



2 Timothy 2:15 *Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*

3 - PRINCIPLES OF BIBLE INTERPRETATION

Because we believe that the Bible is God's Word to us we tend to read Scripture in our a way that makes sense to us. We bring everything we are to the text: our experiences, culture, former teachings, etc. Unless we learn the actual intent of a Scriptural passage, to whom and why the words were written, we may end up with an interpretation that is quite different than the actual meaning. Here are a few basic rules that help us to learn to read the Bible in an orderly fashion.

RULES FOR STUDYING THE BIBLE

1. The _____ cannot see Biblical Truth (John 3:3)
 - 1 Corinthians 2:14 *But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*
2. It is in His Light that we see light. (Psalm 43:3; Matthew 6:22-23)
 - Psalm 36:9 *For with You is the fountain of life, in Your light we see light.*
 - Psalm 119:130 *The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.*
3. We must be delivered from a _____ mindset. Many minds are filled with trivia but void of understanding and wisdom. (Proverbs 4:4-9)
 - 1 Corinthians 3:19 *For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight.*
4. Always begin with prayer and ask the Holy Spirit to be your Guide (John 16:13).
5. Understand a basic aspect of Bible interpretation. Scripture can never mean what it did not mean to the first (original) hearers and readers. Two crucial questions:
 - What was the Bible saying through God's servants to the hearers or readers of that message?
 - How should we understand and apply the passage (if it should even be applied) to people today?
6. Read Bible passages in context which is understood by the passages that precede and follow it.

7. The Bible uses many figures of speech such as hyperbole (John 21:25), similes and metaphors. However, the Bible should be interpreted literally, exactly as it is written, where it is applicable.
8. Interpret the Bible as a _____ revelation of God. The Old Testament is largely foundational truth. The New Testament is largely fulfilled truth.
9. Never interpret Biblical text in a way that contradicts the rest of Scripture. To “rightly divide the Word of God” (2 Timothy 2:15) means to cut in a straight line. Check out your interpretation with others you trust and get a “second opinion.”
10. Wherever possible, let Scripture interpret Scripture (Matthew 13:18).
11. Bible interpretation is singular, Bible application may be _____.
12. Above all, be charitable to those who may differ with your interpretation. Never allow yourself to think that you have “arrived.” In essentials: unity. In non-essentials: liberty. In all things: charity.

WHAT CAN WE EXPECT FROM STUDYING THE BIBLE?

The Bible is not a book of _____. The Bible was not written to simply give us easy answers to life’s complex problems. It is an unfolding of God’s Kingdom on earth and the redemption of mankind. However, living consistently according to its principles will bring wisdom and understanding resulting in eternal life.

1. God is revealed in the history recorded in the Bible. (Acts 2:14-36; 7:1-54)
2. We can expect fellowship with God. (John 14:25-31)
3. We can expect the Holy Spirit to guide us in our study. (John 14:25-26)
4. We are confronted with Christ. (John 5:38-39)
5. God speaks to us about love, truth, justice, righteousness, and the effects of sin in our lives and in the world.
6. We can understand God’s standards of right and wrong. (Exodus 20:1-17; Matthew 22:34-40)
7. We can understand the problems and challenges of people in Bible times and learn how God responded to their problems.
8. We can learn about ourselves and others. (Hebrews 4:11-13)
9. We can expect spiritual growth as we faithfully apply what we learn. (1 Peter 1:3-8)
10. Personal Bible study will strengthen us, give us joy and peace. (Psalm 16:11)

WHAT SHOULD WE BE AWARE OF IN APPROACHING THE BIBLE?

If our realistic expectations about Bible study are to be fulfilled, we must be aware of approaches and attitudes that work against our gaining all we can from our time of study.

1. We can be bound up in the *scientific method*, explaining the miraculous through scientific cause and effect. (Matthew 14:13-21)
2. We can be more *committed to beliefs taught us in our childhood* than we are to the actual teachings of the Bible.
3. Our *fear of paradox* (conflicting ideas and themes) may influence our thinking. (Matthew 10:34-39; Romans 12:2)
4. We may practice _____ literalism, selecting the commands or teachings we like and ignoring the ones we do not like. This causes great division in the Body of Christ since we all determine which parts of the Bible are true or relevant.
5. We may settle for easy answers to complex problems, even at the expense of Truth.

CORRECT AND INCORRECT BIBLE INTERPRETATION

2 Corinthians 4:2 *But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.*

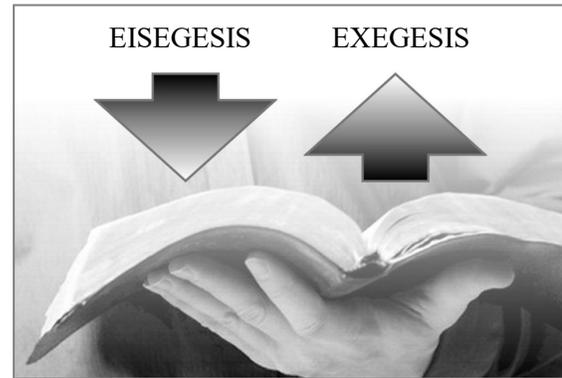
Acts 17:10-15 *Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so...*

KEY THOUGHT — Scripture never means what it did not mean to the first (original) hearers and readers. In speaking through real persons, in a variety of circumstances, over a period of 1,500 years, God's Word was expressed in the vocabulary and thought patterns of the people of those times and cultures. If they were going to hear it, it could only have come through events and in the language they could have understood. Our problem is that we are so far removed from them in time and culture, and sometimes in thought. This is one of the major reasons we need to learn to interpret the Bible. The following section will give the Bible student important tools...

1. _____, is the careful, systematic study of God's Word to discover the writer's original and intended meaning, taking into consideration the historical and literary contents, and the society of the time of writing.
 - A. Exegesis literally means "to lead out of," where the explanation of a text proceeds *from* and is based on careful, objective analysis of its context. It is "correctly handling the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

2. _____, the entire field of Biblical interpretation. In a narrower sense, it is bringing contemporary relevance to ancient texts, the Bible's meaning for today. Obviously this requires an understanding of basic interpretation and the use of key Bible references. We will be studying this in more detail later in the course.

3. **Eisegesis** is the practice of reading our own preconceived notions, biases, and understanding into Bible text. Although this is widely accepted and used as Bible interpretation, **it is incorrect** and may lead to a very different, erroneous conclusion!



A. Webster's Dictionary defines eisegesis as an interpretation, especially of Scripture, that expresses the interpreter's own ideas and bias rather than the actual, intended meaning of the text.

- Bias means "to cut across the grain" and in this case refers to holding a personal preference in meaning even when opposing viewpoints are presented. We all bring biases to Bible text, but eisegesis allows our own interpretation to dictate how we read and interpret the Bible.

B. 2 Timothy 2:15 commands us to use correct exegetical methods: "...a workman who... correctly handles (to make a straight cut) the word of truth." An honest student of the Bible will always allow the text to *first* speak for itself and in its context.

- Eisegesis always leads to error and causes us to force the Bible to agree with our own interpretation. When we use correct exegesis we agree with the Bible.
- Notice how Satan used God's Word in Matthew 4:3-11.

C. **Complete distortion of the original meaning** — A classic example is how Augustine (early church historian, 354-430 AD) interpreted, or *allegorized* the parable of the "Good Samaritan" in Luke 10:30-37. He interpreted it this way: Mankind started down the road of life but fell into sin which beat him and left him helpless in the ditch. The law of Moses came and passed him by. Finally, the good Samaritan, Jesus, bound up his wounds and brought him into the inn of safety - the church. This interpretation completely misses the meaning Jesus intended to give the hearers!

- Note the exegetical sheet on page 11.

D. **Wrongly established beliefs** — In John 5:31-47, the Jews had a pre-conceived notion about Jesus that did not allow them to see Jesus Christ for who He was: the Promised Messiah!

- Describe the Jewish leaders' incorrect method of Bible interpretation.

E. **Exaggerated interpretation** — In John 13:1-17 John records the washing of the disciples feet. However, people have interpreted this as a religious act of worship and unity.

- What was Jesus really attempting to demonstrate by washing feet?

CONTEXTUALIZING THE GOSPEL

We can easily forget that Scripture is a “foreign land” and that reading the Bible is a cross-cultural experience. Because we believe that the Bible is God’s Word to us we tend to read Scripture in our own way that makes sense to us. However, to open the Word of God is to step into a strange world where things are very unlike our own.

An illustration from the life of Hudson Taylor

Hudson Taylor (1832-1905) was an English missionary to China and recognized the need to immerse himself in the Chinese culture in order to relate the gospel to the people in ways that made sense to them. He learned their language and lived as close to their lifestyle as possible. (1 Corinthians 9:19-23)

According to his European colleagues, this was extremely inappropriate. Because the Bible had been in the European culture for centuries, they believed that *their* cultural values and norms were the true expressions of Christian life and universal for all cultures. Hudson Taylor disagreed and brought Christ to the Chinese people in their “context.” He later founded the China Inland Mission which included 205 mission stations with over 800 missionaries, and 125,000 Chinese Christians!



In whatever place and whatever age people read the Bible, we instinctively draw from our own cultural context to make sense of what we’re reading. Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes by Richards and O’Brien

THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTEXT

CONTEXT refers to the words, phrases, or passages that come before and after a particular word or passage in Scripture and helps to explain its full meaning.

1. **Historical context** determines what was going on in the history of the readers whose thinking (as is ours) was deeply influenced by the circumstances of their day. Is there war going on? Against whom? Is there economic depression or drought?
2. **Cultural context** of Biblical times was very different from ours, and its writings must always be considered in light of its culture. Cultural behavior is usually never explained because the readers were knowledgeable of social customs.
3. **Literary context** asks questions such as: What was the basic purpose of this writing? What is the flow of thought? What comes before it and what follows it? What type of writing is it?
4. **Basic context is the** _____, letter or passage. Why was it written? What is its basic message? When Paul wrote 1 Corinthians he did so to answer a call for help because of serious problems. When he wrote 1 Timothy he was dealing with false teaching in the church at Ephesus.

5. In studying the book of James, directed to Jewish believers scattered among the nations, we might sense the apparent “contradiction” with Paul’s teaching on Grace in Romans 4. Paul’s focus was on our justification (salvation) while James focuses on works that *flow from* our salvation.
6. Similar words may not always have the same meaning.
 - A. The word “mystery” in Ephesians 3:3-6 refers to the relationship of Jew and Gentile as “one new man,” while “mystery” in Colossians 1:25-27 refers to “Christ in you.”
 - B. What is difference between the word “flesh” in Romans 8:12-13 and Philippians 1:22-24?
7. Using the previous rules of interpretation, how would you interpret Hebrews 6:4-6, commonly used to validate the teaching that we can lose our salvation?

DISCUSSION

1. Do you think the doctrines you have been taught about the Bible regarding such topics as water baptism, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, predestination, women in leadership, or the second coming of Christ influence the way you interpret certain passages of the Bible?
2. To interpret correctly, we must understand that many of the teachings in the Bible fall into two categories: the highest ideals, norms and standards (the 10 Commandments in Exodus 20) and regulations for people of that culture, not necessarily meant to apply to all people under all circumstances. (Leviticus 19:19) How has this lack of understanding led to wrong conclusions?

BIBLE STUDY SHEETS

1. On page 7 you’ll find a basic Bible study sheet you can use for almost all types of Bible passages and books.
2. Following that are individual study sheets dealing with a variety of Bible writings. Read the book or Scripture passage and answer the questions. Remember, think **CONTEXT**.

ANSWERS

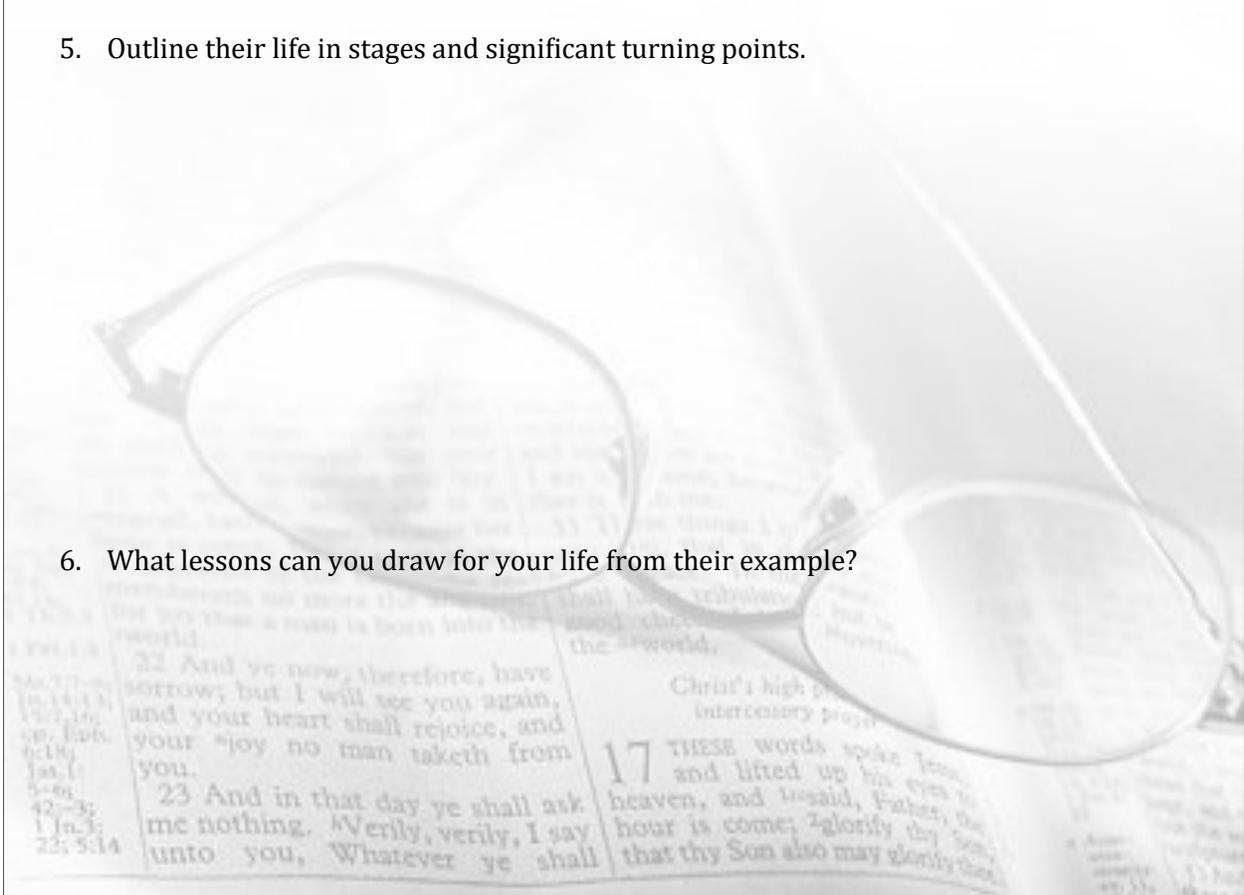
unconverted	selective
secular	exegesis
progressive	hermeneutics
plural	entire book
magic	

BASIC BIBLE STUDY WORKSHEET

1. **PRAY** for the Holy Spirit to give you understanding.
2. Write out the passage or reference and identify the type of literature it is (history, poetry, prophecy).
3. Describe the historical and cultural context.
 - Use books such as Haley's Bible Handbook, Bible Atlas, Eerdman's Handbook to the Bible, Manners & Customs of the Bible (Freeman), etc.
4. Read the passage. Then ask the question, what does it **SAY**?
 - Use books such as Hanford's Bible Handbook and Talk Thru The Bible Handbook (Wilkinson and Boa).
 - Describe what is happening (outline the story plot, narrative, etc.).
 - Who are the characters? Where and why do the events occur?
 - What is the key verse or thought?
5. What does it **MEAN**?
 - Use books such as Strong's Concordance and The Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible (Zodhiates), etc.
 - What is the writer saying to the original hearers? Why did the writer say what he did?
6. How does it **RELATE** to other Scriptures?
 - Use books such as Nave's Topical Bible.
 - Where is the message or theme stated in other books of the Bible?
 - Link the message of the passage to major teachings of Scripture and give references.
7. How does it **APPLY** to me today?
 - Use books such as the Life Application Study Bible, etc.
 - What are the important applicable truths? Are there commands to obey? Are there errors to avoid, sins to forsake? Are there promises to receive?
 - What does this passage suggest I should be or do as a believer in Christ?

BIBLE CHARACTER STUDY

1. Bible character.
2. Reference(s).
3. Describe God's call on their life.
4. Describe their response to God's call (positive or negative).
5. Outline their life in stages and significant turning points.
6. What lessons can you draw for your life from their example?



PROVERBS WORKSHEET | *Proverbs 3:1-10*

1. Read the Proverb.
2. Summarize the intent in the following verses.

1-2

3-4

5-8

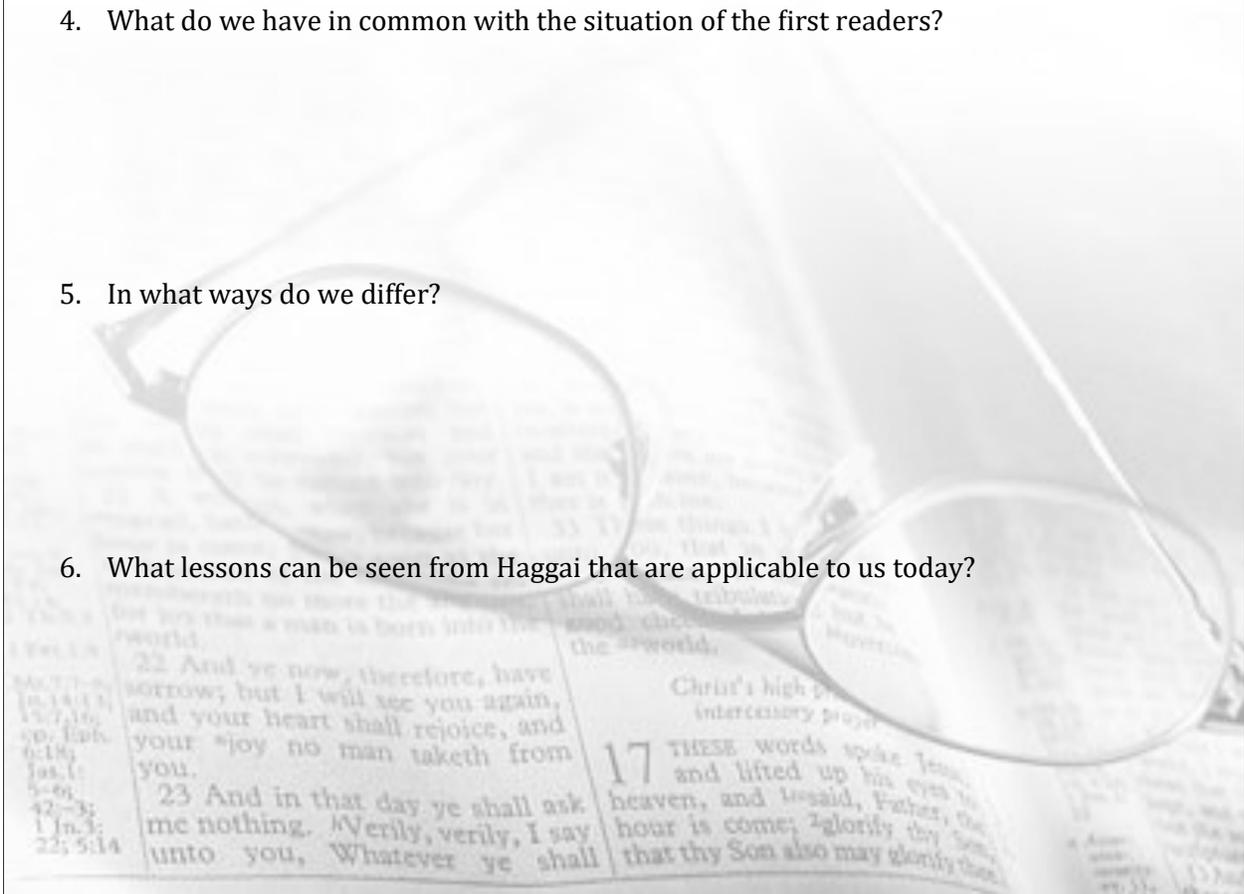
9-10

3. What “old fashioned basic values” can we learn from these?
4. What good advice is taught to encourage responsible living?
5. What attitudes and behaviors are warned against?
6. What is the proverbial intent (application for us today)?



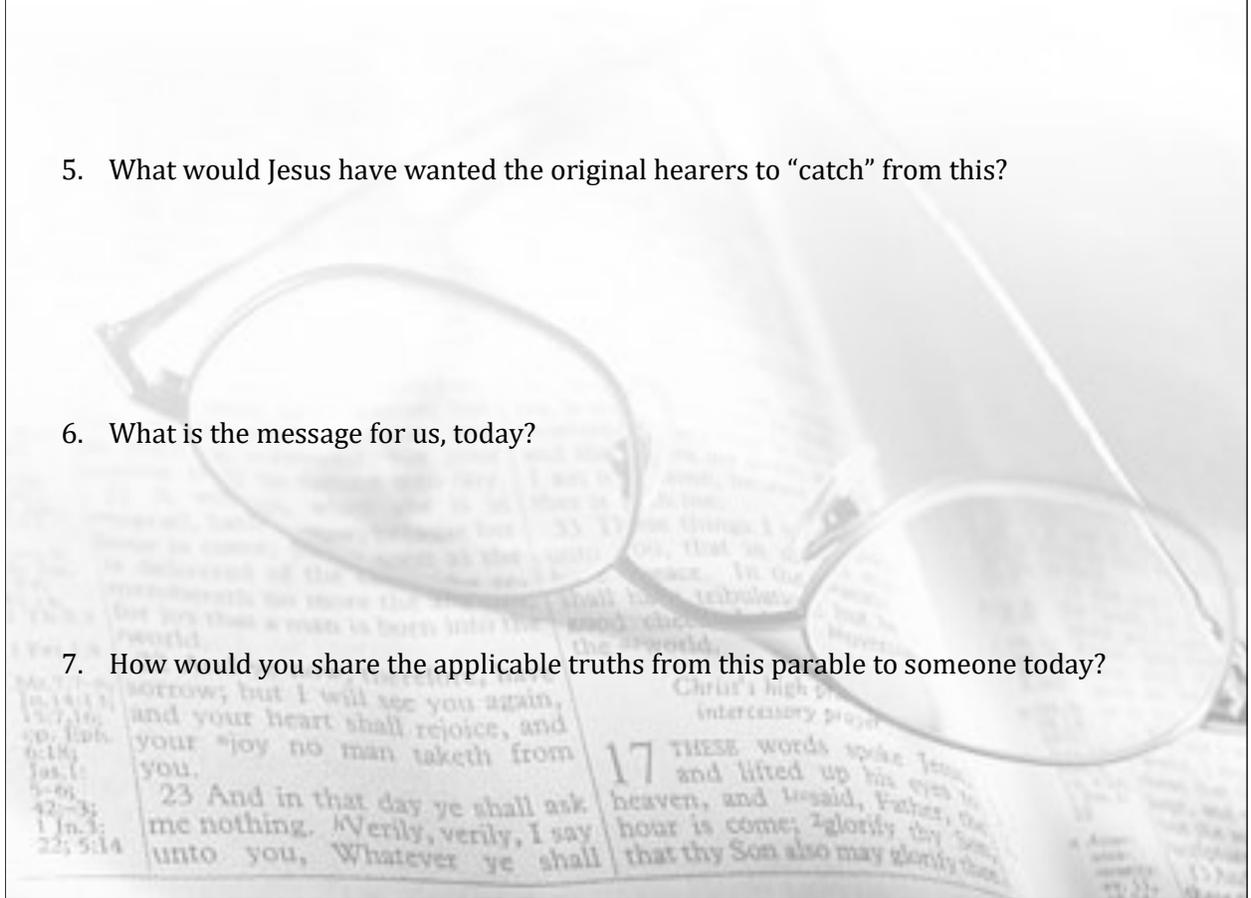
MINOR PROPHETS WORKSHEET | *The Book of Haggai*

1. Read the book of Haggai (one of the “minor prophets”)
2. Describe the life situation, the history and the problems of the people during the time this was written?
3. What is the faith situation, the relationship the people and the nation had with God?
4. What do we have in common with the situation of the first readers?
5. In what ways do we differ?
6. What lessons can be seen from Haggai that are applicable to us today?



PARABLES WORKSHEET | *Luke 10:25-37*

1. Read the parable of the Good Samaritan.
2. What events surround the parable?
3. What prompted Christ to speak the parable and to whom was the parable spoken?
4. What are the facts of the parable itself?
5. What would Jesus have wanted the original hearers to “catch” from this?
6. What is the message for us, today?
7. How would you share the applicable truths from this parable to someone today?



EPISTLE WORKSHEET | *Paul's letter to Philemon*

1. Read the entire letter and pay attention to “small” details throughout.
2. What kind of writing is it? (Narrative, psalm, prophecy, letter, etc.)
3. Who is the author and who are all the recipients? (Verses 1b-2)
4. How does the writer begin the letter? (Verses 4-7)
5. Describe the purpose of the letter. (Verses 8-16)
6. Describe the author's attitude. (Verses 17-22) What is Paul really saying? In what way does Paul behave as Christ?
7. Summarize in your own words what this letter is all about.
8. What points can we apply to ourselves today?

