



Lesson 7 -

# The Literary Context



# **Literary context includes:**

- **Literary Genre**

- **Surrounding Context**

**Literary Genre**  
is the type, kind or  
style of writing.

# **Why does the genre matter?**

**Each type of writing has rules for understanding it. If we don't use the right set of rules, then we will not properly understand the text.**

# **Example from everyday life:**

**You cannot interpret a love letter in the same way you interpret travel directions.**

**You cannot interpret a satire article in the same way you interpret a serious news article.**

# **Example from the Bible:**

**You cannot interpret the book of Revelation in the same way you interpret the book of Acts.**

# Types of Genres:



# **Old Testament**

- **Narrative**
- **Law**
- **Poetry**
- **Prophecy**
- **Wisdom**
- **Apocalyptic**

# **New Testament**

- **Gospel**  
**(Narrative / Biographic)**
- **History**
- **Letters**
- **Apocalyptic**

**We will discuss how to  
interpret each genre in a  
future class.**



**Surrounding context**  
is the text surrounding  
any given verse.

Words

Phrases

Sentences

Pericope (Complete thought)

Book

Literary

Historical / Cultural

Testament

Bible

Meaning



**Give highest priority to  
the immediate context  
when determining the  
meaning of your passage.**

**Example:**

**Philippians 4:7**

**“And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”**



**“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! <sup>5</sup> Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near.**

**<sup>6</sup> Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace**

**of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”**

**“<sup>8</sup>Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.”**

**We cannot expect to have God  
peace that surpasses all  
understanding if we ignore the  
surrounding context of that  
verse.**



**Dangers of  
Disregarding the  
Literary Context**

# **1) Ignoring the Surrounding Context:**

- Misinterpreting a passage**
- Misrepresenting God**
- Leading self and others to falsehood.**

# **Example:**

## **Matthew 18:20**

**“For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”**

# **Example:**

**Many people take this verse out of context and use it to say that they don't need to worship with the church.**



# **Example:**

**Matthew 18:15-20,  
in context verse 20 is  
talking about church  
discipline, not worship.**

**Stopped here 6-14-**

**2023**



## **2) Inaccurate Topical Preaching:**

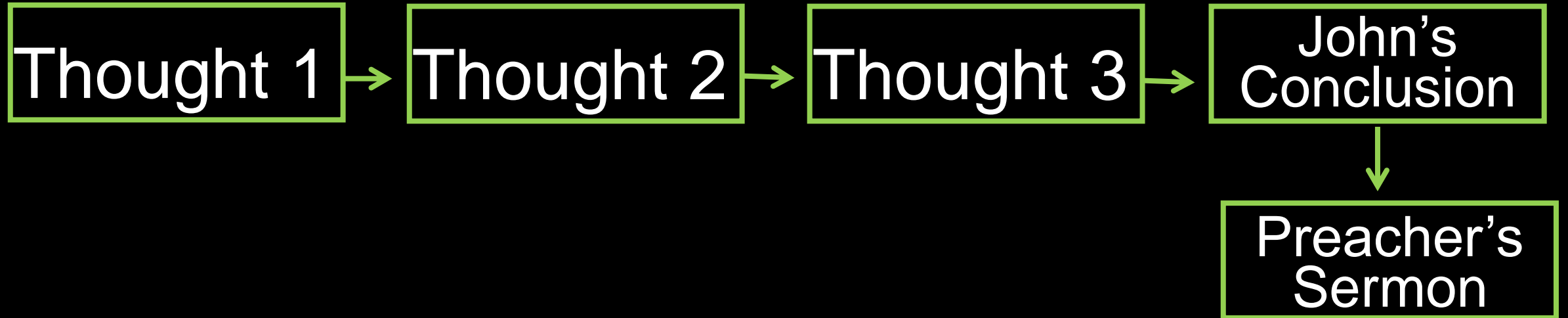
**“Topical preaching is a valid approach to preaching when the various passages are understood in context and the overall message does not violate those individual contexts.” (Grasping God’s word)**

## **2) Inaccurate Topical Preaching:**

**Too often topical sermons simply use verses that appear to be related without considering the context of those verses.**

# Example of a Textual Sermon:

## John 10



# Example of a Topical Sermon:

## John 10



## Psalms 23



## Acts 2



# Example of a Topical Sermon:

## John 10



## Psalms 23



## Acts 2



Preacher's  
Sermon



**When each passages is used in a manner consistent with its context, then there is no real problem with topical preaching.**

**However, topical preaching presents an increased possibility of passages being used out of context.**



**Identifying the  
Surrounding context:**

**We must remember that the Bible is more than just a collection of unrelated thoughts.**

**The Holy Spirit had the writers connect their thoughts in logical ways.**

**Our job is to identify how those thoughts are connected.**

# **Example of unrelated sentences being linked together:**

**Imagine flipping through TV  
channels and trying to make  
sense out of the interrupted  
sentences...**

# **Example of unrelated sentences being linked together:**

**“I heard an interesting story on the news the others night. The quarterback faded back to pass. Carbon buildup was keeping the carburetor from functioning properly. The Two-inch steaks were burned on the outside but raw on the inside.”**  
**(grasping God’s word)**

# **Questions that are answered by knowing the context:**

- 1. What is the unit's role or function in the book?**
- 2. What would happen if we removed this section from the book?**
- 3. Why did the author include this section as a crucial part of the whole?**

# **Example: 2 Timothy 2:22-26**

- 1. What is the unit's role or function in the book?**
- 2. What would happen if we removed this section from the book?**
- 3. Why did the author include this section as a crucial part of the whole?**



# **Steps for identifying the Surrounding context:**

**1) Identify how the book is divided into paragraphs or section:**

# Look for:

- 1. Conjunctions (e.g., Therefore, then, but)**
- 2. Change of genre (e.g., From a greeting to a prayer)**
- 3. Change in Topic or theme (main idea)**
- 4. Change in time, location or setting**
- 5. Grammatical changes (e.g., Subject, object, pronouns, verb tense, person or number)**

**Example:**

**Philemon**

# Philemon

- 1. Greeting (1-3)**
- 2. Gives thanks for Philemon (4-7)**
- 3. Paul appealing for Onesimus (8-16)**
- 4. Expressing confidence Philemon would do right (17-21)**
- 5. Closing remarks (22-25)**



**1) Identify how the book is divided into paragraphs or section.**

**2) Summarize the Main idea of each section.**

# Identify:

- 1. The topic or main idea of the section**
- 2. What the author says about the topic or main idea**



**Example:**

**Philemon**



**1) Identify how the book is divided into paragraphs or section.**

**2) Summarize the Main idea of each section.**

**3) Explain how your particular passage relates to the surrounding section.**

**This allows us to grasp how the whole fits together and how the instructions, rebukes, or information in the section are intended to be applied.**

**This is essentially an introduction to a sermon.**

**Stopped here**

**6-21-32**

**Suggested we study use**

**romans 1:16-17 as**

**example study**



# **Example:**

## **Romans 1:16-17**

- 1) Identify how the book is divided into paragraphs or section.**
- 2) Summarize the Main idea of each section.**
- 3) Explain how your particular passage relates to the surrounding section.**

# Romans 1

- 1. 1-17, The importance of obedient faith**
  - a. 1-7, introduction to Paul and the faith**
  - b. 8-12, Paul's desire to go to Rome.**
  - c. 13-15, The urgency of the faith**
  - d. 16-17, The power of the Gospel (faith)**
- 2. 18-32, exposition of disobedience.**
  - a. 18-23, descent into sin**
  - b. 24-32, the result of rejecting God**



# **How does Romans 1:16-17 relate to the surrounding sections?**

**Paul is expressing his motivation for evangelism and the solution to their sin problem.**

**Paul also gives the outline for the next section of the book.**



# **The importance of context exercises:**

**In Isaiah 14:12 to whom does the term “Lucifer” refer in the KJV and NKJV?**

**Give the verses in context that prove your answer.**



# **The importance of context exercises:**

**In 1 Corinthians 1:14 why did Paul say that he was glad that he did not baptize any of them except a few?**

**Give the verses in context that prove your answer.**



# **The importance of context exercises:**

**What pattern does Matthew use in  
Matthew Chapters 4 through 20?**

**What is the significance of this  
pattern?**

