

**Understand and Study the Bible**  
**Session 3: Key to Understanding #2: Read Carefully in Context**

**Read Carefully!**

- Principle: *Let the text drive your understanding.*
- Principle: *Take time to understand, don't rush to apply.*

**Read in Context!**

- Every passage exists in a *literary* context (the surrounding written material): paragraph, chapter, section of book, entire book, testament, entire Bible
- The contents also exist within a cultural context – time, place, and location in redemptive-history (the big story of the Bible).
- Context is key and generally the closer the context, the more important and relevant for understanding a passage (exception: Old Testament references in the New Testament).
- Principle: *Let Scripture interpret Scripture if you're struggling to understand.*
- Principle: *Understand the author's key themes and main ideas for the whole book.*
- Principle: *When studying what key words mean, do so in context.*

### **A Process for Reading Carefully in Context**

1. Pray for God to speak to you through the passage, for His help in understanding, for Him to guard you from careless reading.
2. Read the whole passage through from beginning to end.
3. Identify the complete “unit of thought” containing the passage.
4. Read the entire chapter(s) containing the passage, plus one chapter before and one after.
5. Identify the genre of the writing – is it prose or poetry, narrative or epistle, etc.?
6. Re-read the passage slowly, going verse by verse and sentence by sentence.
7. Re-read it at least 1 or 2 more times (consider reading different translations).
8. Think about how the passage fits into its immediate biblical context, then move outward.
9. Think through the “5 W’s” (Who, What, When, Where, Why).
10. Look for and understand the purpose of connecting words like therefore, if/then, in order that, in the same way, for, and, but, ...
11. Think about any words that are repeated – is there special significance?
12. Determine the author’s main point – if it’s in the passage, highlight it or underline it. If it isn’t, write it in your own words.
13. Create your own paraphrase of the entire passage.