey

What are the challenges inherent in reading the Bible?

Question: What do you find challenging about reading the Bible?

### What do we bring to the text?

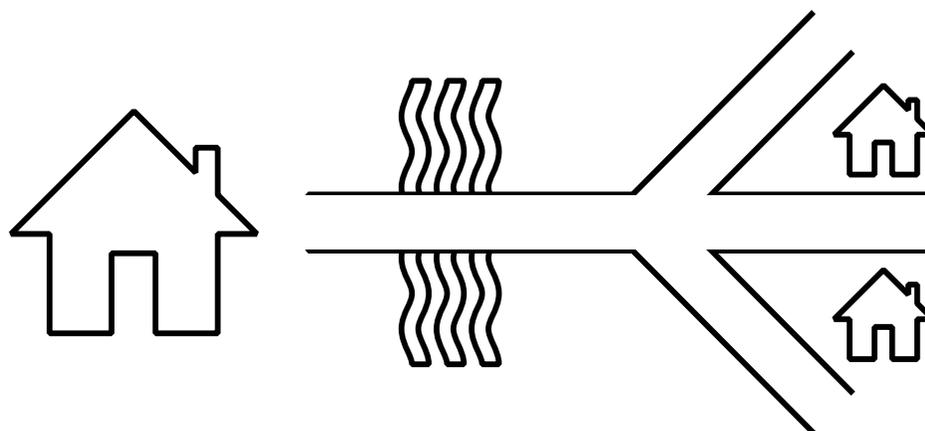
Pre-understanding	Pre-suppositions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Accumulated knowledge and 'knowledge'</li> <li>- Understandings that are shaped by personal circumstances, art, teaching, church traditions, etc. For example:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Father, riches/poverty, power</li> <li>- Jonah, Heaven and Hell, the cross</li> <li>- Church, flesh etc</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The existence, nature and character of God</li> <li>- Do we live in a world in which the supernatural is possible?</li> <li>- The nature of Scripture: Is it coherent, truthful, trustworthy, contradictory?</li> </ul>
Our pre-understanding changes every time we study a passage of Scripture.	Our pre-suppositions rarely change as we read individual passages, but they shape the way we study Scripture

'Pride encourages us to think that we have got the correct meaning before we have made the appropriate effort to recover it. Pride does not listen. It knows.' (Kevin J. Vanhoozer)

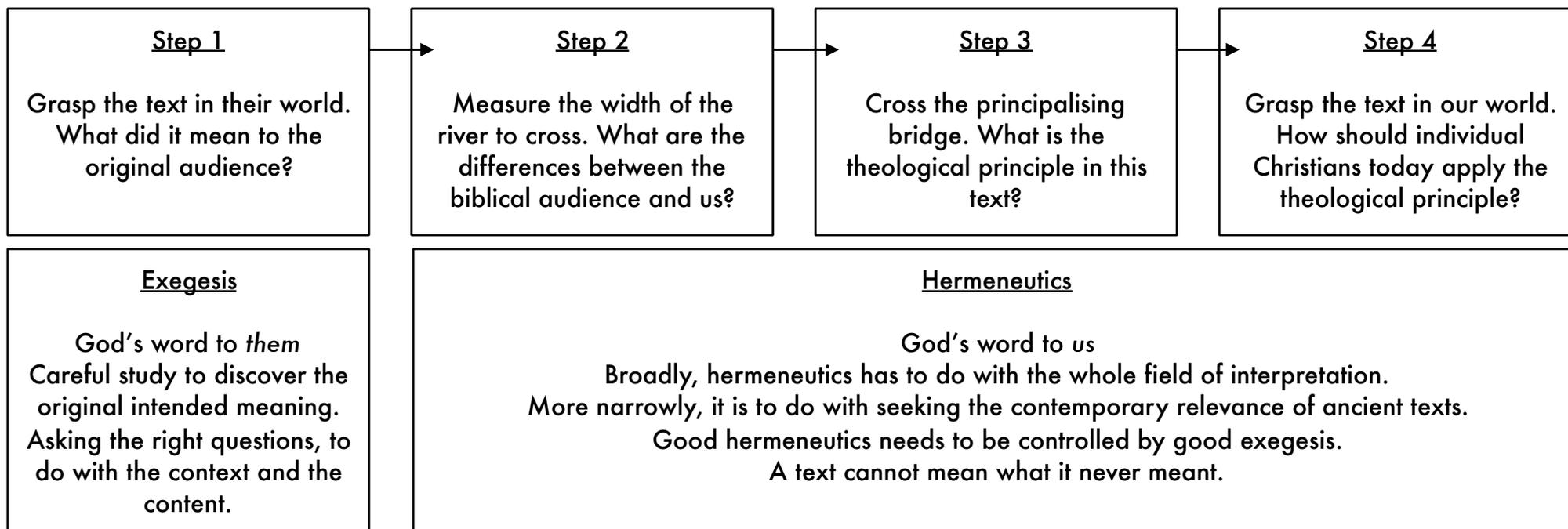
Overstanding vs Understanding

## Beginning the Interpretive Journey

What is the interpretive journey? And what are the tools we use to navigate?



Adapted from  
*Grasping God's  
Word* by Duvall and  
Hays.



# Beginning the Interpretive Journey

## Step 1: Grasp the text in their world



### What did this text mean to its original hearers?

Don't race to application, or trying to make sense of the text for your own situation. To do so will do damage to the text. A text cannot mean to us what it never could have meant to its author or their readers.

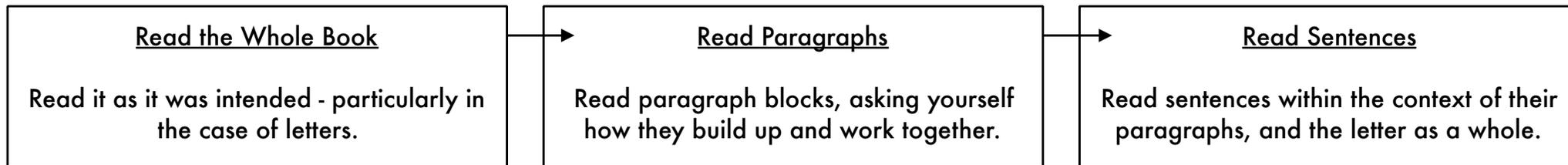
The goal here is to work out what it originally meant. Only then can we responsibly work out what it might mean to us today.

The task of exegesis involves examining two main features: context and content

Context	
Historical Context	Literary Context
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Who - Author and Recipient(s). What is their relationship?</li> <li>- What - What's written? How's it structured? What's the tone?</li> <li>- Why - What was the purpose of it being written?</li> <li>- Where - Author and Recipient.</li> <li>- When - When was it written?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What is the genre?</li> <li>- What is the surrounding context?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Immediate Context</li> <li>- Rest of the section</li> <li>- Rest of the book</li> <li>- Rest of the author's work</li> <li>- Rest of the Bible</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

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## Step 1: Grasp the text in their world



Content		
Things to look for in sentences	Things to look for in paragraphs	Things to look for in discourses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Repeated words</li> <li>- Contrasts and Comparisons</li> <li>- Lists</li> <li>- Cause and Effect</li> <li>- Figures of Speech</li> <li>- Conjunctions (but, and, for, therefore etc)</li> <li>- Verbs</li> <li>- Pronouns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- General and specific details</li> <li>- Questions and answers</li> <li>- Dialogue</li> <li>- Purpose statements</li> <li>- Means by which things are accomplished</li> <li>- Conditional clauses</li> <li>- Actions / roles of people, or God</li> <li>- Emotional terms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Connections between paragraphs and episodes</li> <li>- Story shifts. Breaks and pivots</li> <li>- Juxtaposition and interchange</li> <li>- Chiasm (a, b, c, d, c', b', a')</li> </ul>

Two Questions	
What is the author saying?	Why is he saying it?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What is the content of this paragraph?</li> <li>- Summarise it in a sentence (Past tense, e.g. "Paul encouraged the church in Ephesus to...")</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Why is he saying it in this way?</li> <li>- Why is he saying it at this point in his argument?</li> </ul>

## Beginning the Interpretive Journey

### Example: 1 Corinthians 1:10-3:17

<p><u>1:10-17</u> Don't be divided around leaders</p> <p><i>Response to reports from Chloe. Rhetorical questions focus on Christ. Why end with 'wisdom and eloquence?'</i></p>	<p>→ <u>1:18-25</u> The gospel stands in contradiction to wisdom</p> <p><i>Feels like a tangent. Is it? Gospel should unite. Contrast: foolishness, wisdom, power Contrast: God and humanity</i></p>	<p>→ <u>1:26-31</u> God's choice of people stands in contradiction to human wisdom</p> <p><i>Personal appeal: brothers and sisters Provocative challenge If Christ became wisdom, it can't be bad</i></p>
<p><u>2:1-5</u> Paul's own preaching illustrates this divine contradiction</p> <p><i>And so it was... Eloquence and human wisdom Returns to the foundations of their faith</i></p>	<p>→ <u>2:6-16</u> God's true wisdom is revealed by the Spirit, and we have the Spirit</p> <p><i>Repetition of Spirit We have received, understand, speak, judge etc</i></p>	<p>→ <u>3:1-4</u> Stop acting in such an unwise, human way!</p> <p><i>Pejoratives help them feel the force of their actions: worldly, children, mere humans Rhetorical questions</i></p>
<p><u>3:5-9</u> Don't quarrel over leaders. They're servants. They have different roles but one cause</p> <p><i>Contrast: Paul / Apollos / God We / you / God Why move from field to building?</i></p>	<p>→ <u>3:10-15</u> Build the church wisely, not poorly</p> <p><i>Shift from agriculture to architecture Warnings: build with care, fire, testing, quality, loss</i></p>	<p>→ <u>3:16-17</u> The church is God's Temple, and there are serious consequences for destroying it.</p> <p><i>Repetition of possession: God's temple, God's Spirit Plural, not singular</i></p>

# Beginning the Interpretive Journey

## Exercise: Philippians 1:27-2:18

### Background Information

- Paul is writing from prison (1:13, 17)
- The Philippian church sent him a gift through a church member called Epaphroditus (2:25, 30; 4:14-18)
- Epaphroditus became ill, but God healed him and Paul has sent him back to Philippi with this letter (2:25-30)
- The purposes of the letter are
  - To let the Philippians know how Paul is (1:12-26)
  - To thank them for their gift (4:10, 14-19)
  - To encourage them to live in harmony (1:27-2:18; 4:2-3)
  - To teach them to avoid heresy (3:1-4:1)

1:27-30

2:1-4

2:5-11

2:12-13

2:14-18

Summary