

SELF-FEEDER

EARS Pt 1 - Explanation

Pastor Andrew Hackler

Hebrews 4:12; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:17-21

October 8, 2023

I love the Word of God. It is so deep, so fascinating, so true. By it, we can know whose we are and therefore who we are. We can interact with the very words of the One who told His disciples, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

We have the distinct opportunity to sit under the teaching of the great apostle who encouraged the church in Rome: "Do not be conformed any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

We can recount the story of the Promise that would change the entire fate of all mankind: "All the nations of the earth will be blessed by your offspring." By this promise, you and I, Gentiles, could be ingrafted into the family tree of God.

In this we have a promise that there is a God who cares more deeply for us than any human can. We have a message of truth, peace, and grace. We have a story for the world. This is not mere advice. This is a proclamation that God has forgiven us our trespasses.

Take your Bible. Hold it out in front of you. You are holding in your hand a precious treasure. There's a reason that this is the best-selling book in the world. Unfortunately, that best-selling nature, while leading it to a lot of shelves, has left these Bibles on their shelves and in cars, and on tables, scarcely to be interacted with. It has led us as a society to overlook it. It has become commonplace and shrugged at.

Christian, this is God's Word! He wishes to speak to you! Dive in! Experience the matchless love and wisdom of our Father!

For the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It is able to judge the ideas and thoughts of the heart. Hebrews 4:12

All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16-17

For we did not follow cleverly contrived myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ; instead, we were eyewitnesses of His

majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, a voice came to Him from the Majestic Glory: This is My beloved Son. I take delight in Him!

And we heard this voice when it came from heaven while we were with Him on the holy mountain. So we have the prophetic word strongly confirmed. You will do well to pay attention to it, as to a lamp shining in a dismal place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. First of all, you should know this: No prophecy of Scripture comes from one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the will of man; instead, men spoke from God as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. 2 Peter 1:17-21

It is my conviction and belief that Scripture is the only source of authority worthy of being primary in the Christian life, as it is the only purely objective and incorruptible source of God's Word for all people and times. Now we've established that in this study already, but just to reiterate... it is that!

Now, I understand the common complaint. The Bible is just too hard to read. Too hard!

But through it all, what we must remember is that while reading the Bible can be harder than reading a work of fiction or even the dictionary at times, it wasn't always this way.

There was a time in which people heard these words and knew exactly what they meant. They weren't left guessing about it. This is because of two dynamics that aren't necessarily unattainable from our modern perspective.

When readers in the Ephesian church read Paul's letter to the Ephesians, or heard it from someone orating it, they would be able to connect with the words flowing from the paper. Because this was a letter written directly to them. **They were living it!** Paul's purpose was never to be vague in his writings.

He always wrote so that he would be understood. And that's something we should always keep in mind when reading the Bible! **The Bible is meant to be understood!** We forget that sometimes, don't we?

The hard part for Paul as he was writing these letters, was that he may not have even known that these would end up as part of biblical canon. So it's no surprise that these letters have very specific applications to the churches in those days. (Philippians 4:2 "I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to agree in the Lord.")

This same principle applies with Jesus' parables. Jesus never meant to be misunderstood. Sure, he expected his listeners to do a little critical thinking, but he spoke these parables in order to teach. Not to confuse. Some are hard to make sense of today, but Jesus clearly spoke to them in order that they be communicated in Scripture for Christians throughout the millennia so that we may understand.

This being the case, what should we, Christians, do about this? We should seek to understand scripture and help other people understand Scripture! In fact, I believe that at the end of this study, you ought to be able to teach some of this to people around you, whether you are a teacher or as you participate in a group study.

To understand the Bible is to understand the foundations and standing point for our faith. This Holy Word should be what sets us, as believers, apart from the rest of the world. It should shape our lifestyles. It should inform our desires. It should move us into action! All with the integral help of the Holy Spirit.

This is called Hermeneutics. Hermeneutics simply means the study of interpreting the Bible.

So I'm going to introduce you (or refresh you!) to 3 actors and 4 questions. It sounds like a lot, but I think by the end of this we will all agree that **it's really pretty intuitive. And important.**

Three Actors

Me, Myself, and I

The first actor I want to introduce you to is yourself. The Reader. One of the most important things to understand about reading the Bible is that when we do so, we bring ourselves to the text. We bring our worldview.

Now, let's talk about our worldview. What do you think this means?

It's our surroundings, and the way we interpret them. Let's think of some things that define our context.

Now, we also bring our worldviews to the table. These are more personal and subjective. Someone who had a lousy father may have trouble seeing God as heavenly father. That's part of worldview.

Jeremiah 29:11 - This was written to Israel about their return from exile back to their homeland. But we want to read it as if it's about me, me, me. Now, it is fulfilled, both in Israel and in Christ, therefore we can trust that God has a plan for us... But it's disingenuous to treat that scripture as if it's written personally to me. If you want one more applicable to a believer, it's Romans 8:28.

So here we are, the reader, bringing our baggage to the table when we read the Bible. Fortunately we are not the only actors in the picture.

The Author

Next is the author. He had his ancient context and his ancient worldview that we must take into account when reading the Bible.

Now, something that we share is our common humanity. We connect and relate through this. So when John writes that Jesus wept, we can relate with that. When Paul says he opposed Peter to his face, we can connect emotionally with that.

But something else we have to understand is that God had a purpose in mind when He chose that author. So understanding the author and asking the question, “What is this author seeking to communicate” is an important part of the biblical equation that we can’t really leave out.

Now, in recognizing that there are human authors, we are not saying God is not the Supreme author, He is. But instead we understand that God sovereignly used human authors to accomplish His purpose. And it’s good that we recognize that... It shows us that we, too, have a part to play in God’s grand plan of the reconciliation of the world.

So to recognize a human author helps us to understand what we are reading when we read in Ecclesiastes that the author says, “Meaningless! Meaningless! Everything is meaningless!” We know that’s not God’s view of all things... It’s the author’s. And that is used to communicate a flow of thought throughout the Book of Ecclesiastes that culminates in the superiority of the pursuit of God.

This points us to the most important actor in this scheme.

God

God. He comes with a revelatory or “revealing” context. His context is truth, and He chooses to reveal that truth through something as dumb as a person. And He uses the surrounding context and nitty, gritty, dirty lives of His people to reveal perfect, life-giving truth.

The revelatory context is essentially the overarching truth that God is communicating through the Bible. He has the “30,000-foot view” of the cosmos and everything in it.

And in doing so, the Lord shaped the worldview of that author.

So, too, the Lord shapes and changes our worldviews.

And the Lord has an ultimate reason for that text to be there. He also has the authority to use that text to bring about change and life in us as we read it. There’s a work of the Holy Spirit that happens as we read God’s Word that brings illumination and realization, BUT we must proceed with this thought in caution that God will never contradict Himself. So I do think there are ways in which God uses the Bible in such a way that it may be beyond what the original author meant in our personal study, but that should never be a point of public teaching when that happens.

And in the middle of all of these things sits the text.

So to understand the Bible, we must take into account all of these things. And at this point, we can apply the deepest truths of the Bible to our lives.

Next topic is 4 Questions, but first, we must establish what those four questions are about, so here we go!

Here's a good example:

What if I said to you, "That's the biggest trunk I've ever seen!" How do you know what am I talking about? You will discern it by the context.

Word Context – what is the range of meanings of the word Trunk? What are the options? 1. A large piece of luggage. 2. A storage container at the back of a car. 3. The nose of an elephant. 4. The body of a tree. 5. Someone's backside.

History Context – of what time period am I speaking? If I'm quoting someone who lived in the middle of the 18th century, you know that it's not talking about someone's rear end.

Geographical Context – are we having this conversation in Africa, in the Redwood Forests, in someone's living room?

Conversation Context – what are we talking about that has led me to exclaim that this was a huge trunk? What kind of trunk am I talking about just from that sentence. But suppose you're showing me pictures of your trip to the Redwood Forest, and I exclaim, "That's the biggest trunk I've ever seen," what do I have in mind?

Context--that is, the surrounding text--will give more insight than anything else. When we read Scripture, we have to have the context in mind.

So, the 4 questions:

Historical:

The historical context is likely the biggest key to understanding what is being written. When reading the text, we want to know what's going on behind all these writings. Sometimes the text will tell us, but other times we may have to do some more work.

Who was the king or emperor at the time?

When this was written, had the Temple in Jerusalem fallen yet? Big one for Hebrews and Revelation.

What group of adversaries is coming after God's people at the time? Big for Galatians and Colossians.

What is happening geopolitically? Helps with the Books of the Kings and Chronicles and Daniel and others.

When Jesus says, "Came down from Jerusalem," why did He do that?

- What is the Historical Context?
- When was this written?
- What is going on when this was written?

Book:

What is the purpose behind the book's writing? Let's camp out here for a bit because this is magnanimous.

Purpose can completely change a message. For example: Let's say you receive a letter. All it says is: "I love you."

There are thousands of ways you can interpret this:

What if it's a note in your mother's handwriting? What's the purpose?

Girls, what if it's your BFF's handwriting?

What if you've had a fight with your boyfriend or girlfriend and you find this note under your door the next morning? What's the purpose?

Guys, what if it's from your best friend? (WHOA, back up!)

What if it's on colored paper and in your niece's handwriting with crayons? What's the purpose?

What if you recognize the handwriting as the person that has been stalking you and freaked you out? What's the purpose?

When you come across a writing, there is always a purpose for that writing. What is the book's purpose? When we read the Bible, sometimes the book will give us its purpose.

Read John 20:31

So, why was the book of John written?

Read Luke 1:1-4

So why was Luke written?

But it's not always this easy. As a matter of fact, most of the times, we are not given this. So we have to go by different means. If the reason is a little more difficult to uncover, try reading the book through multiple times. Soon, the book will answer a few questions for you.

- What does the book tell us about the author?
- What does the book tell us about the recipients?

Read Philippians 1:3-4

Read 2 Corinthians 2:1-4

- What does the book tell us about the occasion or purpose?
- Is there a repeated theme or idea that the author keeps coming back to?
- Romans comes back to salvation over and over again. It's Paul's magnum opus on salvation.
- What is the book context?
- Who wrote the book?
- Who was the book written to?
- What is the occasion or purpose for the book?
- Is there a repeated theme or subject that comes up again and again?

Paragraph:

These are the contexts you're probably most familiar with. Finding out what is being said in the paragraphs surrounding the verse in question. There will be a theme throughout the book, and the surrounding paragraphs will help you recognize what the author is addressing specifically.

Ex: 1 Corinthians 13, the love chapter, is couched in a discussion about spiritual gifts. So yes, it's fine to read at a wedding, but that doesn't capture exactly what Paul is trying to make happen here. He is trying to show that love is superior to whatever superior spiritual gift you think you bless the world with. Gives it a little more meat, doesn't it?

- What is the surrounding context?
- What is happening in the paragraph?
- What is happening in the paragraphs around? (1 Corinthians 13)

Word:

We also want to know what certain words mean. What can they mean and what do they most likely mean. Greek and Hebrew to English is not a simple, fluid transition. Many times, words have different semantic ranges in different languages.

Read Jeremiah 1:11-12

There are two Hebrew words here: "shaked" and "shakad".

There's beauty lost in the language there. Furthermore, "shaked" is derived from "shakad" because the almond tree is one of the first trees to bear fruit.

In an ancient sense, the almond tree would therefore "watch over" the other fruit trees. So it's rich in meaning! God will watch over His word to Jeremiah and His people. He will surely accomplish it. And God would surely make Jeremiah a prophet to the nations.

A more familiar example: Agape, Philo, Eros, and Storge. Self-sacrifice, friendship, romance, and affection. Knowing the word that's used for love in a biblical context can change the way you understand what the writer is communicating.

- What does the word mean?
- What did the word mean in the Greek?
- What COULD the word mean?
- How else is the word used in Scripture? (Here's where you can use a concordance)
- What does the word most likely mean?

So let's look at an example.

Philippians 4:13

One of the most misused verses today. It seems that many take this verse to mean: "I can do anything I want because Christ strengthens me!"

But Paul didn't have Tim Tebow in mind when he wrote this. Nor did he have a dream of growing rich and famous someday. Let's work to understand why Paul says this. We'll start with the historical context.

Christianity as a whole is facing persecution for spreading the Gospel. The church is in Philippi and Paul is in Rome. He regularly writes to churches in order to encourage them in their Christian walks.

Book Context: Read Philippians 1:1, 12-13, 21-26; 4:10-14

Paul was in prison. This was not a prosperity text. He wasn't throwing the game-winning touchdown.

"A text can never mean what it never meant."

See, scripture is not some magical, wispy book of nice sayings. It is not merely self-help. **It is a collection of God's interactions with mankind.** It is authoritatively God's Word.

It is His use of very real people in very real situations who were touched and had an insatiable desire to share the truth of God in written form, kept throughout the millennia so that we, His followers, may have ground upon which to stand in regard to faith, and so that He may speak to us!

One resource I greatly appreciate is *How to Read the Bible Book-by-Book*. If you don't have a copy of this, I'd recommend you get it. It gives a primer. This is what I call a

Commentary Lite. This book is jam-packed with information on how to study each book of the Bible.

1 Principle

God's Word is not meant to just be understood. It is meant to be obeyed.