

THE THREE WORLDS OF THE TEXT

The world **OF** the text:

Experience the Passage:

Understand & visualize what is happening in the passage using the context of the story's location and characters.

Key Indicator of Ability:

Can I *accurately* picture what is going on in this passage of scripture?

Lines of Inquiry:

When did this passage take place? How did people view the world at that time?

Where does this passage take place? What does it look like?

Who is involved in this passage? What do they look like? Is there anything about them that might change their worldview from the norm?

** Not a moral guidebook: yet you will be morally guided. **

The world **BEHIND** the text:

Study the Passage:

Understand and contextualize what the passage meant using the context of the audience and author to see how it was intended to be understood.

Key Indicator of Ability:

Can I identify the literary elements used to convey a certain idea or point?

Lines of Inquiry:

What genre did the author choose to write this passage in?

Who/when/where is the author? Audience? What are their worldviews?

What does the author intend for their audience to know or learn from this passage?

** Not a divine answerbook: yet some of your questions will be answered. **

The world **IN FRONT OF** the text:

Apply the Passage:

Understand what it means today by understanding how your own context, experiences, and identity, shape the way you read this passage.

Key Indicator of Ability:

Can I apply a text in a modern world without changing its meaning?

Lines of Inquiry:

What have I heard or thought about this passage in the past? Does that line up with what I'm reading now?

What personal experiences do I have (or not have) that might change the way I look at the topic in this text?

Does this passage directly apply to me, or do I need to discover a deeper principle at work that I can learn from?

** Not written directly to you: yet it is useful for you. **

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Example Passage #1 Luke 10:25-37

World Of the Text:

This text deals with Jews and Samaritans, you don't have to research much to know that when Jesus was teaching, these groups *hated* each other. Writing to a Jewish audience, Jesus makes the Samaritan the hero of the story rather than the "faithful" Jewish people who were "coming down" from Jerusalem to Jericho. This phrase – coming down – means the priest and Levite were not just walking upon any road at random, they were just coming from the *temple*!

World Behind the Text:

The author of this gospel is Luke and his intended audience is a little different from Jesus's audience that he is teaching to. While the Gospel of Matthew is written to more of a Jewish audience, Luke is written to a much more general audience of the time. On top of that, one of the main biblical themes that

Luke traces throughout his telling of the gospel is: Jesus's ministry to the excluded, disadvantaged, and inclusion of all in his Kingdom. This is right on theme for Luke, and demonstrates to his audience that Jesus came even for the ones the Jewish people hated.

World in Front of the Text:

Do you think of your biblical neighbor as just those in close proximity to you that you can stand to be around? Or do you actively include groups that you may feel strongly against?

Example Passage #2: Revelation 3:14-22

World Of/Behind the Text:

Quick note: when studying the New Testament letters, the worlds "Of" and "Behind" the text overlap enough to study them simultaneously.

The audience here is the *church* at Laodicea. Picture what is going on in 15-16. Jesus is metaphorically "taking a drink of

the deeds" of the church. Almost all drinks are good either hot or cold. The bad thing is when the drink has been left out to go stale. Rather than "God would rather you hate him than be in between," this passage presents two good options and one bad for the way *christians* should act.

Now look at verse 20. We sometimes like to use this passage to say "Hey sinners, God is knocking at the door of your heart you just have to let him in!" In its context, this verse is actually for *church-going* people who have locked Jesus outside the walls of their heart.

World in Front of the Text:

Have you been taught or heard either of these verses before as a way to get sinners to repent rather than the church? Maybe your favorite pastor growing up shared an evangelistic message on this. I've taught it that way before! But, can you look past what you thought to see this is a passage about reforming the church when we have lost our vibrance and left Jesus outside.