

## Journeying Through the Different Genres The Unique Challenges of Various Types of Literature In The Bible

- Difficulties involved in reading certain genres...
- General guidelines for reading certain genres...
- A practical process for reading certain genres...
- Examples of reading certain genres...

### Journeying Through the New Testament Letters

#### Difficulties involved in reading the letters...

- What in the world does that mean?

*“Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead?  
If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them?” (1 Corinthians 15:29, NIV)*

- What in the world are we supposed to do?

“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.  
Honor one another above yourselves.” (Romans 12:10, NIV)

“Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.” (Romans 13:1, NIV)

“Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ send greetings.” (Romans 16:16, NIV)

#### GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR READING THE LETTERS . . .

- New Testament letters are occasional documents.
  - ▶ Written to a specific audience.
  - ▶ Written at a specific time.
  - ▶ Written to address a specific **situation**.
    - Behaviors that needed to be corrected.
    - **Doctrines** that needed to be straightened out.
    - Misunderstandings that needed to be clarified.
  - ▶ We have the answers, but we don’t always have the **questions!**
  - ▶ We are **careful** not to conclude too much from only one letter.
  - ▶ We are **confident** that God has clearly communicated to us what is most important.
- New Testament letters are **NOT** theological treatises.
- Overall, New Testament letters have a common form:
  - ▶ Introduction
    - Identification of the **author**.
    - Identification of the audience.
    - Greeting.
    - Prayer or Thanksgiving.

- ▶ Body
- ▶ Conclusion
  - Final **greetings**.
  - Farewell.
  - Various elements...
    - A number of different elements including:
    - Travel plans (Titus 3:12; Philemon 22).
    - Commendation of workers (Rom. 16:1-2).
    - Prayer (2 Thess. 3:16; Hebrews 13:20-21).
    - Prayer requests (1 Thess. 5:25; Heb. 13:18-19).
    - Greetings (Rom. 16:3-16, 21-23; Heb. 13:24; 2 John 13).
    - Final instructions and exhortations (Col. 4:16-17; 1 Tim. 6:20-21a).
    - Holy kiss (1 Thess. 5:26; 1 Peter 5:14).
    - Autograph (Col. 4:18; 2 Thess. 3:17).
    - Benediction (1 Cor. 16:23-24; Eph. 6:23-24).
    - Doxology (2 Peter 3:18; Jude 24-25).
- ▶ Differences in form are often **clues** to meaning.

### A PRACTICAL PROCESS FOR READING THE LETTERS . . .

- Observe their home: What do I see?
  - ▶ **Read**: Begin by reading the letter aloud through in one setting.
  - ▶ **Reconstruct**: As you read, reconstruct the original situation behind the letter.
- Understand their home: What does it mean?
  - ▶ Think **paragraphs**!
  - ▶ For each paragraph and series of paragraphs, write down in one or two sentences the answer to the overall question: What's the **point**?
- Bring it back home: How does it relate?
  - ▶ Look for the biblical and compatible...
    - Focus on truths that are **central** to the message of the text and all the Bible.
  - ▶ Look for the eternal and cross-cultural...
    - Focus on truths that are **consistently** taught in Scripture.
  - ▶ Look for the applicable...
    - Focus on truths that are inherently **true** in all situations.
  - ▶ Write out the timeless truth (or truths) using present-tense verbs.
- Apply it in your home: What do I do?
  - ▶ Meditate on the timeless truth.
  - ▶ Relate the timeless truth to today.
    - See the timeless truth in its original situation.
      - Look for key elements (people, places, relationships, ideas, items, etc.) in the text.
    - Identify a contemporary situation that parallels the original situation.
      - Look for key elements (people, places, relationships, ideas, items, etc.) that parallel the original situation.
    - Relate the timeless truth specifically to that contemporary situation.
  - ▶ Practice the timeless truth.
    - Who should I be?                      What should I do?                      Who will I teach?
    - How should I think?                      Where should I go?

## STUDYING THE BIBLE: Example of Letter-Hebrews 12: 1-3 From Their Home To Our Home

### Observe their home: What do I see?

Write down significant notes concerning who, what, where, when, why, and how. What does the Word emphasize, repeat, connect, compare, or contrast, and how does the Word communicate?

- Hebrews written to encourage Jewish Christians facing threat of persecution to trust in Jesus.
- "Therefore" – connects text with preceding chapter – "Hall of Faith" amidst trials
- Followed by instruction to persevere in discipline: obviously talking about endurance in faith.
- Imagery – running a race with effort and endurance toward the finish line.
- "Let us" – Verb mentioned three times – Throw off, run, fix our eyes...
- Throw off two objects: "everything that hinders" and "sin that entangles"
- Run with endurance (a prevalent theme in all of Hebrews and this particular context)
- Fix our eyes on Jesus – He has run the race ahead of us - He endured and enables me to endure.
- He endured for joy – he was motivated by joy!
- He scorned the shame of the cross – Even the most brutal shame could not stop him.
- "At the right hand of the throne of God" – Romans 8:34 – He is interceding for us there.
- Purpose Statement – We look at Jesus so that we will not grow weary and lose heart.

### Understand their home: What does it mean?

Taking into account literary, historical-cultural, and theological contexts, identify in one or two sentences the primary meaning of the text for its original readers.

The author of Hebrews encouraged these Jewish Christians to endure in their faith despite opposition.

He reminds them that the only way they can endure is by focusing

### Bring it back home: How does it relate?

Identify the timeless truth(s) in this passage that relates to both the original readers and us. (If studying an Old Testament passage, filter theological principles through the New Testament.)

The Christian life is like a race that requires effort and endurance.

The saints who have gone before us provide valuable examples of endurance that encourage and inspire us.

To run the race successfully, Christians need to reject things that hinder their progress and focus completely on their relationship with Jesus.

### Apply it in your home: What do I do?

Identify parallel situations between the biblical context and ours. Make specific application of the timeless truth to our life today by asking five questions:

#### Who should I be?

I want to be completely focused on Jesus in every facet of my life, especially in the trial I am going through right now.

#### How should I think?

I need to think about the trials I am facing right now in light of Jesus' endurance. I need His perspective on my troubles.

#### What should I do?

I will go back and read about others in the Bible who have faced difficult challenges and see how God provided in their lives. I will also repent of selfishness that is entangling me and keeping me from Christ.

#### Where should I go?

Even though I do not understand why I am going through this trial and I am struggling in my faith, I will continue to gather together with the church for worship (Hebrews 10:24-25).

#### Who will I teach?

I will look for opportunities to intentionally show the supremacy of Christ in suffering to my co-workers who do not know Christ. I will also be honest with my small group about the trial I am going through so that the strength God gives me might encourage them to endure.



