

Western

MAGAZINE



SPRING 2016 | BIBLICAL LITERACY

FAITHFULLY INTERPRET GOD'S WORD

One of the consequences of the United States moving culturally to a post-Christendom paradigm is an increase in biblical illiteracy. There is no longer a widespread understanding of the basic message of Scripture (which in turn fuels a general diminished respect for the transcendent truthfulness of that message). For example, one survey documents that 60% of Americans can't even name five of the Ten Commandments.

Sadly, this ignorance is also increasingly present in the Church. Survey after survey report that even self-identified evangelicals are much less knowledgeable about biblical content than one would expect of those who claim to be "people of the Book."

The tragic consequences of this ignorance are obvious. First, how can we rightly obey God's commands if we either misunderstand them or aren't even aware of them? Furthermore, if we miss the rationale and context behind His commands, we will be like children who lack the motivation to obey when their parents commend or forbid certain actions because they don't appreciate the love and wisdom that undergirds that counsel. Superficial and misguided discipleship results, causing a credibility crisis when we talk with others about the beauty of gospel transformation. Second, the gospel message itself can be miscommunicated if we don't read Scripture carefully. As a fellow seminary president has written, "An individual who believes that 'God helps those who help themselves' will find salvation by grace and justification by faith to be alien concepts." (He references a study in which over 80% of surveyed Christians believed that was a biblical verse.) It's very difficult to be missionally effective if we don't have our core message right and if our lives contradict our message.

As a seminary whose mission is to promote spiritual renewal through theological education, Western is seeking to redress this illiteracy on a variety of fronts. A sampling of these efforts are featured in this issue of Western Magazine.

Dr. Carl Laney begins by offering an antidote to "biblical myopia," namely understanding the big picture and central themes developed in the Bible. Alumna Whitney Woollard follows with some helpful suggestions on how to assimilate biblical truth so that it results in the counter-cultural transformation that God both intends and enables.

Attention then shifts to illustrations of how Western alumni and ministry partners are creatively seeking to increase people's awareness of what Scripture actually teaches. Popular music often reinforces a misunderstanding of biblical teaching (for example, some of us will remember the infamous phrase, "never been a sinner, I've never sinned..." in Norman Greenbaum's "Spirit in the Sky," a song often sung in Christian youth groups back in the 1970s). Western is therefore joining forces with leaders of Humble Beast Records to bring more accurate and robust theology to the Christian artistic community, including an upcoming conference illustrating how theology and the arts should interface.

Dr. Todd Miles offers five guidelines for properly interpreting Scripture, and three fellow Western professors offer personal perspectives on three of the leading Bible study software programs. Finally, we call your attention to the Center for Leadership Development (a tool produced by Western to offer low cost, high quality biblical training to the Church) and the vision of its new directors.

May the Lord use this issue to renew your commitment to a careful study of Scripture so that you may represent Him faithfully and fruitfully as His ambassadors!

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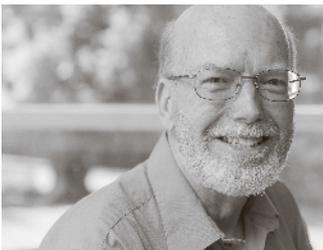
Western Seminary strives to serve as a catalyst and resource for spiritual transformation by providing, with and for the church, advanced training for strategic ministry roles.

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BIBLICAL ILLITERACY IN THE CHURCH TODAY

By Dr. Carl Laney

Thirty years ago, a perceptive Christian leader identified a serious concern for pastors, church leaders and seminary professors. He wrote, “Today a form of illiteracy abounds that is especially dangerous precisely because it is unrecognized. It is particularly prevalent among those of us who read the Bible regularly, memorize verses, and are committed to the authority of Scripture. I am referring to our biblical and historical myopia or nearsightedness. We lack a world view, a vision of the whole.”¹

Today, we still see this problem of “biblical myopia” in our sermons, Bible studies, and even how we converse with each other about the Bible. We teach Bible stories and often tack on little morals. But we fail to explain how all of the pieces fit together in the great flow of holy history. Seldom are believers presented a picture of God’s all-encompassing plan for the ages.

The story of David and Goliath (1 Sam. 17) is one of the most celebrated stories of the Bible. We all love how David, the shepherd boy, defeats the Philistine giant Goliath. We speak of his fearlessness and faith as he confronts Goliath with a shepherd’s sling and five smooth stones, and we cheer when the giant falls. But how does this story fit into the great story of the Bible? What is the narrator trying to teach us through this exciting text?

Inherent in the gospel-centered message of the Bible is that Israel’s God is the one true God, in contrast to the many false gods people are prone to worship. Belief in the one true God is the starting point for

all the great themes of the Bible. This is what the narrator of the David and Goliath story wants readers to embrace. Facing Goliath and the Philistine army, David announces to the army that God will give him victory “so that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel” (1 Sam. 17:46). Everything else in the story is presented as the context for communicating this great truth! Throughout Scripture we find God introducing Himself as the one true God (Exod. 3:13–15, Deut. 6:4, Isa. 40:12–26). As the writer of Hebrews comments, “He who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him” (Heb. 11:6).

For the last thirty-eight years as a Bible professor at Western Seminary, I have been seeking to address and respond to this concern for “biblical myopia.” In my own seminary training I was taught the importance of biblical exegesis. As students, we focused our attention on books and texts which are crucial to the development and support of our Christian theology. We immersed ourselves deeply in the great books of our faith like Romans, presenting the doctrine of justification by faith, and Hebrews, presenting the person and work of Jesus Christ. But while mastering the details, many of us lost sight of the big picture. We failed to understand and embrace the over-arching story of the Bible revealed in Genesis through Revelation. Hence, we have fallen short of communicating the grand drama of salvation history to the people in our congregations.

How can pastors, seminary professors and Sunday School teachers move beyond merely telling the stories of the Bible to declaring the great story of God’s plan for the ages? The key, I believe, is to give more attention to proclaiming the major Bible themes in our teaching and preaching. In this article, I would like to identify some of these themes and show how they can be used to provide believers with a greater understanding of God’s plan for the ages.

THE BLESSING/CURSE THEME

In the first two chapters of Genesis the word “blessed” appears three times. God blessed the sea creatures, the land animals, and the seventh day. The repetition of “blessed” reveals that God has a plan to bless the world that He has created. But in chapters three and four, the word “cursed” appears three times. God intended to bless His creation, but a curse resulted from Adam’s disobedience and sin. The curse is evidenced in Genesis 5 where all of Adam’s descendants (except one) dies. The theme of blessing and cursing can be traced through Scripture. In the chapters that follow, we discover that God has a plan to remove the curse that came as a result of sin and restore blessing to His creation (Gen. 12:2–3). As a result of the work of Jesus on the cross, believers are “blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ” (Eph. 1:3). And by the time we reach the closing chapter of the Bible, the apostle John writes, “There will no longer be any curse” (Rev. 22:3). God’s great plan for the ages is simply to reverse the curse that came as a result of sin and restore blessing to His creation. Most of the stories of the Bible are sub-stories of this grand narrative.

THE PROMISE THEME

In recognition of the unity of the Bible as one great story, Walt Kaiser has identified the “Promise-Plan of God” as a unifying theme which permeates the pages of Scripture from Genesis through Revelation.² The promise has its beginning in Genesis 3:15 where we find the first “good news” (*protoevangel*) of the

Bible. Here God promises that a descendent of Eve would receive a painful wound on the heel, while giving Satan a deadly wound on the head. This promised descendant of Eve would sacrifice Himself to save humanity and achieve victory over Satan.

The theme of God’s promise advances in His promise to Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3) and is confirmed with Isaac and Jacob. God promised Abraham and his descendants a land, a nation, and a blessing. The promise of a land is advanced and developed (Deut. 30:1–10) and the promise of a nation is further developed in a promise given to David (2 Sam. 7:12–16). The promise of blessing is elaborated in the promise of the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31–34 and Ezek. 36:25–28). We see this promise confirmed and advanced when the angel Gabriel identifies Mary’s unborn son Jesus as the one with whom the promise will be fulfilled (Luke 1:32–33). Through His death Jesus enacts the New Covenant which provides the basis for all humanity to be blessed through the offering of His once-for-all sacrifice on the cross. Paul writes to the Gentile churches in Galatia teaching that the blessing promised to Abraham can be theirs on the basis of faith (Gal. 3:9,14,22). While the promised

THE BIBLE IS ONE BOOK TELLING ONE GREAT STORY OF HOW GOD HAS REACHED OUT FROM ETERNITY INTO TIME TO GIVE US A PLACE IN HIS STORY.

blessing is chiefly fulfilled in Christ, there are future implications for the nation of Israel as well. The promise of the land and nation will be fulfilled in the messianic age when Jesus returns to judge the nations, redeem Israel, and rule His earthly kingdom from Jerusalem.

THE KINGDOM THEME

One of the great themes of the Bible is the Kingdom of God. The Hebrew Scriptures predicted it; Jesus announced it; Paul wrote about it; and John envisioned it. This theme is highlighted in Psalm 10:16, “The Lord is king forever and ever!” The Bible teaches that God’s kingdom is eternal. Jeremiah declares, “But the Lord is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King” (Jer. 10:10). We also learn from Scripture that God’s kingdom is universal. The psalmist writes, “His sovereignty rules over all” (Psa. 103:19). Many texts of Scripture reveal that God possesses absolute authority and rules as the eternal King over all creation. The essential elements in the kingdom theme of Scripture are God’s people, in God’s place, under God’s rule.³

The Bible records that sometime in antiquity past, God’s universal kingdom was challenged by a created being known as “Satan” or

“the Devil.” Scripture reveals very little about Satan’s fall, but his sin constituted an act of rebellion against the sovereign authority of God. At his fall, Satan instituted a counterfeit kingdom to parallel God’s kingdom and challenge His authority. Satan is a usurper, claiming kingship and seeking to exercise his authority over this earth. Paul refers to him as “the god of this age” (2 Cor. 4:4) and the “prince of the power of the air” (Eph. 2:2). Every ruler needs subjects and Satan is no different. In order to gain a following, Satan tempted the first human couple and successfully carried out his scheme to bring about their fall. The world, under Satan’s sway, stands in open rebellion against God.

A sovereign God cannot let His kingly authority be successfully challenged. To do so would indicate that the king is not really sovereign. So God established a plan to reclaim His kingdom and to reassert His sovereign authority on this earth—the place where it was challenged. We can trace the steps of God’s reclaiming His kingdom from Genesis through Revelation. A major junction in this journey occurred when John the Baptizer announced, “Repent, the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 3:2). John introduced King Jesus to the people of Israel with the words, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” (John 1:29). Although King Jesus was rejected by Israel, the Bible traces this narrative through to Revelation where we read of the return of the king and the establishment of His kingdom (Rev. 19–20). God is in the process of reclaiming His kingdom; this is the story of the Bible. The incidents that occur along the way are simply episodes of this great kingdom theme.

THE REDEMPTION THEME

The redemptive theme of Scripture is often more familiar. A central narrative of the great story of the Bible is God’s plan to redeem fallen humanity through the promised “seed,” the Messiah Jesus. Genesis records how God provided Adam and Eve with a lovely place where they could thrive and enjoy His blessing. There was just one prohibition, “From the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat” (Gen. 3:17). God warned Adam that violation of this one command would result in death. Well, you know the story. Adam and Eve succumbed to temptation, disobeyed, and they and their descendants became subject to physical death and spiritual separation from God (Rom. 5:12). What a sad chapter in the story of the Bible. Yet because of His infinite grace and sacrificial love, God chose to redeem fallen humanity and provide a way of deliverance from the fate of spiritual death.

The narrative of redemption begins in Genesis 3:15 and continues through the pages of Scripture to the last chapter of Revelation where what Adam and Eve lost in Eden—the tree of life—is restored in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 22:2). And in every step along the way, the means of salvation is always by grace, through faith, based on blood. Abraham was saved by grace, through faith in the sacrifice that Jesus would make on the cross (Gen. 15:6, 22:8, John 1:29, Rom. 4:1–3). This is the same means of salvation presented by Paul (Eph. 1:7, 2:8–9).

THE JUDGMENT THEME

Having reclaimed His kingdom and redeemed fallen humanity, one might conclude that the story is over. But not quite; a holy God can’t ignore sin. Rebellion against God has deadly consequences. While God’s plan for salvation provides deliverance from this judgment, those who reject His provision are subjects of His



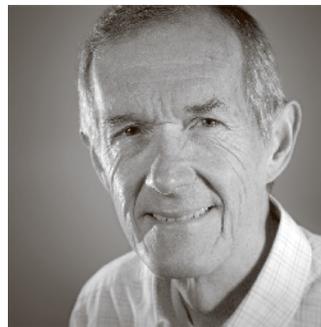


wrath (Eph. 2:3). God's judgment is presently and progressively taking place (John 3:18–19) and has an eschatological culmination.

Scripture tells of a future judgment on the first rebel and enemy of God's people. Jesus spoke of the "eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41). The judgment on Satan began at the cross (John 12:31). His wicked activities are further restricted during the millennium (Rev. 20:2) after which he will be confined to the lake of fire forever (Rev. 20:10). His followers—those who have rejected Christ and His provision of salvation—will be raised and judged, joining Satan in the lake of fire after the millennium. The final judgment will involve the purging of the earth to remove the effects of sin and fall in preparation for the New Heavens and Earth (Isa. 65:17–25, 2 Pet. 3:10).

CONCLUSION

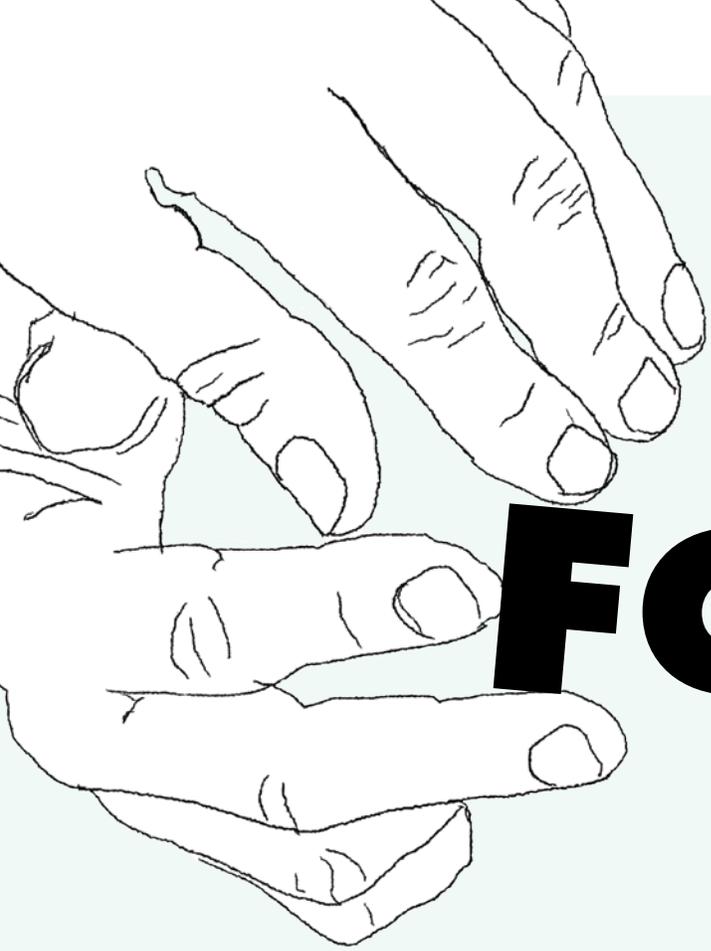
The Bible is more than a collection of thrilling stories or a library of inspired books. The Bible is one book that tells one great story of how God has reached out from eternity into time to give us a place in His story. As you read the Bible, look for the themes that reflect and propel this story. Like a sparkling diamond, the story of the Bible has many facets. But it is one story! It is the story of a great king who offers His love and forgiveness to a sin alienated people. It is the story of the end of a curse and the restoration of blessing.



Dr. Carl Laney is Professor of Biblical Literature at Western Seminary. He is the author of multiple books, including "Answers to Tough Questions: A Survey of Problem Passages and Issues." In addition to his for-credit courses, Dr. Laney also teaches Old Testament and New Testament Overviews for the Center for Leadership Development Biblical Studies certificate.

Endnotes

1. Richard Foster, "Getting the Big Picture: How we can know the Bible—and not just Bible trivia," *Christianity Today*, April 18, 1986, pp. 12–13. While not in agreement with all Foster's views on mystical spirituality, I do concur with his assessment cited here.
2. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Promise-Plan of God," Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008.
3. Graeme Goldsworthy, "Gospel and Kingdom: A Christian Interpretation of the Old Testament," Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1981.



FIVE SIMPLE WAYS TO BE **FORMED** BY GOD'S WORD

By Whitney Woollard

*This post is from the
Transformed blog archives
and is a part of Western
Seminary's partnership with
Gospel-Centered Discipleship.*

Five years ago, if you would have told me I would be susceptible to the black hole of social media and Netflix, I would have laughed. But these days I find myself increasingly formed by hours of screen time rather than God's Word. I might spend ten minutes on Facebook or USA Today before I get out of bed to read my Bible. Or watch Netflix at the end of a long day in the place of meditating on Scripture. Or scan fitness blogs instead of talking about God's Word with my spouse. It feels harmless, yet these voices unconsciously shape me.

More than any other time in history, God's people are distracted by endless cultural noise in our limited 24 hour days. When we give thoughtless hours to these distractions, something will inevitably get crowded out. God's Word is often the first thing pushed aside. Entertainment isn't evil in and of itself; rather it's a gift from God if enjoyed in a way that leads to worship. However, if we don't intentionally prioritize biblical formation above other formation, these outside voices will unconsciously shape us more than God.

HOW CAN WE RECOVER BIBLICAL FORMATION?

The Bible always has been and always will be formational for the Church. God gave it to us that we might orient our lives, identities, and practices around the God who has spoken. Over and above every other word in our lives, God's authoritative Word must form our lives, our families, and our missional communities. We must commit ourselves to not only hearing God's voice but also submitting ourselves in obedience to that voice. In a culture of endless voices ready to shape us into their image, we must fight to recover biblical formation.

These simple practices are the regular ploughing of our heart with God's Word. You will be more apt to think God's thoughts, challenge cultural norms, spot your own blindspots, feel spiritually nourished, and grow in godliness. As your appetite for and commitment to God's Word grows, it will drown out the cultural noise all around you. Also, the recovered art of biblical formation in your life will produce marked transformation in the life of your community as you seek to make, mature, and multiply disciples.

MEDITATE ON A PASSAGE FOR FIVE MINUTES IN THE MORNING AND NIGHT

Psalm 1:1–2 depicts a man who delights in the law so intensely that he pores over God’s words morning and night. This practice shapes him in such a way that he becomes like a deeply rooted tree which yields fruit in due season. Every single one of us (regardless of busy schedules) could set apart five minutes in the morning and evening to reflect on God’s Word. What would it look like for you to build this into your daily routine? What changes need to be made to reserve ten minutes for biblical meditation?

For me it’s easier to read the Word in the morning and then zone out to TV/phone at night. I’ve set a cut-off time for all screens and put my Bible next to my bed as the only thing within my reach. I’m not suggesting this as a “legalistic” boundary, but I am sharing what’s helped create an atmosphere that enables me to prioritize the Word of God over other distractions. Examine your routine, decide where you could prioritize God’s Word, pick a passage, and ask the Spirit to shape your heart and mind through the Word every morning and night.

TALK ABOUT GOD’S WORD WITH THOSE AROUND YOU

Deuteronomy 6:6–7 explains how God’s Word shapes His people as they talk about it with their children, as they walk along the roads, as they lie down, and as they get up. This wasn’t formal “theological training,” it was biblical formation as they went about their daily routines. God’s people today must learn to weave His Word into the fabric of our lives in this same manner.

This can be implemented in endless ways! Talk to your children about Jesus in the small tasks throughout the day, tell your family what God is teaching you through His Word, talk to your friends about what you’re wrestling through in the Scriptures, tell co-workers (even unbelievers) what verse you’re pondering that day. I find that people don’t naturally talk about God’s Word in informal settings. This isn’t a scripted gospel-presentation, rather it’s talking about God’s Word as you might your favorite TV show the night after an explosive episode. This may even be the most formative change you make.

LISTEN TO THE BIBLE DURING “EMPTY” PERIODS

Throughout history God’s people primarily heard His Word. As a matter of fact, many ancient texts were written to be heard rather than read. This should not replace Bible reading and study (praise God we now have access to many translations of the Bible!), but it’s helpful to hear God’s Word as its original hearers did.

Download an audio Bible translation and listen to it during “empty” periods in your day, times when you have tasks to complete that take little-to-no brainpower. These are the moments we are most tempted to turn on a sports broadcast, the TV, or listen to our own self-talk. Instead, listen to the Bible when you do laundry, exercise, mow the lawn, fix the car, drive to work, clean the house, cook or bake. Don’t obsess about giving the audio 100% of your focus; just throw it on in the background. You will be shaped by it more than you think. This has been one of my favorite habits I’ve recently implemented.

IN A CULTURE OF ENDLESS
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US INTO THEIR IMAGE, WE
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BIBLICAL FORMATION.

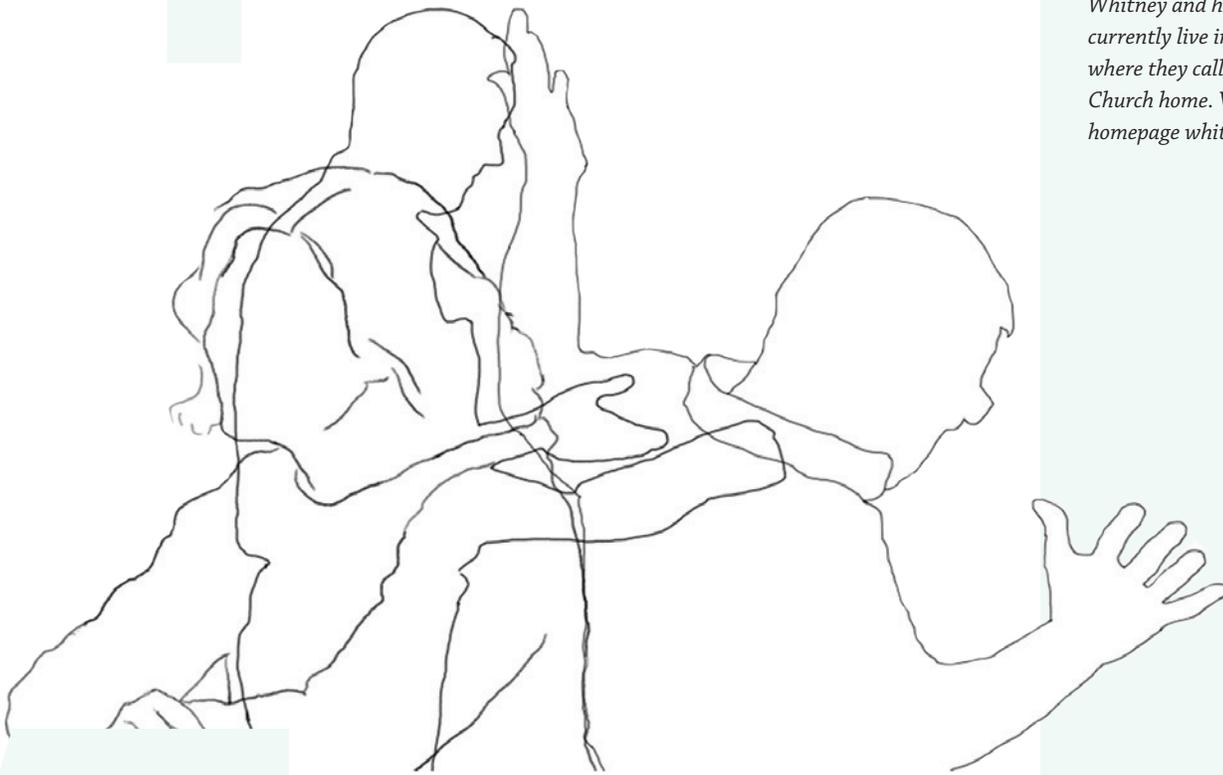
GATHER TO HEAR GOD'S WORD CORPORATELY

There's a powerful story in Nehemiah 8:1–8 in which God's people gathered to hear the Law read and interpreted. It changed them as they corporately heard and responded to the Scriptures. The practice of gathering to hear and respond to God's Word has been an integral part of His people throughout redemptive history.

Today, we must be committed to gathering each week to hear God's Word preached. This actually takes a small amount of effort (outside of getting ready and driving to church). Simply attend your local church gathering and actively listen to biblical exposition. A steady diet of the preached Word week in and week out has power to form you. Of course, there are times you just can't get there, but the norm should be gathering with God's people on a set apart day to hear God's Word.



A Western Seminary alumna, Whitney Woollard is passionate about equipping others to read and study God's Word well. She is a regular contributor to "Gospel-Centered Discipleship" and guest writes for various other blogs. Whitney and her husband Neal currently live in Portland, OR where they call Hinson Baptist Church home. Visit her writing homepage whitneywoollard.com.



MEET FOR REGULAR BIBLE STUDY

Colossians 3:16 exhorts believers to "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom." Meeting weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly with other people to study Scripture is a formative practice. Many of my most fruitful relationships have been borne out of faithful Bible study.

Don't overcomplicate this. Set a regular time and place to meet. Do it in a convenient place such as your home, a park, or your office. Build it naturally into your schedule—meet forty-five minutes before work with co-workers or during your child's play date with another mom or thirty minutes before class with a fellow student. Pick a short book (e.g., 1 John) and commit to read through it separately then meet to discuss. Talk about points of conviction and how you will respond.

TOOLS FOR INTERPRETATION

Do you want to better understand the language and context of the Bible? Bible software can be a great resource in your studies. In fact, Western so believes in the benefit of these tools that we recently entered into a special arrangement with Logos to offer our students an amazing discount on that program. Below, three of our professors explain which program works the best for them and why.

BIBLEWORKS

Review by Dr. Jan Verbruggen

Bibleworks focuses on the Bible. It comes with access to Bibles in 40 languages, often with many different translations in each language (200+), and over 50 original language texts. While it does not focus on giving you an electronic library, it does come with the most important research grammars, dictionaries and lexicons in the major biblical languages of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, as well as a number of introductory grammars.

Beyond this, it provides a great number of additional features like a biblical map app (just move your mouse over a place name in an English Bible and it will bring up a detailed satellite map with the probable location of your biblical site), a vocab app (for learning the original languages), a time table (covering all of the major events related to the Bible or the Church), access to the Sectarian Dead Sea Scrolls, the Apocrypha, the Talmud, a number of Christian confessions, Josephus, Philo, the writings of the Church Fathers, some classic books on Church History, Theologies (Grudem and Bavinck), with most of the original language texts analyzed grammatically and searchable. The user can make notes on any word in the text, any verse or any chapter written in any European language, interspersed with Greek, Hebrew, or Aramaic. These notes will automatically pop up the next time you look at that word, verse, or chapter. For those interested in the original text, Bibleworks gives you access to the original manuscripts by way of detailed photographs of the Leningrad Codex and a large number of the New Testament Greek manuscripts. Bibleworks comes with free access to video tutorials for everything that you can do with the program.

LOGOS

Review by Dr. Gerry Breshears

I highly recommend Logos, the superstar of Bible software that runs on virtually every device you own: PC to Mac, desktop to mobile phone, syncing them all.

The powerful and expandable electronic library combines materials of all sorts: commentaries, articles, encyclopedias, sermons, videos, maps, and more. This makes deep exegetical work with biblical

PASTORS AND MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL IN THE MODERN AGE ARE BLESSED TO HAVE MULTIPLE BIBLE PROGRAMS TO ASSIST THEM WITH THEIR LIBRARIES AND LANGUAGES.

texts possible. I particularly appreciate the interlinear display that parses English, Hebrew, and Greek words. With just a few clicks you can go deep quickly. (This is limited by the size of your base package.) The strength of the Logos system is its power to find and relate information across your whole library. Type in a key word or reference in one of the search windows and it searches your whole library (or any specified part of it) to find materials.

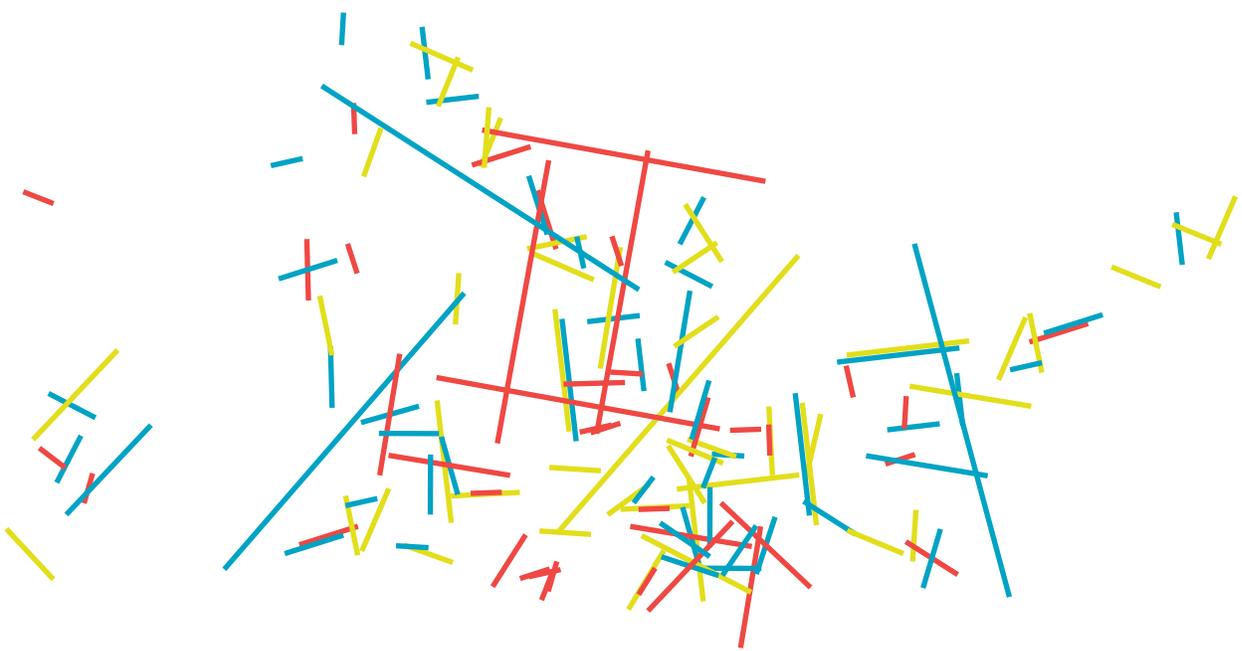
Access to a large library, no matter where I go, enables on the spot research in the most remote parts of the world. While you can copy into other documents with footnotes automatically appended, you cannot lend a book to a friend. As with any powerful software package, your use will depend on how much you invest in instructional training and the hardware to run it. But anyone can do a lot with the simple search windows. Logos can be expensive. It will not save money over print materials, though it will speed up your research and enable you to look at many resources. As with any electronic library, you will need to keep up to date which means regular investment.

ACCORDANCE

Review by Dr. Patrick Schreiner

Pastors and ministers of the gospel in the modern age are blessed to have multiple Bible programs to assist them with their libraries and languages. Each Bible program available (Logos, BibleWorks, and Accordance) have similar functions, but they also specialize in their own way.

I prefer Accordance for several reasons. First, Accordance is text-centered. I use my Bible program mainly to perform Bible study functions and they have set up their program to where the text is central. As a native Mac program, the developers have devoted time to making the space simple and intuitive. They do not distract you with all the functions the program can perform, but focus on the searching function and the text. The text is always before you in Accordance. This seems theologically right to me. Second, Accordance excels at language capability. Although the other programs do have language functions, I find that you can do both more in-depth study, and do it quicker, with Accordance. Third, Accordance is nimble. It never slows down my computer or smartphone, and when I click "Enter" the results appear immediately. Previous experiences with other programs stalling out drove me back to Accordance. Although Logos is better for building your library affordably, I have decided to stay with Accordance because of the ease of use, text-centeredness, language capabilities, and because it is the most nimble of the programs.

An abstract graphic consisting of numerous thin, overlapping lines in red, blue, and yellow, scattered across the white background. The lines are of varying lengths and orientations, creating a sense of dynamic movement and complexity.

GROUNDING ENDEAVORS

Biblical literacy provides the necessary constraints to ground and inform creative endeavors. In this interview, Dr. Ryan Lister speaks with Thomas Terry, owner of Humble Beast Records and rap artist, to discuss how Scripture provides a framework for the arts.

A continuation of the abstract graphic from the top, featuring a dense cluster of overlapping red, blue, and yellow lines on a black background. The lines are scattered and chaotic, mirroring the style of the top graphic.

Ryan Lister: *Tell me about Humble Beast. What is it?*

Thomas Terry: Humble Beast is a record company. We create music and music resources that attempt to put the glory of God on display. We are a collective of artists from all across the country. Our roster includes Propaganda from Los Angeles; Beautiful Eulogy from Portland, Oregon; Jackie Hill Perry from Chicago; and Sho Baraka from Atlanta. We write songs about Jesus: His goodness, kindness, and mercy to humanity. Humble Beast has four distinctives: creativity, humility, theology and doxology. Creativity we use as a vehicle to drive theology, the truth about God, in a posture of humility knowing that none of us are above anybody else, imitating the incarnation of Jesus. We want to do all of these things with the end goal of worship (doxology). So creativity, theology, humility, and doxology all intersect at Humble Beast and we don't do anything without touching on one of those distinctives.

On the business side of things, Humble Beast functions much like a record label. We make records. We put records up on iTunes and digital retailers. We sell merchandising and we support artists while they tour. We do everything that a record company would practically do, however, ministry is what drives us. We love and care for people, so we want to see people come to know Jesus. We want to see people come to know the Bible. We want to see Christians living and thriving in Christ. So, because of our commitment and passion for people and ministry, we use the record company as a vehicle to communicate these things.

RL: *What is your view of Scripture and how does that connect to what you are doing? How does the local church help you be faithful to this view?*

TT: I believe that Scripture is God's very Word to His people. It is the final authority over all matters of life; it is our compass and our guide, so we might better understand who God is, and how to live in light of that. God reveals Himself to us through Scripture and we grow in our understanding of the Scriptures within the context of the local church. So one of the things that we look at when it comes to churches is, are they faithfully preaching God's Word? Are they presenting it as it ought to be taught? Do they have a right understanding of Scripture or are they twisting and making it something else? So we value men who can preach God's Word the way it should be preached. That happens in our church and that's why we're there. Just as the Church submits to the authority of Scripture, so does our ministry.

RL: *So you have a high view of Scripture that informs your art and your ministry, and those are one and the same in a lot of ways. What then does biblical literacy mean for you as a pastor and an artist?*

TT: Biblical literacy means that I know what God's Word says. I know it and am able to apply it to my life. Specifically, this means that I am familiar with the text (I know what is actually recorded in the Bible), I can interpret it in the larger context of the Scripture narrative, and I can apply transcendent truths to my life. So there is a cognitive side of it that means I have to be able to open it up, read it, process, think, and pray that God would apply those truths to my heart and apply those truths to all matters of life. If I am dependent on someone else to tell me what it is, I am at

a disadvantage. That means I'm dependent on someone else to help me understand. It would be really challenging for somebody who didn't have a sense of biblical literacy to thrive as a healthy Christian.

RL: *Can you give me an example of how this view of Scripture has affected you as an artist? Maybe in a song or album as a whole?*

TT: I'm part of a hip-hop group called Beautiful Eulogy. We've written a song called Symbols and Signs. This song explores how people interpret who God is and also how people experience God. If I did not have a strong biblical literacy, I would be left with just my experience and my interpretation of those experiences. This is dangerous because what one person experiences is largely different from what another person experiences. Something has to govern that experience. So that song was written to help people understand that you have to submit to Scripture to interpret experience. That's the reality, because if we don't have the Bible to interpret our experience, we're left to a whole bunch of crazy

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things. If you allow the Scriptures to determine how you think, feel, and believe, you have a different grid to look at life. So that song was basically written to help people understand: don't look to symbols and signs, don't look to your experiences, don't look to your emotions, and don't look to television evangelists; look to the source of all truth, and that's Scripture.

For Beautiful Eulogy, our burden is to create songs that wrap our head around Scripture. We tend to thrive in that type of environment. It's what we're most passionate about. We want to communicate in our music tools that are helpful for the Christian and we believe that the greatest tool is God's Word.

CANVAS

A CONFERENCE ON THEOLOGY & CREATIVITY

IMAGES & IDOLS / PORTLAND, OR
AUG 12-13 / IMAGO DEI COMMUNITY

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PROPAGANDA / SHO BARAKA / JACKIE HILL-PERRY
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PERFORMERS

KINGS KALEIDOSCOPE / BEAUTIFUL EULOGY / PROPAGANDA
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humble beast.



RL: *Why does biblical literacy matter for the creative community?*

TT: I think artists see beauty, notice things, and explore aesthetics in ways that others don't. For example, I personally find beauty in words where someone else would see words as strictly utilitarian. I delight in words; for me, they are more than a tool for communication. Words are art to me. Because artists are so bent to appreciate aesthetics, because they're so driven by art, sometimes their art and their view of aesthetics can determine what is good or bad, right or wrong, pleasing or not pleasing; subjectivity is huge. Oftentimes the artist must wrestle with what governs their thinking and how they interpret life, because they are so used to interpreting life through an artistic grid. Oftentimes it's really challenging for Scripture to be the thing that governs. If their mind is not wrapped around the Bible and they don't allow for the Bible to determine truth, justice, morals, meaning, and beauty, but rather allow their art to do it for them, there is a huge danger. Scripture allows artists to look at art through an appropriate grid. It still allows them to find beauty and to interpret things, but it's ultimately governed by solid foundation.

RL: *So Scripture is the external authority that helps us understand ourselves, whereas with the creative mind-set that seems to be reversed?*

TT: Absolutely. I think that some, not all, but the vast majority of artists that I know (outside of Humble Beast) would say that when you take an outside authority and put those constraints on your art, it is very limiting; it is oppressive. The mystery of God's truth is that when Scripture governs your interpretation of life,

it actually causes your art to flourish and gives you freedom. It's outside of you, so you have much more to look at, and truth is behind it, so that means there is tremendous depth to explore. You move beyond a superficial "I feel this way because this is how it makes me feel;" it's rooted in something that has substance. So while other artists might look at that outside governing force as oppressive, for myself and for artists who are in community with me, we find it to be liberating.

RL: *Why is biblical literacy missing in this community? Is it because of those things?*

TT: I think it has to do with idolatry. Artists spend so much of their time crafting and working with their hands, words, or mind, that I think their creations can easily become an idol for them, and idols occupy the center most place in the heart. It is what they yield to. In this, the Bible oftentimes is pushed aside. Admittedly, this is often unintentional, but just by virtue of the time, creative, and emotional energy invested, creating can quickly and unknowingly become an idol. You have to learn to recognize those idols and then deal with it. And I think that is why the idea of biblical literacy is so bankrupt in the artistic community: art is the thing that they pursue most, not Scripture.

RL: How does Humble Beast help the creative community better understand the Bible?

TT: We speak to a culture that, in our mind, really wrestles with biblical illiteracy. Most in our culture don't know how to read or interpret their Bible, and so they don't find beauty in God's Word. Further, they don't know how to apply the truth or the beauty of Scripture to their lives and so we feel compelled to communicate these truths to God's people, ultimately for their benefit. I think about when I was 13 or 14 years old, all I had was music. I came from a fatherless home, a bankrupt family; I wasn't raised in a Christian home, and so music taught me how to think about life. I learned about justice and love through music, and although it was really distorted and broken, that's how I learned to navigate the ways of life. Music is powerful and can communicate some profound things, which is one of the reasons why we use this medium. It's not because we're amazing at it or because we're young and it's the hip thing to do; we use music because it is an effective tool to communicate the truth of who God is, what He's done for humanity, and package it into something that is more palatable for people.

RL: Besides artists and music, is Humble Beast doing other things to bring biblical literacy to the world?

TT: Humble Beast has started to produce some curriculum, in partnership with Western Seminary, that speaks biblically to some key issues. We are launching a video podcast, and out of this video podcast we're talking about what the Bible says on issues like fatherlessness, social justice, and loving people outside of the Church. These things have nothing to do with music and have everything to do with teaching God's Word to people. We're also doing a lot of work with the organization called Streetlights, which works with folks who cannot read. We take word-for-word Scripture and put it under a music soundscape so that people will be able to hear the Word of God, absorbing and applying it to their life. So we are a ministry and a record label that is committed to creating resources that exist within our wheelhouse. Whatever we can do, whether it's a book, video, or a song, our end goal is to communicate the glory of God, the truth of His Word, and how that affects people.

RL: What's the Canvas Conference and why are you doing it?

TT: Canvas Conference is happening because we see so many artists, even within the Christian community, lost when it comes to theology. They don't understand theology and that has an impact on how they do art. They don't understand theology and so that has an impact on how they work. They don't understand theology and that impacts the way they live. Theology and Scripture inform all matters of life. We are so committed to this idea of helping people understand theology and the Bible that we wanted to create a conference that speaks to the creative. It will feature lectures, poetry, performers, music, and visual arts and will happen August 12th-13th, 2016 at Imago Dei Community in Portland, Oregon. Find out more or register at www.thecanvasconference.com.

www.humblebeast.com

Humble Beast is a family of creatives, pastors, writers, theologians, and musicians who leverage their talents to see the gospel go out into the community and transform lives. Humble Beast is committed to modeling generosity. Because of this, they give their music away for free. Find out more about their music and ministry at www.humblebeast.com.



Thomas Terry is the owner and proprietor of Humble Beast Records and a member of the "hip hop and hymns" group, Beautiful Eulogy. Thomas also serves as an elder at Trinity Church in Portland, OR.



Dr. J. Ryan Lister is Associate Professor of Theology at Western Seminary. He is the author of "The Presence of God: Its Place in the Storyline of Scripture and the Story of Our Lives." He and his wife, Chase Elizabeth, have four children.

FIVE COMMON BIBLE INTERPRETATION ERRORS

Interpreting the Bible correctly and faithfully is not difficult.

By Dr. Todd Miles

Why would I say such a thing? It is not because I have any confidence in human ingenuity or intelligence, nor do I believe that the subject material of Scripture is simplistic and weightless. I am certainly not under the illusion that people never misinterpret the Bible. Far from it; ridiculous Bible study errors are commonplace. So despite all the evidence to the contrary, why do I believe that Bible interpretation is easy?

For this very simple reason: The Lord, the divine author of Scripture, is an effective, accommodating, and kind communicator. He knows what we need to know and how best to communicate it. In an act of wonderful mercy, the Lord worked in and through human authors to reveal Himself and His redemptive plan. Because of this, the Lord's good communication comes to us in human language, written according to the sensibilities of normal human communication, couched in the forms of typical human literary genres.

I think there are so many egregious Bible interpretation mistakes because people often open the Bible and treat it like it is something other than what it actually is: the Word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit, written by human prophets, wherein God reveals Himself and His redemptive plan to His people. What does it look like when we forget what the Bible is? Here are five mistakes that commonly arise.

1

Forgetting the Bible is not a magic book: Ignoring immediate context

I have never met anyone who likes to be taken out of context—not even one person. Have you ever noticed how many politicians, movie stars, or professional athletes, when they are trying to get off the hook for saying something foolish, will claim, “I was taken out of context.” That is how obviously important context is when it comes to determining meaning. We all know this. It is basic to human communication. But how many times have you seen someone read or claim a verse without any regard for its context? One of the most common examples is reciting Matthew 18:20, “for where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them,” to invoke the Lord’s presence during a prayer meeting. The context tells us that this statement of Jesus is a promise of His authoritative presence in the midst of the Church discipline process. When we rip words out of context and claim them as though God must be beholden to them simply because He said them, we are treating the Bible like a magic book.

2

Forgetting who and when we are: Ignoring historical-cultural context

Sometimes, we forget that the Bible was originally written to an audience very different than ourselves. For example, the New Testament was written to a first century Greco-Roman audience in the Greek language. We are separated from those folk by geographical, cultural, technological, and chronological distance. Those are significant hurdles to overcome. And yet, some people read the Bible as if it were originally addressed directly to

them. Paul’s admonition to “Greet one another with a holy kiss” should not be woodenly read as cookbook instructions to twenty-first century Pacific Northwest local church greeters. The principle of offering a warm greeting no doubt applies, but the holy kiss command was written to a people used to greeting one another in that way.

3

Forgetting the story: Ignoring biblical-theological context

The Scriptures are not a collection of divine sayings that can be randomly chosen and applied. Rather, the Bible tells the story of Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Consummation. The story progresses as God does different things with different people. Major categorical changes occurred when God introduced different covenants. Ignoring the biblical-theological context is akin to taking a US History book and looking for guidance from the colonial structure on how

to obey traffic laws today. When God told His exiled Old Covenant people, “Seek the welfare of the city,” in Jeremiah 29:7, there was more going on than the giving of instructions to New Covenant churches on how to serve local municipalities.

4

Playing the dictionary game: Ignoring how words work

Words have meanings, not meaning. But a word has a singular meaning in context, when it is used in a sentence. Occasionally, if a person is clever, a speaker will intend multiple meanings by a singular word in a sentence. When that happens, we call it a pun. The biblical writers were very clever, and like the rest of us, when they used a word in a sentence, they intended one meaning for that word. I have been to Bible studies where a person will say, “I looked this word up in the dictionary and I found that it could also mean ___ and _____. When I plugged those meanings into the sentence, I was really blessed.” And people will look at that individual like they did something deep and spiritual, when what they actually did was irresponsible and foolish. We would never want others to do such a thing with our words. Why is it okay to treat the biblical authors and biblical Author so disrespectfully?

5

Forgetting what literature is: Ignoring genre

Literary genre refers to the type of literature and the rules for interpreting it. There is no such thing as the “one biblical literary genre.” Instead, the Bible has a host of different literary genres, such as poetry, historical narrative, parable, prophecy, proverb, law, apocalyptic, etc. Each genre does different things and was specifically chosen by the biblical author to accomplish his intended task. As readers, we should be used to transitioning from literary genre to literary genre seamlessly and without difficulty, because we do it often in our day-to-day lives. Which of you have ever confused a baseball boxscore for an editorial in the newspaper? And yet, how often do people read proverbs like they are promises or Old Testament narratives as though they are New Testament letters?

Most Bible study errors can be avoided by asking these two questions:

What is the context?

What is the genre?

Dr. Todd Miles is Professor of Theology at Western Seminary. Before his doctoral studies, Dr. Miles was a Research Engineer at Pacific Northwest National Laboratory for ten years. He is also the author of “A God of Many Understandings? The Gospel and Theology of Religions” (Nashville: B&H, 2010).



A black and white photograph of a young woman with long, light-colored hair, looking down intently at an open book resting on a desk. A laptop is partially visible in the foreground on the left. The woman is wearing a dark top and a light-colored cardigan. The background is softly blurred, suggesting an indoor setting like a library or study area.

W

estern Seminary's Center for Leadership Development complements the biblical and theological training of the Seminary's degree programs by providing resources for churches and individuals who otherwise might not have affordable access to resources grounded in God's Word. In many ways, the CLD exists to address the problem of biblical illiteracy. Individuals can take courses online from any location. Churches can use the materials for small or large group classes. All are rooted in the Bible and cover a wide variety of topics, such as foundations in biblical and theological studies, elder training, and Christians in the marketplace.

As you may have read in our winter edition of *Renewal*, Dr. Jim Hislop, who led the CLD for three years, retired at the end of April. Dr. Bert Downs and Dr. Josh Mathews have assumed joint leadership of the program. While many tasks related to course production, distribution and customer care will be shared, each of these leaders will also focus on a specific area in the program's development. They each reflect on those emphases below.

BERT DOWNS

Director, Leadership Development

Three stories from my life underscore the emphasis I bring to CLD. The first grows from twenty years teaching Walk Thru the Bible Seminars, and seeing the coffee break comments of participants deteriorate from "I can't believe the Bible's stories fit together so beautifully," to "Are those stories really in the Bible?" The second involves a conversation with a veteran pastor who said to me, "If another elder moves or dies, I'm out of leaders." In working with hundreds of churches, I've found that more of a reality than we'd like to admit. When I shared this with my friends at Leadership Catalyst, their response was, "This isn't a leadership problem. It's a maturity problem." I believe they're right.

The last experience is very personal and involves some costly help I offered to a difficult person that kept him out of serious trouble and helped open a new possibility for his life. In that process, he asked this question of me, "Are you for real?" Before the word "authentic" was a cliché in evangelical circles, this experience and others like it convinced me that spiritual maturity expressed authentically in life is the power source that often seems to elude us. It's that power source I want to see moving toward commonplace in the lives of individual believers and in the faith communities to which they belong. It's the context from which leaders emerge. It's also our story in Christ, and my hope for and through CLD is that more and more believers and emerging leaders will be able to live it, tell it, and lead it in powerfully advancing the Good News.

JOSH MATHEWS

Director, Faith and Work Initiative

One aspect of the CLD I will be focusing on in particular is the area of faith and work (or vocation). In the "Christians in the Marketplace" track we offer several courses related to this topic, and this is part of a broader initiative to train Christians to think theologically and biblically about vocation. One of the negative impacts of biblical illiteracy is that Christians who are not in occupations typically regarded as ministry positions (like pastor or missionary) sometimes struggle to see their work as a meaningful part of God's kingdom purposes. This disconnect that often occurs between church on Sunday and one's work throughout the rest of the week can be attributed, at least in part, to the diminished role of the Bible in the life of the Church and its people.

To put things positively, we want to help Christians see their daily activities, responsibilities, and work with a perspective shaped by God's Word. As they discover the richness of the story of Scripture, culminating in the person and work of Christ, they will grasp the gospel's impact on all facets of life. My hope and prayer is that the plumber, the businessperson, and the stay-at-home mom will be equipped to better understand and appreciate the biblical picture of God's kingdom and its king Jesus, and that this will enable them to view their work as fruitful and fulfilling.



Dr. Bert Downs is Chancellor and former president of Western Seminary. He has also served as Executive Director and Regional Coach for Southwest Church Connection. Experience Bert's teaching in "Big Screen Perspective Bible Survey," available through the CLD Biblical Studies certificate.



Dr. Josh Mathews is Assistant Professor of Biblical Studies at Western Seminary. Before joining Western full-time, he served as associate pastor at a Portland area church. In his role at Western, Josh aims to serve the Church by helping equip its leaders and future leaders to know God through His Word, and to love Him and glorify Him in their lives and ministries.

