

How to Do Exegesis

What is *exegesis*? Exegesis just means interpreting a text, trying to determine the meaning of a text. This is what we will spend a lot of time doing over the next few months. Exegesis is the process of trying to understand who said what in a passage, and most importantly, with what intent. We will be, together, trying out different methods in order to better understand passages in our Bible. Before we start that, let's go over some basic principles to doing exegesis. Try not to put your own slant on the passage. Be careful to not come to a passage already knowing what you want it to say. If you come to a passage knowing what you want to hear, you might find it there, but you will miss what God wanted to say to you through it. Instead, approach Scripture with an open mind.

1. Our primary tool is Scripture itself. Instead of automatically consulting commentaries, we are going to start with God's word itself. Scripture interprets Scripture. For this, we will be looking at cross references in our passages and looking at the book as a whole in order to better understand what the author meant and what it means for us today.
2. The Holy Spirit inspired the author, and He will also inspire me to understand the text.
3. God wants to redeem His people—this is the primary message of the Bible that we should keep in mind whenever studying even the most difficult to understand passages.
4. Spend time listening. This is always the first step to any of the passages you will study—listen. Read the passage in multiple translations. Read it over and over again. This will really help you to allow God's word to seep into your heart and change you personally. This will help you to meditate upon it as you go throughout your day.
5. Don't forget the context! Context is so important in understanding what God's Word is saying. Look at the surrounding context- the book as a whole, the surrounding chapters, the whole Bible (cross references). All of this will bring what you are studying into better clarity. Look at the genre because each genre will be read with a different perspective. Look at the history behind your passage (using a Bible Background Commentary). Keep in mind the geography (a Bible Atlas may come in handy here).
6. In the end of your study, formulate a statement about what this passage really says and means—why did God put this passage in the Bible? What is His intent for the passage? What does God want me to do, feel, say, or be in light of this passage?