

OK, we've collected, categorized and cataloged. Now we need to hone that material. We want to be as precise, as *concrete*, as we possibly can.

Concrete Concepts

Interpretation

Weeding your garden

This process is very much like weeding your garden. Think about weeding for a second. When you weed, what fundamental procedure are you implementing: search and destroy! You've got to seek out those life forms that don't belong and remove them, being very careful not to remove those things that do belong.

This can be a very tricky process. If you have ever weeded anyone else's garden you know the difficulty. Sometimes its hard to spot the real thing, and sometimes you pull what you thought were weeds but really were not.

So it is with interpretation. When you have your catalogue of details on a given subject, its necessary to run back through and make sure every detail belongs.

Weeding for accuracy

As we move into this concept, we are getting ever closer to the presentation of our material. As such, you'll begin to think in terms of the material you're going to be presenting, and rightly so. However, you must also keep in mind that you are still in the interpretation phase. There will be more weeding of our presentation material, but the purpose of weeding there is conciseness, whereas here it is accuracy. In other words, we are at this phase, not so-much interested in weeding out extra material, rather extraneous material—we're not weeding additional information, but inaccurate information.

By inaccurate, I do not mean inaccurate in itself, rather I am referring to that information which does not readily relate to our subject or passage—material that in a proper context would be helpful, even accurate, but in the wrong context is damaging, even damning.

Different Levels of Weeding

Imagine a multi-tiered garden, with different types of plants at each level. In this type of garden, you would weed at each level using the same procedure: remove those items not belonging. The difference is determined by type of plants that do belong. You may even need to weed out non-weeds—plants that belong at a different level.

Now, envision your study material in the same way. You have topical studies, word studies, passage studies, etc.... Likewise, you need to weed at each of those levels. The procedure is much the same: finding elements which do not belong. The distinction is based on the appropriateness of that material at that level. However, the garden analogy ends here, because we will often mix types across levels. The point is not to keep your word study only looking at words, etc..., but to make sure that the specific material you are using in your word study really relates to that word study; likewise in a passage or topical study. Some examples may help.

Caveats to Weeding

Be careful! We're ever so likely to think of this as a way to approach our study as a means to prove our doctrinal point. That's not the purpose of weeding. In this phase we have already done our study, we have already found our material, we have organized it etc... we are now simply removing the unrelated. Of-course you'll naturally do this along the way as well, but it is imperative that you avoid, to the best of your ability, building on preconceived notions.

Similarly, we are also to avoid removing items that simply do not fit within our own doctrinal position. In other words, we've gathered and organized all this material, are going through it and go, "uh oh, this causes me to draw a different conclusion, one which I do not like, therefore, it must go!" That, of-course, is not good.

Therefore, we are neither to weed to prove our point, nor are we to weed to remove things that disprove our point. Rather, we weed in order to remove items that do not relate to our point.

Homework

Expanding your tree

Time to add some twigs to those trees.

Remember the tree exercise from last week (pg. 79)? It's time to expand upon that. Pick one of your 3-5 trees and begin to fill it out*. Make sure you have at-least 3 limbs (categories). Do a topical study, using whatever tools you have available, on at-least one of these, resulting in at-least 3 branches (sub-categories) of this limb (category). Have at-least 2 twigs for each of these, consisting of either references, or word-study topics. **For example:**

Topic: End Times.

Categories...

I. The Rapture	II. The Return of Christ	III. End-times Judgements
A. Definition/Description B. Extent (who?) C. Timing (when?) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Rev. 3:10 2. 1 Thes.5:1-11 3. The Church <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Absence in Rev. 4-19 b. Removal of restrainer (2 Thes. 2:1-9) 4. Kingdom Population 		

**Choose carefully, because this tree is going to form your in-class presentation material. Calm down, you won't be presenting these next week. We still have a lot of work to do before we're ready for that. But, we're beginning to build some material to use for our presentation. Also, work diligently, because you're going to start handing in your homework for me to make suggestions on.*

We said that interpretation is to observation what diagnosis is to inspection. Likewise, application is to interpretation, what prescription is to diagnosis. In observation we see what is there, in interpretation we answer what does what we see mean, in application we put the principles to work in our lives. You've seen what it said, you understand what it says, now you live what it says. James speaks succinctly on the matter: "Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works" (James 2:18b). What good does it do to know if you are not willing to live by that knowledge?

2 Timothy 2:2-3

And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. 3You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

3 Steps to Teaching

- **Gathering** our Material
 - Observation
 - Interpretation
 - Application
- **Organizing** our Material
- **Presenting** our Material

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Application Hazards

In interpretation we sought to determine what the text means, in application we seek to determine what it means to me. As we do this, there are two extremes in approaching the Bible for application that we tend toward, both of which are hazards to avoid.

The No Application Hazard

For some, interpretation is enough. I now understand the Bible, and that's all that is needed. The Holy Spirit will do the rest. Certainly, without the Holy Spirit's work, we would be in dire straits. But, it's not at the application level we would first need the Holy Spirit, rather the understanding level. Yes, the Holy Spirit plays a crucial role in the application of the Word to our lives as well, but that does not mean we just sit back and let Him do the work. As James wrote,

22But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; 24for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. 25But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does. (James 1:22-25)

The No Interpretation, Only Application Hazard

Equally dubious is the opposite extreme, wherein we dive into the Word for our "blessing" or daily guidance, totally ignoring the entire interpretive process. In this approach, it is very easy to make the Scripture mean and say what it really doesn't. Therefore, we must never abandon proper interpretation, which introduces us to our 9 steps to properly apply the Bible to our lives.

The Nine Steps to Proper Biblical Application¹

- 1) Build application on interpretation.
- 2) Determine what was expected of the original audience.
- 3) Base applications on elements present-day readers share with the original audience.
- 4) Recognize how God's working varies in different ages.
- 5) Determine what is normative for today.
- 6) See the principle inherent in the text.
- 7) Think of the principle as an implication (or extrapolation) of the text, and as a bridge to application.
- 8) Write out specific action-responses.
- 9) Rely on the Holy Spirit.

¹ The "Nine-Steps to Proper Biblical Application" are borrowed from Roy B. Zuck's, *Basic Bible Interpretation: A Practical Guide to Discovering Biblical Truth*, pp. 282-291. Victor Books, Wheaton, 1991.