

CHARLES SIMEON TRUST

WORKSHEET PREPARATION GUIDE

Preparing a Worksheet can be challenging. We want you to work hard and do your best. But we also don't want you to feel overly anxious about it. This document clarifies some of the terminology and the intention of the questions on the Worksheet to help you make progress in understanding it.

Each question on the Worksheet builds upon the one before. The questions follow a Pathway for Preparation. You start with Exegesis. Discover the structure of a passage to discern its emphasis. Understand how context informs the meaning of the passage. These will help you arrive at the author's main point to *his audience* (the original audience). Then you move on to Theological Reflection where you'll consider how your passage legitimately connects to the gospel. Having seen the author's main point in light of the gospel, you now begin to consider what your main point to *your audience* will be. You also need to think about how you will argue for that main point in your preaching or teaching outline. Then consider what applications will flow from the main point for the different people in your audience.

Audience

Prior to working through the Worksheet, consider an audience that you will have in mind as you study and prepare your assigned passages. It may be a weekly church context or an evangelistic talk on campus. It may be a room full of ministers or a room full of teenagers. This audience should be included at the top of your Worksheet. Your homiletical work (questions 5-7) should reflect *your audience*.

1. How has the author organized this passage? a) Show the structure in *sections* with verse references. b) Explain what *strategies* you used to discover the structure. c) What *emphasis* did you discern from the structure?

The *author's organization* (or *structure*¹) is a way of talking about the shape or form of a biblical passage. Beneath the surface of each passage is an underlying arrangement of material and a logic that the author has used to organize the passage. You might think of it as the author's outline. Each part of the passage has a role to play in that structure. When we ask you to identify the structure of a passage, then, we are asking you to identify that underlying shape. It might be a grammatical or logical structure (common in discourse), or it might be a plot arc, scene changes, or comparison of characters (common in narrative), or it might be the separation of the passage into stanzas (in poetry).

¹ The term *structure* is used to refer to the organization of a passage. The term *macro structure* is more appropriate for considering the structure of a whole book.

However you discover the author's structure, you should mark the sections of the passage, including the verse numbers. We also ask you to explain what strategies you used to discover the structure. We want to see how you arrived at your conclusions.

The goal of discovering the structure of a passage is to apprehend the *emphasis* that the author is making and has communicated through the structure. By *emphasis*, we mean what this text is about, not merely a summary of the passage. Understanding the flow of the passage, not just the parts, is important. Think through the structure and how the various parts relate to one another. Ask the *why* and *how* questions to see if you can observe the author's emphasis. This *emphasis* should be captured in just a few words.

What about Genres and Text Types?

Genres are categories of literature that have distinct characteristics and, as a result, require some particularized reading strategies. Most people would not read a newspaper the same way as a novel, or a letter, or song lyrics. The Bible has several different genres within it, including Old Testament History, Prophetic Literature, Wisdom Literature, Apocalyptic Literature, Gospels and Acts, and Epistles. While each Workshop will focus on a genre, and usually a specific book as a representative of that genre, the Worksheet questions are based on principles and so apply to any genre.

Text types are a slightly different idea from genres. They are both categories of literature, so it can be a little confusing. Genres are a bigger category and take into account things like content, place in history, form of literature, and rhetorical purpose. Text types, however, refer only to the form of the text in the passage—this is why this is so important for structure work. In the Bible, there are three major text types: narrative (or stories), discourse (or speeches), and poetry (or songs). Importantly, each of these text types appears in each of the genres. That is, there is narrative and discourse and poetry in each of the genres listed above. Each text type has specific structures and requires specific strategies for finding those structures. You should always begin by reading and rereading your passage and then trying to find the text type. A literal translation can be helpful at this point. Once you have a sense of the text type, use the following strategies:

- *Discourse* (or speeches): This text type is most common in the speeches within Old Testament History books or the Epistles. It is typically a single person speaking and tends to have a logical flow to it. As such, the key to finding the structure in discourse is tracing the logic or reasoning of the passage. You might try grammatical analysis (such as identifying the verbs or noting how some clauses and ideas are subordinated to other more dominant ideas) or tracing the flow of ideas (similar to arcing) or discourse analysis. Key words and transitional words are also very important, especially as they help you see the grammatical and syntactical qualities of the passage. And you will want to pay special attention to repetitions.

- *Narrative* (or stories): This text type is found mostly in the Old Testament History books, some of the Prophets, the Gospels and Acts, and Apocalyptic Literature. The key to finding structure in narrative is seeing how the story develops from beginning to end. The structures in narratives tend to revolve around things like scene changes (marked by changes in location, characters, time, etc), plot (setting, conflict, climax, resolution, new setting), or characters (similarities, contrasts, developments).
- *Poetry* (or songs): This text type is found throughout the Bible, but primarily in Wisdom Literature, Prophetic Literature, and Apocalyptic Literature. The key to finding structure in poetry is understanding how the stanzas work. Many English translations break poems into stanzas, usually with vertical spaces between the lines. This can be useful. However, the editors are not always right (nor do they agree)! You might try finding how the stanzas separate by noticing repetitions, changes in imagery, changes in voice/point of view/person (e.g., first person, second person, third person), or other poetic literary devices (e.g., alphabetical, parallelism).

As noted above, one of the first things you want to do is try to identify your text type. One common challenge to identifying text type is when you encounter dialogue (often in narratives). Dialogues are, in a technical sense, narratives. A narrator is relaying the interactions between two people. However, you have to ask an additional question: Is this dialogue functioning as a narrative or as a discourse? Sometimes, the presence of a second speaker is not because it advances a plot, for example, but gives the primary speaker a question or a comment to help them along in a functional discourse. As such, do not be afraid to treat a dialogue as a discourse, if you think that is warranted.

Specific strategies for each text type will be used to discover the structural organization. The next step is to consider how the parts of that structure relate to one another (how they correspond). Then discern what emphasis is revealed.

2. How does the context inform the meaning of this passage? Consider: a) the *literary context*, b) the *historical context*, c) the *cultural context*, and d) the *biblical context*. Include only what is relevant to the meaning of the passage.

Part of exegesis is understanding a passage within its proper context, namely how it would have been understood by the original audience. The intention of this question on the Worksheet is to consider how relevant contextual findings *inform* the meaning of your passage. A Worksheet should not simply list contextual findings but synthesize how the relevant contextual findings inform the meaning of the passage. And because you need to include only what is relevant to the meaning of the passage, some of the categories of context will not be included on some Worksheets.

Literary context refers to the larger literary section in which our passage resides. It is anything within the book, but special attention must be given to passages immediately before and after. The best way of finding *literary context* is to become familiar with the whole book by reading it over and over again. Get a feel for the major themes and arguments of the whole book. Get a feel for the story arcs and arguments in the major sections. Particularly important to understanding your passage is the passage that comes before and the passage that comes after. How do they inform your passage? Is there a larger discussion or topic that dominates them that might help you understand your passage?

Historical context refers to the historical situation or circumstances experienced by the author and his first audience at the time the book was written. For many books in Scripture, the date, location, author, and audience will be difficult to discern. Often, we need to work within a range of probability. The less certain we are the less likely historical context will be helpful in our study.

For *historical context*, it might be good to consider the following:

- *Old Testament History*: When considering historical context in any book, you first must identify (as best you can) the original author and audience of the book. This can be difficult to determine in Old Testament History, but you can estimate an approximate date of writing. For example, the setting of the book of Ruth is “in the days when the judges ruled.” However, this is not the historical context of the first audience. Since the book narrates the completion of the events included, it must have been written later than when the events occurred. In the case of Ruth, it couldn’t have been written in final form until at least after King David was born because he is mentioned at the end of the book. So, the historical context is at least after the monarchy was established. Finding references from other books throughout the Old Testament covering or addressing the same period in history of the original audience might also be helpful (e.g., in the Prophets or other historical books).
- *Wisdom Literature*: The Wisdom books are, for the most part, somewhat separate from historical context. Song of Songs and Job, for example, do not really give us any clues as to their place in Israel’s history. There are some good clues in Proverbs, but it is less clear that the historical context has a role to play in the book. So, ask yourself what you can learn from the Scriptures about the historical context, but be very slow and measured to rest your interpretations on it.
- *Prophetic Literature*: Like Old Testament History, it can be difficult to determine the original audience of a prophetic book. The original audience is not the people who heard the spoken prophecy or oracle but those who first received the completed written work. While it is not always possible to determine the situation of the original audience, they are normally people who lived at least after the events contained in the book. For example, in Isaiah, Sennacherib’s

attack on Hezekiah and Jerusalem is recorded as history. That means the earliest possible date of the completed written work is after that event.

- *Apocalyptic Literature*: This genre is found in both the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament it can be difficult to determine the original audience with certainty. Still, like the rest of the biblical genres, those who received the text are necessarily those who lived after the events recorded. In the New Testament, Revelation is more straightforward. The historical context is the situation of the churches to whom John is writing (we can learn about them in Revelation 1-3.) You will want to consider how the words that John is writing would have been heard by the churches.
- *Epistles*: The best source of the historical context of an Epistle is generally the Epistle itself. Look at the beginning of the letter and the end of the letter for clues about the particular situation in history. Look throughout the letter for references to named people or locations. In the Pauline Epistles especially, look at the specifics concerning opponents or false teachers. Ask yourself: 'What is going on in the city/region of the recipient?' Also, look in related passages. For example, if you are studying 2 Corinthians, 1 Corinthians might give you some good clues. If you are reading 2 Timothy, 1 Timothy will provide some help. And finally, the book of Acts is a very helpful resource. Look for corresponding references to places and people mentioned in Acts. This historical data is rarely going to be the key to reading a passage, but it almost always helps put the situation of the letter *in context*.
- *Gospels/Acts*: We know very little about the authors of the Gospels (remember that the Gospels are technically anonymous, though the traditions are very old and likely authentic) or, more importantly, we only have speculation as to where they were written and to whom. It is quite likely, in fact, that the Gospels were meant to be distributed widely throughout the ancient Mediterranean and so should not be tied to the particular situation of a particular church in a particular place. To be clear, this hint is entirely in reference to the historical context of the Gospels. Issues concerning that field of Biblical Studies called *historical Jesus* as well as the *cultural context* of the ancient Mediterranean are still very much relevant and should be reconstructed from the Gospels themselves.

For *cultural context*, one must consider the setting in the daily life of the people/characters in the book and how that will have been understood by the first audience. *Cultural context* refers to details, concepts or terminology in the text sufficiently known by characters in the text – though not necessarily known by our contemporary audiences – that require explanation or definition. This is distinct from historical context in that it does not relate to a particular audience in a particular place at a particular time, but the details of life that the people/characters in the text had in common. So, for

example, reading an agrarian parable in the Gospels might require an understanding of certain agricultural or economic realities that the people in the parable (and passage) and the first audience of that Gospel would have both had. Or, to connect with an earlier example, to understand cultural context in the book of Ruth, you could look at the book of Judges because the setting of the characters in the book is “in the days when the judges ruled.” That means reading Judges would tell you what life was like when Ruth’s story occurred. In the prophetic books it may be helpful to look at the reign of a particular king to get a sense of what problems Israel and Judah were facing to understand the prophet’s agenda. Remember, the first fulfillments of prophecies are often in the history of Israel and Judah themselves. Anything that can be derived from the Bible itself is, of course, reliable. Seek to glean as much as you can from the internal evidence of the Bible. Anything that requires extra-biblical knowledge should be treated a bit more cautiously.

Biblical context refers to how this passage uses earlier biblical passages. It considers legitimate, literary or historical connections between books (e.g., Isaiah alludes to the historical event of the Exodus, or Paul quotes a passage from the Psalms). For *biblical context*, you need to look very carefully in the passage. Is the author referring to some previous historical event captured in the Bible? That is, is the author citing or alluding to some previously written passage that was already in existence at the time of the author’s writing? Keep in mind, this is part of *exegesis*, so we are asking for what connections the author could have reasonably expected his first audience to make. We are not looking for theological connections (e.g., the author mentions *grace*, so let’s look at three other passages that talk about *grace*). That is part of *theological reflection* and will come into play in question 4. Here, we are looking for what references the author makes to other parts of the Bible (whether through direct citation or broader allusion). Go back and read them. And remember, the most important question is *why*? Why has the author chosen to make this biblical connection? What about that event or story or the context of that passage has captured the author’s attention? What is the author’s purpose in making that connection?

3. What is the main point the author is arguing to *his audience* (in one short sentence)?

The *author’s main point* is a way of talking about the aim of a passage as a whole. It can be descriptive or prescriptive. It is not a summary statement. But rather, it is the idea of which the author is trying to persuade his audience. It factors in not only the content of the passage but the intent of the passage. Reflect on what the author is *doing* through this text, not simply what the author is saying in the text. Consider what the author is saying about (or doing with) the emphasis that you discerned in question 1 on the Worksheet.

As you work on articulating the author’s main point, please keep in mind that 1) it is for the *first audience* (we’ll get to modern readers later), and 2) it should be one sentence that is both short and

clear, and specifically captures the *argument* of the passage. The goal is NOT to cram as much of the passage into your sentence as possible or to summarize the passage, but rather to focus on the main point (authorial intention) as clearly as possible. The *main point* of a passage could be a descriptive statement. It might also be phrased as an imperative because the author's primary point is a call to action. In any case, we hope that you will supply your best attempt at the *main point* as a way of demonstrating that you understand and can articulate the central intention of the passage and the author's agenda or claim in arguing it.

4. How does this passage connect to the gospel of Jesus Christ? How does this gospel connection function in relation to the author's main point? Why does this gospel connection matter for your audience?

The Bible gives us the conviction that the person and saving work of Jesus Christ is the unifying interpretive center of the Scriptures, according to the scriptures (cf., Luke 24:13-49). This means there is an organic relationship between any passage of Scripture and Jesus's person and saving work. If this is the case, we must do the rigorous and prayerful task of determining the relationship between our passage and the gospel. We must find a legitimate connection to the gospel, namely one that is *organic* to the text and *amplifies* the original author's main point. By *organic*, we mean a connection that arises from the specific words and themes of the passage. By *amplifies*, we mean that the connection flows out of, advances, and escalates the author's original intention. A legitimate connection will never be "forced" into the text, and it will never undercut what the biblical author is doing. The work of theological reflection will naturally move the preacher or teacher to consider the significance of a legitimate gospel connection for their audience. A legitimate gospel connection will never undercut what the biblical author is doing but always amplifies the author's intention for the sake of the audience today.

The first part of this question is asking in what way your passage—or really what parts of your passage—connects to the gospel. Your passage might anticipate the person and saving work of Jesus. Your passage may be announcing something directly about the person and saving work of Jesus. Your passage may be applying the person and saving work of Jesus. The important thing here is that the connection is legitimate and textually driven. We want to avoid the subjectivity of allegory or over-spiritualizing our passages. Make sure your connection is organically coming out of your study of the passage.

To answer the first part of this question, you might do well to consider several strategies:

- *Direct Reference:* This New Testament strategy can at times be the easiest strategy to see as, sometimes, the person and saving work of Jesus Christ is stated explicitly in your passage. This happens in the Gospels, but more frequently in the Epistles. Just make sure you treat the

gospel the same way the author did.

- *Prophetic Fulfillment*: Sometimes, the best connection is made explicitly, but in relation to a prophecy or its fulfillment found elsewhere in the Bible. *Prophetic fulfillment* is a biblical prediction or promise that is fulfilled in Jesus. The Old Testament creates expectation for a greater fulfillment in Jesus. In the Prophets, for example, messianic prophecies are stated that have both a proximate historical fulfillment and an ultimate fulfillment in Jesus. The Gospels and Acts and the Epistles often look back at such prophecies. When you have such a connection in your passage, explore whether this is the best way of connecting to the gospel.
- *Analogy*: An *analogy* is a broad set of comparisons (including similarity, contrast, and irony) between two concepts. As a strategy for gospel connection, it is a comparison of something in the passage to the person and saving work of Jesus that serves to highlight him and his work in a greater way. An analogy will be based on strong linguistic, conceptual, and thematic overlap between texts.
- *Typology*: *Typology* is a kind of analogy used in biblical literature. It is an analogical correspondence between persons, events, things, or institutions that prefigure Christ. There is a kind of progression in the comparison, where the final person or object or event is escalated in value in some way. In other words, a *type* is a pattern or a shadow that in some way points to an ultimate expression of it. And, for the purpose of connecting to the gospel, the type is a shadow cast by a particular facet of the gospel. The New Testament confirms the escalated fulfillment by Christ of these earlier types. Moses is an important prophet who anticipates the ultimate prophet in Jesus. David is a good king who anticipates the ultimate king in Jesus. There are always aspects of similarity and dissimilarity present in typologies.
- *Historical Trajectory*: This is one of the harder strategies to use as it requires having a fairly good grasp of redemptive history. Each of our passages describes something with a redemptive-historical value that exists on a timeline of all history, from creation to new creation. At the center of this timeline is the death and resurrection of Jesus. As such, your passage might include some kind of historical anticipation, some marker in history that inches closer (forward or backward) to the death and resurrection of Jesus. You might think in eras or epochs of salvation history and ask how your passage plays a role in the trajectory of history that is aimed at the cross and resurrection.
- *Biblical Theological Themes*: Themes are larger ideas that progressively develop throughout the Bible. They trace the development of key concepts that ultimately culminate in Jesus. Major themes include kingdom, exodus and exile, priest and temple, and covenant. There are several others. Consider how one of these themes might be present in your passage and, as a result,

how that theme then connects you to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

- *Systematic Theology*: The Bible often highlights doctrines or theological concepts that define, explain, or apply the person and saving work of Jesus. Various passages will teach the implications of the gospel, the results of the gospel, or the right responses to the gospel. When present, these systematic theological categories will be strong ways to connect to the gospel.
- *Ethic of the Gospel*: Sometimes your passage revolves around ethical action. It can be hard to see the gospel of grace in passages that so easily lend themselves to a message of obedience. The important thing here is to get the ideas in the right order. When we are saved, we are given the righteousness of Christ (justification), a righteousness that depends on faith (Phil 3:8-9; cf., 2 Cor 5:21). Works of righteousness do not save us, but they are how we are commanded to live in faith for our own good (sanctification), having been saved. When we come across ethical demands God makes of his people, we need to understand these demands in light of the gospel. So, you might look for foundational theological ideas in the context that provide the gospel basis for the ethics. The *ethic of the gospel* is the way of life demanded in light of the gospel. The gospel connection must support the author's ethical intention, not lessen its force. The gospel motivates and empowers Christians to live out God's ethical commands.

In general, the best way to demonstrate the legitimacy of a gospel connection, especially in the Old Testament, is to make sure you have a passage (complementary to your own) that drives the connection. That is, you want to make sure you are teaching gospel connections in the Bible, not just loosely related abstract theological concepts. A legitimate gospel connection will come organically from the passage. You also need to reflect on the specific aspect of the person and saving work of Jesus in view. The heart of the gospel is, of course, the death and resurrection of Jesus as a substitutionary atonement for human sin, providing eternal life in relationship with God. But there are other angles on the person and saving work of Jesus that might be more relevant to your passage, including the Incarnation, the Ascension, the Second Coming, and the life and miracles and teaching of Jesus. There are also implications of the gospel like repentance, faith, and obedience. And there are also results of the gospel like forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Any one of these might be the strongest, textual, legitimate connection from your passage to the gospel.

The second part of question #4 is causing us to reflect on how a gospel connection(s) is functioning in relation to the author's main point. Theological reflection occurs after exegesis. It aligns with and advances the agenda of the author. Is the gospel connection fulfilling something in the passage? Is the gospel connection answering a question or objection in the passage? Is the gospel connection the solution to a problem in the passage? Is the gospel connection serving as motivation to act? Is the gospel connection providing an example to imitate? A gospel connection can function in a variety of

other ways as well. We must determine its function in relation to the author's main point in your passage.

The third part of question #4 is factoring in your audience. We want to know the significance of your legitimate gospel connection for your audience. Your gospel connection is addressing all kinds of needs and questions. Theological Reflection will naturally lead us to consider why your gospel connection matters for your audience today. How is this gospel connection good news for the believer? How is this gospel connection providing an opportunity to preach evangelistically to the unbeliever?

5. What is the main point you will argue to *your audience* (in one short sentence)?

The *main point* of a sermon is the fundamental statement of what you, as a speaker today, are trying to argue to your audience today.² It is the one thing you intend to persuade your audience of. In expositional preaching and teaching, it will certainly be intimately related to the author's *main point* for his original audience. It will consider how the gospel connection amplifies the author's main point as well as the gospel connection's significance for your audience. Aim to have a main point that is thirteen words or less. It should be well-reasoned and, perhaps, articulated as the result of a proof (so depending on premises and building arguments).

6. What sermon title and preaching outline will you use to argue your main point?³

A sermon title is a short and simple statement that is intended to play well with your main point. It should be stated in modern and accessible language. It needs to capture the attention of the *audience* and draw them in. It is something that a preacher or Bible teacher can interact with throughout their sermon.

A *preaching outline* is sometimes called a homiletical outline. It is simply a way of organizing your sermon or message. It should be derived from your work in the passage and will most likely be related to the structure of the passage. In the same way your *sermonic main point* is related to the author's *main point*, how you organize your material to make your argument (your outline) should be related to how the author argued his point (*structure*). But as with your sermonic main point, you also need to take into account both your *audience* and the *gospel connections*.

² We are using the term *sermon* throughout this document to refer to the message or teaching session of a preacher or teacher. We realize that in some contexts, women may be uncomfortable using this terminology to refer to women teaching women. We use *sermon* here for the sake of simplicity and our use of this terminology does not imply anything about gender for us. Our doctrinal statement is clear as to what we believe about issues of gender and ministry.

³ In the women's version of the Worksheet, the question reads: "What talk title and teaching outline will you use to argue your main point?"

While *structure* is behind-the-scenes work, the homiletical outline is shaped and prepared to help your listeners follow along with your message for your church audience. While some might include detailed notes in a homiletical outline for teaching, your homiletical outline for the Worksheet presentation needs only to be the headers you might attach to each section of your sermon.

7. How will you apply your main point for the good of your audience? Consider both Christians and non-Christians. Indicate where the applications will be made in the sermon.

The *applications* (and implications) will also be related to the *main point* of your sermon. You might have multiple applications or just one. You might articulate them throughout your sermon or just at the end. But use your work up to this point in the Worksheet to draw out primary applications (and implications) from the text, particularly deriving from the main point you are arguing. These applications should be tailored to your *audience* that you named at the top of your Worksheet. Within this audience, consider the Christian and the non-Christian, thus taking into account how your passage relates to the gospel and not merely its meaning for the first audience.