



WORD-FILLED
WOMEN WORKSHOP

The Drama of a Redeemer's Kindness **"May His Name Be Renowned!"**

Hearing, Doing, and Sharing
Old Testament Narrative

EFCA One Deeper Learning Track
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First Introduction | Workshop Purpose and Plan

WHAT ARE WE AFTER TOGETHER?

This workshop aims to help equip each of us to know Christ and make him known, and to lead others in doing the same.

More specifically:

- On a personal level, we're asking God to help us each make progress in **our hearing, doing, and sharing of his Word** within our various callings and contexts.
- On a local-church level, we're asking God to show us how we might encourage our local-church sisters to keep making progress in **their hearing, doing, and sharing of his Word** within their various callings and contexts.

What is “Word ministry among women in the local church”?

Let's dream for a moment: *What might it look like for God to mature your Word ministry and the Word ministry among all women in your local church?*

HOW WILL WE GET AFTER IT?

1. Word Foundations (Session 1)
2. Word Work (Sessions 2 & 3)
3. Word Alive (Conclusion of Session 3)

ULTIMATELY, WHY ARE WE AFTER IT?

The Bible is God's breathed-out Word. It's his personal, authoritative, and enduring speech to his people. In the Bible, God speaks about his Son, the Lord Jesus, and the salvation God has accomplished through him.

Word ministry is a Christ-centered and Christ-exalting calling. Paul writes, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (Colossians 3:16). When we engage in hearing, doing, and sharing God's Word, we encounter and minister Christ, by the power of Christ, with joy in Christ, for the sake of Christ. It's a Christ-centered calling in every way, and it's all for his glory.

The Scriptures cast a robust vision of Word ministry's ultimate goal of **glorifying Christ**, from creation to redemption to new creation (i.e., the new heavens and new earth).

Second Introduction | Sharing Around Your Tables

Please share your answer to the questions below. You may want to write down in the space below what others say, so that you can pray more specifically for them and encourage them.

- 1. What are the one or two main contexts in which you share God's Word with others?**
For example: with your children or grandchildren, in student ministry, in teaching Bible Study, or...
- 2. Who is a Word-filled woman whom God has used at some point in your life to encourage you and spur you on in the faith?**
Maybe your grandmother, a friend or neighbor, your Bible study teacher, ...

Sisters at My Table:

(a)

- a. Her main contexts for Word ministry:
- b. Area of Word ministry in which she's hoping to grow:

(b)

- a. Her main contexts for Word ministry:
- b. Area of Word ministry in which she's hoping to grow:

(c)

- a. Her main contexts for Word ministry:
- b. Area of Word ministry in which she's hoping to grow:

(d)

- a. Her main contexts for Word ministry:
- b. Area of Word ministry in which she's hoping to grow:

(e)

- a. Her main contexts for Word ministry:
- b. Area of Word ministry in which she's hoping to grow:

Third Introduction | The Heart of Biblical Exposition

What is “biblical exposition”?

Biblical exposition is, at its heart, laying out the Word—treasures that are there, and helping people see them clearly. It’s not creating new treasures—or decorating the old ones. It’s laying out and pointing to the treasures that are there, in the form in which we’re given them—that is, passage by passage and book by book, within the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

Kathleen Nielson, *God’s Word Our Story: Learning from the Book of Nehemiah*

Expositional preaching is empowered preaching that rightfully submits the shape and emphasis of the preaching to the shape and emphasis of a biblical text.

David Helm, *Expositional Preaching: How We Speak God’s Word Today*

Although there are several profitable ways of studying and teaching the Bible, **the entrée of a Christian’s spiritual meal**, in my view, ought to be “expositional” study and teaching. We open our Bibles to hear our Father speak to us, his beloved daughters, and dig into his “Word-treasures” as *active learners and sharers*.

- The **healthiest diet** for a growing Christian involves direct study God’s Word in its proper contexts.
- An implication for local-church women’s ministry: If we’re part of a women’s ministry team, we want to help shape our women’s ministry **so that Word ministry is at its heart**. It would be wise, then, for our women’s ministry *mainly* to help women gather around God’s Word (in various contexts and formats) so that God’s Word would do its work among us, even if our women’s ministry doesn’t *merely* help women gather around God’s Word (i.e., our women’s ministry may do *more* than help women hear, do, and share God’s Word, but that’s our emphasis).

Expositional teaching involves:

- (1) **Expounding a biblical text** by making plain what God is saying;
- (2) **Discerning how that text expounds the human heart**, and so applying what God is saying to the heart(s) of a particular person or group.

Teaching is poor work when love is gone; it is like a smith working without fire, or a builder without mortar.

Charles H. Spurgeon, *Come Ye Children*

There’s no substitute in Word ministry for a sincere and growing love for _____.
We can only teach *to* the heart if we teach *from* the heart.

There’s no substitute in Word ministry for a sincere and growing love for _____
(especially those with whom we’re sharing God’s Word).

Fourth Introduction | The Tools of Biblical Exposition & the Book of Ruth

No learning can make up for the failure to pray. No earnestness, no diligence, no study, no gifts will supply its lack.

E. M. Bounds, *Power Through Prayer*

Prayer does not fit us for the greater work; prayer is the greater work.

Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*

How do we start digging into a book to understand it and communicate it faithfully?

What tools do we need?

The following terms represent basic tools for expounding any type of biblical literature:

Genre	In terms of <u>literary form</u> , how does the author say what he's saying?
Structure	In terms of <u>literary shape</u> , how does the author say what he's saying?
Context	In what <u>context</u> does the author say what he's saying?
Unifying Theme	<u>What</u> is the author saying? (That is, what's the <i>main thing</i> he's saying?)
Aim	For what <u>purpose</u> is the author saying what he's saying?
Application	What <u>difference</u> does what the author is saying make in my/your life?

Genre | A “genre” of literature is simply a certain *kind* of literature—and God’s Word is full of all different kinds. God didn’t give us a list of theological propositions to learn, but a unified volume of books artistically shaped in a wide variety of literary genres, such as narratives, prophecies, laws, and songs. It’s important to notice what genre we’re reading, because each genre requires that we ask certain distinct questions.

The overall genre of the book of Ruth is **Old Testament narrative**. Biblical authors artfully combine various genres and literary forms within a single book, even if we classify a book according to one main genre. The book of Ruth exemplifies biblical narrator’s tendency to blend various genres; the narrator concludes Ruth with a genealogy that locates the book’s drama in the overall drama of redemptive history and highlights God’s sovereign purposes.

What are some particular features of the genre of Old Testament narrative?
(That is, what are some literary elements that we expect to find in this biblical genre?)

^{1:1}In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. ²The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. ³But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. ⁴These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. They lived there about ten years, ⁵and both Mahlon and Chilion died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

⁶Then she arose with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the fields of Moab that the LORD had visited his people and given them food. ⁷So she set out from the place where she was with her two daughters-in-law, and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. ⁸But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each of you to her mother's house. May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. ⁹The LORD grant that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband!" Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. ¹⁰And they said to her, "No, we will return with you to your people." ¹¹But Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? ¹²Turn back, my daughters; go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, even if I should have a husband this night and should bear sons, ¹³would you therefore wait till they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the LORD has gone out against me." ¹⁴Then they lifted up their voices and wept again. And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

¹⁵And she said, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law." ¹⁶But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. ¹⁷Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the LORD do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you." ¹⁸And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more.

¹⁹So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. And when they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them. And the women said, "Is this Naomi?" ²⁰She said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. ²¹I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi, when the LORD has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?"

²²So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabite her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

^{2:1}Now Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. ²And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find favor." And she said to her, "Go, my daughter." ³So she set out and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers, and she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the clan of Elimelech. ⁴And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem. And he said to the reapers, "The LORD be with you!" And they answered, "The LORD bless you." ⁵Then Boaz said to his young man who was in charge of the reapers, "Whose young woman is this?" ⁶And the servant who was in charge of the reapers answered, "She is the young Moabite woman, who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. ⁷She said, 'Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves after the reapers.' So she came, and she has continued from early morning until now, except for a short rest."

⁸Then Boaz said to Ruth, "Now, listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women. ⁹Let your eyes be on the field that they are reaping, and go after them. Have I not charged the young men not to touch you? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink what the young men have drawn." ¹⁰Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground, and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?" ¹¹But Boaz answered her, "All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. ¹²The LORD repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!" ¹³Then she said, "I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, though I am not one of your servants."

¹⁴And at mealtime Boaz said to her, "Come here and eat some bread and dip your morsel in the wine." So she sat beside the reapers, and he passed to her roasted grain. And she ate until she was satisfied, and she had some left over. ¹⁵When she rose to glean, Boaz instructed his young men, saying, "Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not reproach her. ¹⁶And also pull out some from the bundles for her and leave it for her to glean, and do not rebuke her."

¹⁷So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley. ¹⁸And she took it up and went into the city. Her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. She also brought out and gave her what food she had left over after being satisfied. ¹⁹And her mother-in-law said to her, "Where did you glean today? And where have you worked? Blessed be the man who took notice of you." So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked and said, "The man's name with whom I worked today is Boaz." ²⁰And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "May he be blessed by the LORD, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!" Naomi also said to her, "The

man is a close relative of ours, one of our redeemers.”²¹ And Ruth the Moabite said, “Besides, he said to me, ‘You shall keep close by my young men until they have finished all my harvest.’”²² And Naomi said to Ruth, her daughter-in-law, “It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, lest in another field you be assaulted.”²³ So she kept close to the young women of Boaz, gleaning until the end of the barley and wheat harvests. And she lived with her mother-in-law.

^{3:1} Then Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, “My daughter, should I not seek rest for you, that it may be well with you?² Is not Boaz our relative, with whose young women you were? See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. ³Wash therefore and anoint yourself, and put on your cloak and go down to the threshing floor, but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. ⁴But when he lies down, observe the place where he lies. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down, and he will tell you what to do.”⁵ And she replied, “All that you say I will do.”

⁶So she went down to the threshing floor and did just as her mother-in-law had commanded her. ⁷And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. Then she came softly and uncovered his feet and lay down. ⁸At midnight the man was startled and turned over, and behold, a woman lay at his feet! ⁹He said, “Who are you?” And she answered, “I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer.”¹⁰ And he said, “May you be blessed by the LORD, my daughter. You have made this last kindness greater than the first in that you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich. ¹¹And now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you ask, for all my fellow townsmen know that you are a worthy woman. ¹²And now it is true that I am a redeemer. Yet there is a redeemer nearer than I. ¹³Remain tonight, and in the morning, if he will redeem you, good; let him do it. But if he is not willing to redeem you, then, as the LORD lives, I will redeem you. Lie down until the morning.”

¹⁴So she lay at his feet until the morning, but arose before one could recognize another. And he said, “Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor.”¹⁵ And he said, “Bring the garment you are wearing and hold it out.” So she held it, and he measured out six measures of barley and put it on her. Then she went into the city. ¹⁶And when she came to her mother-in-law, she said, “How did you fare, my daughter?” Then she told her all that the man had done for her, ¹⁷saying, “These six measures of barley he gave to me, for he said to me, ‘You must not go back empty-handed to your mother-in-law.’”¹⁸ She replied, “Wait, my daughter, until you learn how the matter turns out, for the man will not rest but will settle the matter today.”

^{4:1} Now Boaz had gone up to the gate and sat down there. And behold, the redeemer, of whom Boaz had spoken, came by. So Boaz said, “Turn aside, friend; sit down here.” And he turned aside and sat down. ²And he took ten men of the elders of the city and said, “Sit down here.” So they sat down. ³Then he said to the redeemer, “Naomi, who has come back from the country of Moab, is selling the parcel of land that belonged to our relative Elimelech. ⁴So I thought I would tell you of it and say, ‘Buy it in the presence of those sitting here and in the presence of the elders of my people.’ If you will redeem it, redeem it. But if you will not, tell me, that I may know, for there is no one besides you to redeem it, and I come after you.” And he said, “I will redeem it.”⁵ Then Boaz said, “The day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you also acquire Ruth² the Moabite, the widow of the dead, in order to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance.”⁶ Then the redeemer said, “I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I impair my own inheritance. Take my right of redemption yourself, for I cannot redeem it.”

⁷Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging: to confirm a transaction, the one drew off his sandal and gave it to the other, and this was the manner of attesting in Israel. ⁸So when the redeemer said to Boaz, “Buy it for yourself,” he drew off his sandal. ⁹Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, “You are witnesses this day that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and to Mahlon. ¹⁰Also Ruth the Moabite, the widow of Mahlon, I have bought to be my wife, to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brothers and from the gate of his native place. You are witnesses this day.”¹¹ Then all the people who were⁶ at the gate and the elders said, “We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman, who is coming into your house, like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you act worthily in Ephrathah and be renowned in Bethlehem, ¹²and may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, because of the offspring that the LORD will give you by this young woman.”

¹³So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. And he went in to her, and the LORD gave her conception, and she bore a son. ¹⁴Then the women said to Naomi, “Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel! ¹⁵He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him.”¹⁶ Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse. ¹⁷And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, “A son has been born to Naomi.” They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

¹⁸Now these are the generations of Perez: Perez fathered Hezron, ¹⁹Hezron fathered Ram, Ram fathered Amminadab, ²⁰Amminadab fathered Nahshon, Nahshon fathered Salmon, ²¹Salmon fathered Boaz, Boaz fathered Obed, ²²Obed fathered Jesse, and Jesse fathered David.

Structure | The structure of a book or passage is its shape from beginning to end. When we look for structure, we look to find the distinct parts of a text and how these parts hold together. An **outline** shows structure in a clear, logical form. Discovering structure lets us begin to grasp the whole, unified meaning of a text.

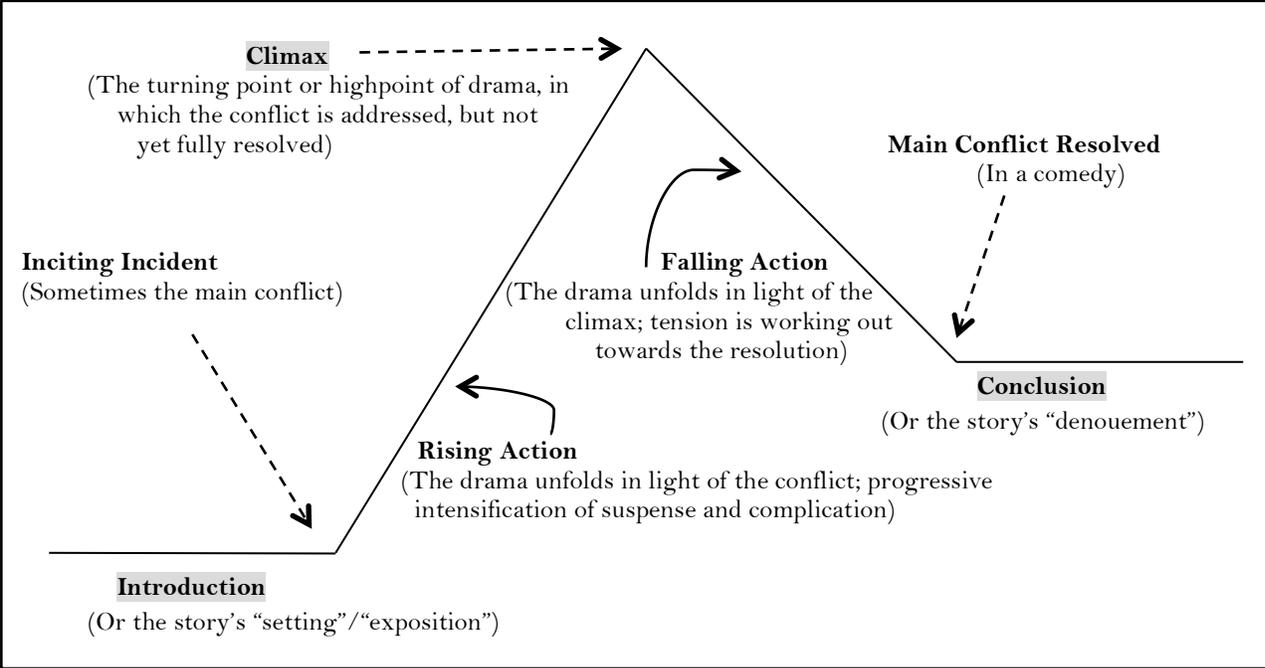
1. What should we look for to find the structure of a text? And what about in Old Testament narrative, in particular?

2. How might we outline the structure of the book of Ruth?

(That is, if you had to divide the book into smaller parts, how would you do so and why?)

3. How might we outline the structure of Ruth 1?

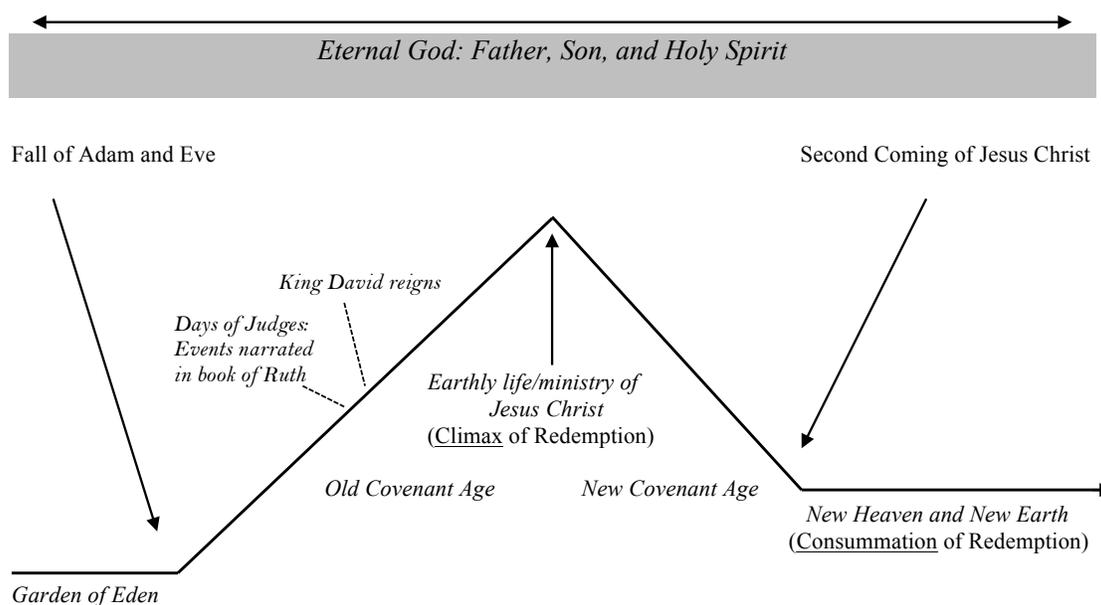
The chart below shows one common way to visualize a **plot structure** of a “**comedy**” (i.e., a story with a happy ending), with only one main conflict introduced:



Context | The context of a book or passage is the world and words that surround it. Most of us are aware of the danger of taking words “out of context.” In studying any portion of the Bible, it’s crucial to understand the author’s words in historical, literary, and theological context.

1. In the book of Ruth, what various contexts ought we bear in mind as we try to understand the book and apply it to our lives today?
2. What stands out to you in Ruth 1:1–5 in terms of the narrator’s strategy to show the story’s relationship to the larger biblical storyline?
3. Why do you think the narrator explicitly shows the redemptive-historical context of the story in Ruth? How might this context influence the way you read this book?

God's Big Story of Redemption



God's progressive and unfolding revelation in Scripture moves us along in this story of God's redemption in Christ. God's promises and commitment to fulfill his covenant promises sustain the redemptive narrative.

Immediate Historical Context

What historical circumstances (time, place, people, culture) does the book reflect or address? How does the historical context shed light on this particular passage?

Immediate Literary Context

How do the passages right before and after this one shed light on this passage's meaning? Where does the passage come in the flow of the whole book, and how does the passage contribute to that flow?

Broader Literary/Historical Context

How does this book fit in the flow of the books of the Old and New Testaments? At what point in the big story of salvation history does this book come? In general, how does the whole-Bible context help us understand this passage and this book?

Example Questions for Old Testament Narratives

Looking Back: How do the human actions in this story express obedience (or disobedience) to God's revealed commands?

Looking Forward: How might this story (i.e., the actual events of the drama, as well as the recording of those events in a story) have helped prepare its original audience for the full revelation of the gospel in the coming of the Lord Jesus?

Unifying Theme | The unifying theme is the big idea of a book or a passage—what some call the “main idea” or “central thrust.” Every book or passage has themes (i.e., recurring ideas) at work in it, and the unifying theme is the main message communicated as these themes combine, develop, and pierce our hearts. It’s helpful to articulate a text’s unifying theme in one sentence.

Exposition is not just a verse-by-verse commentary on the passage. Rather, we are seeking to crystallize the truth it sets forth and focus on the main message or point of the passage or text.

Eric J. Alexander, *What is Biblical Preaching?*

1. What are some ways to discover the unifying theme of a text?
2. What are some themes in the book of Ruth?
3. How might we state a unifying theme for the book of Ruth, in one concise sentence?

4. What are some themes in Ruth 1?

5. How might we state a unifying theme for Ruth 1, in one concise sentence?

Process for Developing a Unifying-Theme Statement

1. Read! (and then read; and then re-read!)
2. Observe _____ words, phrases, and ideas
3. List the text's key _____, and their relationship to one another
4. Work out the text's _____, and show it in an outline
5. Determine the author's main _____ in writing this text (*our next tool ...*)
6. Articulate a unifying-theme statement in one sentence.

Ideally this statement will reflect the text's main point with *simplicity* and *clarity*, and this statement will have *explanatory power for the whole text*, even if the statement focuses on the text's main point.

Genre	In terms of <u>literary form</u> , how does the author say what he's saying?
Structure	In terms of <u>literary shape</u> , how does the author say what he's saying?
Context	In what <u>context</u> does the author say what he's saying?
Unifying Theme	What is the author saying? (That is, what's the <i>main thing</i> he's saying?)
Aim	For what <u>purpose</u> is the author saying what he's saying?
Application	What <u>difference</u> does what the author is saying make in my/your life?

Aim and Application | An author's aim is what that author intends to accomplish through his or her words. An Old Testament narrator told these stories for a reason. What did he want his audience to understand, and how did he want them to respond? Once we begin to grasp the author's aim for his original audience, then we can resonate with that same aim in our own lives and in the lives of those to whom we minister.

Application, then, is the process of bringing that aim to bear on the specifics of our lives today. How will this passage make a difference in our hearts and actions? Most fundamentally: How will this passage point us toward the Lord Jesus?

[E]very part of Scripture was originally written with a pastoral intention—it was meant to be applied. The original authors always intended their audience to think or do something differently as a result of hearing or reading their words.

Phil Campbell, *Saving Eutychus*

Application that remains strong and steady week after week arises from a mind fixed on God and from a heart that beats for broken people in a fallen world.

Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*

1. How can we discern an author's **aim** in writing a particular passage?

- *Start with the whole* _____: What is the author's purpose in writing the book?
- *Then, examine the* _____: What evidence is there of the author's purpose in writing this particular passage?
- *Finally, relate the aim of the passage with the aim of the book*: How does the author's aim in this passage contribute to his overarching aim?

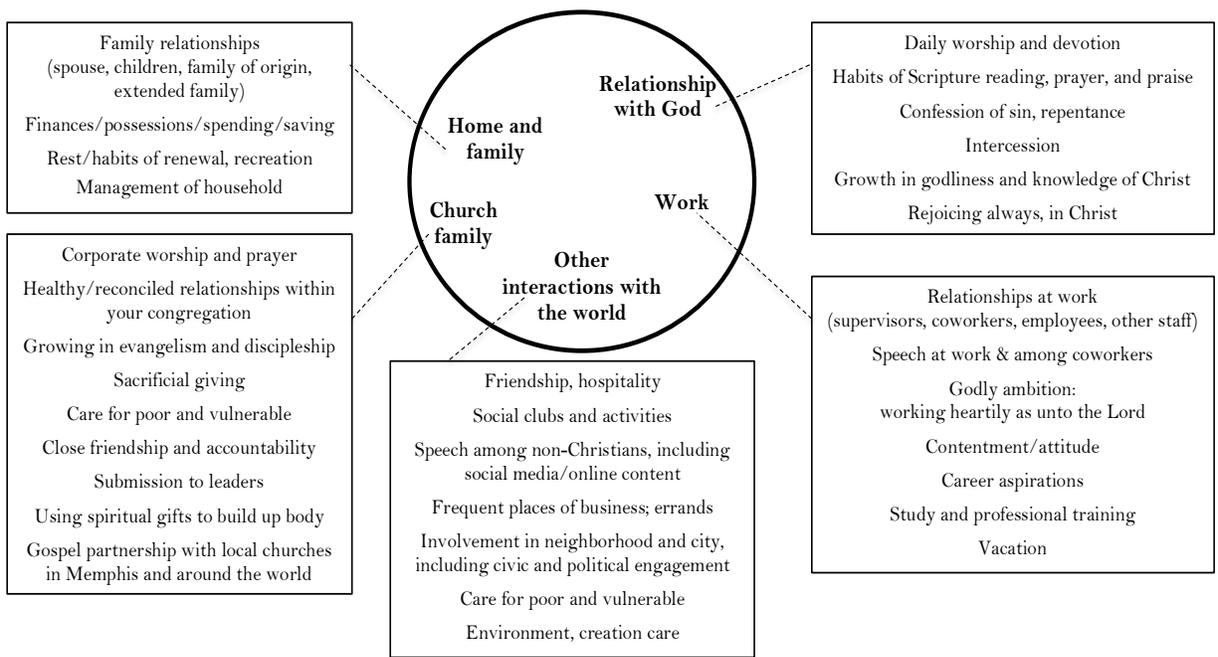
2. How can we **apply** a passage to the hearts of people in a way that grows out of the text?

We must start by asking in what ways this text is accomplishing the author’s aim in our own heart.

The following four questions aim to help us discern how to apply the main point of a passage according to the author’s main aim in writing that passage.¹

- a. **Response:** How is God calling you and your hearers to respond to him and put his Word into practice? In what particular area of life is God calling you and your hearers to respond this way? *Identify a concrete implication of this passage for a specific area of life for you, and for those to whom you’re applying this passage.* (See chart below)
- b. **Motivation:** Why is God calling you and your hearers to respond to him in this way? In other words, what reason or motivation does the passage give—explicitly or implicitly—for why you and your hearers must put God’s Word into practice in this particular way?
- c. **Struggle:** Why is it difficult for you and your hearers to respond to God’s Word in this way? In other words, what specific obstacles will you and your hearers face as you seek to put his Word into practice?
- d. **Divine Provision:** What resources does God supply you and your hearers to put his Word into practice, in the face of these obstacles? How will you commit yourself to rely on his resources, and call on your hearers to do the same?

For Help in Discerning Specific Areas of Life in Which a Passage May Apply



¹Some of these questions were formed by reflecting on Bryan Chapell’s *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (2nd ed; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 214–22.

Ruth 2

Please write your answers to the following questions about Ruth 2:

Characters & Themes | Ruth 2

1. Who are the main characters in this passage, and how does the narrator portray them?
2. What are the major themes of this passage, and how do these themes help develop meaning?

Structure | Ruth 2

3. Step 1: Make some general observations about how this passage unfolds and develops.
For example, at what point(s) in the passage does the narrator convey tension and conflict, develop the main characters, and/or surprise his readers/listeners?
4. Step 2: What are the distinct parts of this passage, and how do they hold together?
Briefly outline the passage to show its structure. You may outline it in whatever form you prefer.

Ruth 2

Context | Ruth 2

5. How does this passage relate to the passages immediately preceding it and following it? How does this passage's **immediate context** affect your understanding of it?

6. How does this passage fit into the context of the whole book of Ruth? How does this passage's **whole-book context** affect your understanding of the passage?

7. How does this passage fit into its whole-Bible context? How does this passage's **whole-Bible context** affect your understanding of the passage?

Look back: for example, how does this passage reflect historical events and literary themes that are recorded in portions of the Bible that precede this passage chronologically?

Look forward: for example, how might this passage have prepared its original audience for the full revelation of the gospel, in the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ?

Unifying Theme | Ruth 2

8. Drawing on your work above, state in one sentence what you see as this passage's unifying theme.

9. How does the unifying theme of Ruth 2 relate to the whole book's unifying theme?

Ruth 2

Aim & Application | Ruth 2

10. Look back through the passage you have studied. Considering all that you have observed about it, how would you summarize the narrator's aim in writing it?

One way to discern the peculiar contribution of a passage is to ask: "If this passage were to drop out of the story, what would be lost (in terms of plot, character development, and so on)?"

11. In what ways do you find this passage accomplishing the narrator's aim in your own heart?

Choose a specific person/group to whom you might teach this passage, or whom you might lead in studying it: such as your child(ren), a small group of high school seniors, a group of women from your local church, or an elderly non-Christian neighbor.

My audience: _____

12. As you align your aim in teaching this passage with the narrator's aim in writing it, what kinds of concrete applications of this passage might you develop for this audience?

13. How do your applications turn your audience toward the Lord Jesus, who is at the center of all the Scriptures?

Committing to Ongoing Progress in Word Ministry

1. What is one element of Word ministry in which you hope to keep making progress?

For example: you may want to grow in learning how to apply a passage to others, how to understand the context of a passage, how to discern and communicate the main point (i.e., unifying theme) of a passage, or something else ...

2. As you think about Word ministry among women in your local church, what is one area in which you hope you and your sisters will keep making progress?

For what in particular will you be praying for growth, with respect to your local church's Word ministry among women?

3. What is something you've learned or seen during this deeper learning track that you'll aim to take home with you to your local-church family?

4. How would you value prayer from your sisters around your table here, with respect to your personal Word ministry and the Word ministry among women in your local church?

Practical Suggestions for Women’s Bible Study Gatherings

There are many ways to put these tools for biblical exposition to work. Our faithful handling of the Scriptures affects the way we:

Worship	Support a friend through a divorce
Give relationship counsel to a roommate	Blog
Teach our children about Jesus at bedtime	Lead a small group
Give a devotional at a bridal shower	Minister among the poor
Pray	Share the gospel with a coworker

But let’s flesh out one way we might use these tools specifically for women’s Bible study in the local church. What sorts of Bible study formats and models best facilitate growth in our skillfulness to hear, do, and share God’s Word in our various callings and contexts?

Here I’ll develop just one possible approach to shaping a women’s gathering that facilitates (1) group work in expounding a Bible passage, and (2) explicit training of each woman in hearing, doing, and sharing the Scriptures.

Not too long ago, my local church asked me to help start a women’s expositional Bible study.

A few features of our overall approach:

- A six-week evening study of Colossians: We limited the study to six weeks, with the hope that it might foster more willingness to commit for some. While no time of day is ideal for everyone, we wanted students and professionals who work during the day to be able to participate, and so we chose to gather in the evenings.
- Flexible investment (both in attendance and in preparation): We communicated real flexibility by letting women know that they were welcome to come for as many or as few gatherings as they were able to attend. We also wanted women to feel free to participate even if they had never read the passage we’d be studying that evening. At the same time, we wanted women to have an opportunity to meditate on the passage in advance (with a set of questions), if they desired. So we distributed a card to everyone (*see below*), but each woman could choose her own level of investment.

COLOSSIANS: GROWING IN CHRIST

**You’re invited to reflect on the following questions for each passage in advance of our gathering. If you don’t take the time to do so, you are still welcome to participate in discussion!*

1. Observation: What words or ideas stand out to you in this passage? What strikes you as surprising, encouraging, or difficult?
2. Interpretation: What does this passage communicate about God?
3. Application: If you more fully believed this truth about God, how would that affect your life today?

Oct 13	Colossians 1:1-14	The fruit of the gospel
Oct 20	Colossians 1:15-23	The heart of the gospel
Oct 27	Colossians 1:24-2:5	The ministry of the gospel
Nov 3	Colossians 2:6-23	The way of the gospel 1
Nov 10	Colossians 3:1-4:6	The way of the gospel 2
Nov 17	Colossians 4:7-18	The partnership of the gospel

- Team teaching: We recruited a team of three teachers, so that women could hear God's truth articulated by different teachers with different personalities, life experiences/stages, and strengths. Before our study began, our teaching team met twice, and we stayed in communication throughout the study to give one another feedback and encouragement.
 - For our *first teachers' meeting*, we each had prepared expositional worksheets on Colossians. During our meeting, we reviewed our answers and discussed how to apply the tools for biblical exposition (i.e., genre, structure, context, unifying theme, and aim/application) to Colossians.
 - In our *second teachers' meeting*, we each completed expositional worksheets for the particular passage(s) we were assigned to lead. We each offered a ten-minute expositional presentation on our assigned passage(s) in which we articulated our thoughts on the passage's structure, unifying theme, and aim, and how we planned to apply the passage.
 - Following each teacher's presentation, she received feedback from her co-teachers. For example, we co-teachers asked: *Do we agree with how she's understanding the passage's unifying theme and structure? Is she applying this text faithfully to the lives of the women in our local-church context? Is there any part of the passage she'll need to work harder to explain with more clarity and simplicity?*
 - In this second teachers' meeting, we also agreed on a feedback form (*see below, pg. 26*) we would use throughout our six-week study.
 - *During our six-week study*, we emailed one another feedback following each session. We encouraged her and offered any suggestions about how she might keep making progress in her teaching for her next assignment.
- Pastoral support: It may be that one of your pastors/elders would help lead your teachers' meetings as you work through the book in advance. We invited one of our pastors to open our first and our final Bible-study gatherings with prayer and an encouraging word to all the women.
- Expositional, discussion-oriented style: One of our top priorities for our gatherings was to encourage women to engage the Scriptures themselves so that they would grow more confident that God's Word is for them. Because of that priority, we decided to shape our gatherings so that they featured lots of group interaction, and were as unintimidating for beginners as possible.
 - Because we wanted to have available to us both large-group discussion and small-group discussion, we set up the physical space with a number of smaller tables. This way teachers could employ any of three sorts of interaction:
 - (1) *Person to Person*: Inviting women to turn to one or two people beside them and discuss something;
 - (2) *Small Group*: Inviting women to discuss something at their tables;
 - (3) *Large Group*: Inviting women to discuss something as a whole group.

More or less, here's how we structured each gathering (1.5 hours each week):

1. Opening question (5-7 minutes): We began with a non-threatening (and often light-hearted) opening question that related to the main idea of our passage. We had about 20-30 women, sitting around small tables, so each person answered this question around her table before we invited several women to share with the whole group.

For example: Relating to Colossians 1:15-23, my opening question was, “What is your favorite food that has little or no nutritional value? And why do you love it? (Be honest!)” After laughing a good bit together, this question enabled me to lead into discussing the problem in Colossae: these young believers were depending for spiritual nourishment and maturation on things that, in reality, had negative nutritional value and actually caused them to lose their appetite for Christ. In this passage, Paul presents Christ himself as the supreme and sufficient source of redemption, life, wisdom, and growth for his people; only the Lord Jesus can nourish and mature his church, as we walk in him.

2. Introductory orientation (5 minutes): We opened each session by anchoring our discussion in “the big picture”: *to whom is Paul writing this epistle, and why? What is Paul's great burden for these believers? And where does our passage come in this epistle?*

In these initial comments, we also aimed to set out the main idea of the specific passage right away, and indicate why this main idea matters for us (i.e., how God's speech to his people in this passage addresses and equips us today).

3. Prayer and reading the whole passage (5-7 minutes): Sometimes we started again at Colossians 1:1 and read all the way through our passage for that evening, so we'd remember the flow of the epistle. We teachers had decided on a specific translation in advance of the study, and had printed out the whole letter for women so that they could mark it up during our gatherings.
4. Opening summary of the whole passage (3 minutes): We wanted to provide the women with a “compass” of sorts before diving into any passage's details. So we always offered some initial summary comments about the passage's structure and unifying theme. In my experience, the best group discussion flows when there's clear guidance established at the outset about what and how an author is communicating. This sort of strong and clear direction from the front sets the context for more profitable discussion around the tables.

After reading Colossians 1:15-23, for example, we summarized its structure and main point by saying something such as: “*What do we notice about the way Paul's argument in Colossians 1:15-23 flows? First, in vv. 15-17, Paul shows that Jesus Christ is Lord over all creation. And, second, in vv. 18-20, Paul shows that Jesus Christ is Lord over new creation, that is, the church. So Christ is supreme in creation, vv. 15-17, and in new creation, vv. 18-20. He's Lord of creation and redemption. And, why does this matter? Well, third, Paul shows us in vv. 21-23 that Jesus Christ is Lord over you. Paul makes plain the difference that Christ's ministry of reconciliation makes for me and you. So we'll follow this logic for our discussion tonight. Let's start with vv. 15-17, where we see that Jesus Christ is Lord over all creation ...*”

5. Facilitated discussion of passage, unit-of-thought by unit-of-thought (45 minutes):

For example, we divided Colossians 1:15-23 into three units, as seen above. We discussed the passage unit by unit, always keeping in mind how these units hold together thematically. As we began unpacking each unit, we offered a strong, clear sentence or two summarizing it. Then we invited everyone to make observations about the unit together at their tables: *What words or ideas stand out to you in this passage? What strikes you as surprising, encouraging, or difficult?*

We often used the same observation questions that we put on the cards we had distributed to the women, so that if they chose to meditate on the text ahead of time, they'd be able to share their mature reflections with the group.

After sufficient time at the tables, we reconvened as a large group to hear one another's observations. When it was time to move on to the next thought unit, the teacher offered several summative comments to wrap up discussion for that section. The teacher's summative comments aimed to emphasize the *main* contribution(s) of these specific verses (i.e., in this particular section) to the whole passage's unifying theme, and the relevance of these verses to our lives.

Once again: when a teacher reiterates the "forest" of a passage throughout her facilitating, it helps everyone keep in mind a passage's unifying theme idea and structure. These "forest" comments actually allow women to enjoy and understand a passage's "trees" all the more.

6. Small-group application and Word-filled prayer (20 minutes): At the conclusion of the study, we invited everyone to reflect on the following questions (and then asked if anyone was willing to share): *What does this passage communicate about God? If I more fully believed this truth about God, how would that affect my life today?* Again, some of the women would have already meditated on these specific questions if they'd used the reflection questions on the cards. We then guided everyone to pray for one another in light of our evening's passage and what they had just shared.
7. Concluding Word-filled prayer: The teacher concluded the whole evening with a Word-filled prayer, praying some of the passage's words/ideas.

In our final Colossians Bible study, we distributed an evaluation to all the women so that we could get a sense for how we might serve our sisters more effectively in the future:

Evaluation for participants to fill out:

Name: (optional) _____

How many weeks have you attended this study? 1 2 3 4 5 6

In case you wanted to reflect upon the text ahead of time, we provided you a card with the assigned passages and a few questions for each week. Did you find this helpful? **Yes** **No** **N/A**

What encouraged you the most during our time together?

What worked well in our format for this study, and what could we improve?

Is this sort of environment one into which you'd be willing to invite a friend who isn't presently following Christ or studying the Scriptures? Why or why not?

Did this study help equip you to study the Bible for yourself? If so, how? If not, any suggestions for how we could better equip one another to read, understand, and delight in God's Word?

Any other comments you'd like to make?

Possible Feedback Form for Teachers

1. Introduction

- a. How did her initial comments help orient us to the passage and its main idea?
- b. How effectively did she introduce the relevance of this passage for broken, sinful image bearers?

2. Structure

- a. How did she help us see the way the biblical passage unfolds (i.e., its logic)?
- b. In what ways did the structure of her teaching clearly flow from the structure of the passage?
- c. How effectively did each section of her exposition serve her main idea and bring that main idea into focus? (i.e., How unified was her exposition around one central idea?)

3. Main Idea (i.e., “Unifying Theme”) & Context

- a. What does she see as the passage’s main idea:
- b. How did she help me understand (not just “identify”) the passage’s main idea?
- c. How effectively did she deal with the passage’s whole-book and whole-Bible context?
- d. How effectively did she relate this passage to the person and work of Christ?

4. Interaction & Illustrations

- a. To what extent did her discussion questions and illustrations grow out of the text itself and clarify her main idea?
- b. How effective were her discussion questions for provoking thoughtful reflection and engagement (rather than only having one “right” answer)?
- c. How did her discussion questions and illustrations help us digest the passage and understand it more deeply?

5. Application

- a. How was it evident that she’s yielded her own heart to God, to let his Word do its work in her?
- b. To what extent did her main application flow from the author’s main idea and aim?
- c. In what ways did her call to action exalt the person and work of Christ, such that she rooted her major applications in the gospel (and avoided legalism and moralism)?
- d. How did her conclusion effectively focus her message and call us to respond with faith and obedience?

6. General feedback

- a. How well did she relate with her audience and engage them?
- b. What is one area she might work on for next time? And what suggestions do you have for her in this?

For example: clarity; simplicity; brevity; more engaging illustrations; showing how she arrived upon her interpretation, so we’re better equipped to do so on our own; showing how her applications grow out of the text; encouraging women to take risks in contributing to discussion

- c. What are one or two aspects of her approach that especially encouraged you?

Basic Questions to Ask of Any Biblical Passage or Book

Genre | A book's genre is simply the kind of literature it is. The Scriptures are full of a variety of literary genres, which show forth the depth, beauty, creativity, and clarity of God's Word.

- Does the text give us any indications as to what kind of literature it is?
- How does the nature of this passage's genre affect our understanding of it? And how does its form help shape and convey its meaning?

Structure | The structure of a book or passage is its shape from beginning to end.

- If you had to divide this book into several main parts, how would you do so, and why?
- What are the distinct parts of this passage and how do they hold together? Briefly outline the passage to show its shape.

Context | The context of a book or passage is the world and the words that surround it.

- *Immediate historical context:* What historical circumstances (time, place, people, culture) does the book reflect or address? How does the historical context shed light on this particular passage?
- *Immediate literary context:* How do the passages right before and after this one shed light on this passage's meaning? Where does the passage come in the flow of the whole book, and how does the passage contribute to that flow?
- *Broader literary/historical contexts:* How does this book fit in the flow of the books of the Old and New Testaments? At what point in the big story of salvation history does this book come? In general, how does the whole-Bible context help us understand this passage and this book?
 - If the whole Bible is about God's redeeming a people for himself through his Son, for his glory, then how might you explain in one sentence just how this book fits into the Bible's storyline of redemption?

Unifying Theme | By "unifying theme" we mean the big idea of a book or a passage. Every book or passage has themes (recurring ideas) at work in it; the unifying theme is the main message communicated as these themes combine, develop, and pierce our hearts.

- What are some of the main themes that stand out in the whole book?
- If someone asked you what this book communicates about God, how might you respond in one sentence?
- If someone asked you what is the unifying theme of the book, how might you respond in one sentence?
- If someone asked you what is the unifying theme of the passage, how might you respond, in one sentence? How does the passage's unifying theme relate to the whole book's unifying theme?

Aim and Application | An author's aim is what he/she intends to accomplish through his/her words. Once we begin to grasp the author's aim for the original audience, then we can resonate with that same aim in our own lives and in the lives of those to whom we minister. Application, then, is the process of bringing that aim to bear on the specifics of our lives today: How will this passage make a difference in our hearts and actions?

- Discerning an author's **aim** in a passage:
 - Does the book tell us why the author wrote it (for example, John 20:30–31)? If the author doesn't tell us explicitly, are there other indications in the book as to why the author wrote it?
 - How would you summarize the author's aim in writing this passage? And how does the aim for this passage relate to the author's overarching aim in writing the whole book?
- **Applying** the passage to people's heart in a way that grows out of the text's unifying theme and aim:
 - In what ways do you find this passage accomplishing the author's aim in your own heart?
 - As you align your aim in teaching this passage with the author's aim in writing it, what kinds of concrete applications might you develop for your audience? How do these applications exalt Christ Jesus the Lord and turn us toward him?

Some Recommended Resources for Ongoing Growth As a Word-Filled Woman

- Begg, Alistair and Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Name Above All Names* (Crossway, 2013). A celebration of the Person and work of Jesus Christ according to seven Biblical themes, such as “Jesus Christ, the Son of Man.” Each chapter strengthens the understanding of how Jesus fulfills God’s Old Testament promises, thereby training how to interpret various parts of Scripture in light of its whole story of salvation.
- Beynon, Nigel and Andrew Sach, *Dig Deeper: Tools for Understanding God’s Word* (Crossway, 2010). Simple, clear tools for biblical exposition, with good detailed examples and practice questions.
- Carson, D. A., *The God Who Is There: Finding Your Place in God’s Story* (Baker, 2010). A Bible overview that deepens our appreciation for the whole of Scripture by evaluating its parts. Carson has also written a Leader’s Guide for this book, so that together they make a great small group resource.
- DeYoung, Kevin, *Taking God at His Word: Why the Bible is Knowable, Necessary, and Enough, and What That Means for You* (Crossway, 2014). An extremely helpful volume for understanding the nature of the Scriptures and why we study, teach, and love them.
- Furman, Gloria and Kathleen Nielson, editors, *Joyfully Spreading the Word: Sharing the Good News of Jesus* (Crossway, 2018). Here are theological reflections and real stories from women from across the world who are eagerly sharing the good news of Jesus wherever God has placed them— showing us just how possible it is to follow Jesus’s call to evangelism in our ordinary, everyday lives.
- Furman, Gloria and Kathleen Nielson, editors. *Word-Filled Women’s Ministry: Loving and Serving the Church* (Crossway, 2015). Women from a spectrum of ministry contexts provide concise theology and practice of Word-based ministry among women in the local church.
- Goldsworthy, Graeme, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (IVP, 2002). Goldsworthy lays out basic principles to interpret the Scriptures in light of God’s progressive revelation of his redemptive purposes across history.
- Helm, David, *Expositional Preaching: How We Speak God’s Word Today* (Crossway, 2014). Although Helm focuses on expositional preaching by pastors, anyone who is interested to learn how to expound the Scriptures in various contexts can learn a great deal from his basic approach.
- Helm, David, *One to One Bible Reading: A Simple Guide for Every Christian* (Matthias Media, 2010). Wonderfully practical and sound wisdom for those eager to learn how to work through a biblical passage/book with another person. A brief and easily digestible volume.
- Roberts, Vaughan, *God’s Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible* (IVP, 2002). A concise book providing a bird’s eye view of God’s story of redemption, with study questions included in each chapter. This is a great book to read with beginners of various ages or those who want to solidify their understanding of the Bible’s big story and learn to articulate it clearly. (For online content: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/course/gods-big-picture-tracing-storyline-bible/>)
- Ryken, Leland, *Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction to the Bible* (Baker, 1993). A clear and accessible introduction to the Bible as literature, with careful explanation of various biblical genres.

Check out Simeon Trust’s online courses and training workshops, at <https://simeontrust.org> !