

THE
DISCIPLESHIP
PLACE

Telling the New Testament
Story of God



SESSION 5
The Four Gospels

NOTICE TO CLT PARTICIPANTS AND EDUCATORS

This is a contract. By using these materials you accept all the terms and conditions of this Agreement. This Agreement covers all Leader's Guides, Student Guides, and instructional resources included in the Continuing Lay Training (CLT) website.

Upon your acceptance of this Agreement, Continuing Lay Training grants to you a nonexclusive license to use these curricular materials provided that you agree to the following:

1. USE OF THE MODULES.

- You may distribute educational materials in electronic form to students or other educational providers.
- You may make and distribute electronic or paper copies to students for the purpose of instruction, as long as each copy contains this Agreement and the same copyright and other proprietary notices pertaining to the Module. If you download the educational materials from the Internet or similar online source, you must include the CLT notice for the Module with any online distribution and on any media you distribute that includes the educational content.
- You may translate, adapt, and/or modify the examples and instructional resources for the purpose of making the instruction culturally relevant to your students. However, you must agree that you will not sell these modified materials without express, written permission from CLT.

2. COPYRIGHT.

The material is owned by CLT and is protected by United States Copyright Law and International Treaty provisions. Except as stated above, this Agreement does not grant you any intellectual property rights in the Module.

3. RESTRICTIONS.

- You may not sell copies of these educational materials in any form except to recover the minimum reproduction cost of electronic media or photocopy expense.
- You may not modify the wording or original intent of the educational material for commercial use.

THANK YOU

Continuing Lay Training would like to thank Clergy Development for granting permission to modify and adapt their course of study materials for our educational purposes. Their willingness to partner with us is sincerely appreciated.

The Four Gospels

SESSION OVERVIEW

Exegesis: Learning to Ask the Right Questions

Gospel Discovery

Application

Exam

Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant

LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should:

- gain a basic understanding of the elements of exegesis.
- understand the genres, purpose, and content of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

INTRODUCTION

When you are asked to give advice on or interpret a situation you have not been a part of or witnessed, what are some of the questions you need answers to before you give an answer? In this session, we will introduce and discuss these required questions and apply them to the four Gospels. Before doing so, however, an introduction to the topic of exegesis is necessary.

EXEGESIS: LEARNING TO ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

NOTES

Proper Bible study does exegesis, which means to read out of the text the meaning of the scripture. The Bible was written many years ago and in different cultures from our own. Sometimes the meaning of the text is very straightforward and simple to understand, but many times, there is danger of reading a verse out of context because we do not understand or take into consideration the historical and cultural setting of the passage.

There are many ways to do exegesis, but the following method was developed to provide an easy way to remember the most important questions to ask about your text.

WHO?

This question reminds us that we need to identify both the person(s) speaking and the listener(s). Who are the people involved in communication? If these are different from the author and the reader(s), then these must also be identified. Try to answer the question first from the biblical texts themselves and secondarily from commentaries: “Who are they and how can they be described?”

- *The speaker/author’s point of view.* Read the chosen text and identify who is talking. It may be a narrator and thus the only speaker/author is the author. There may be one or several people speaking. If so describe each one. Most times clues about the author are found in the first few verses of the book. Rarely are there any clear descriptions of the speakers or the author, so look between the lines for any clues.

We can learn more about the speakers and author by looking at their choice and arrangement of words, treatment of the subject matter, use of evidence, argumentation, and control of emotion to see how the author/speaker tries to persuade his or her audience to believe something or believe it more profoundly.

- *The listener/reader’s point of view.* Here we focus on the audience. The type of audience affects the arguments, tone of voice, and word choices the speaker chooses to use. Different audiences can account for differences in style by the same author/speaker. Look for clues in the text that will tell you to what kind of audience the speakers or author is talking.


NOTES

- *Cultural considerations.* Sometimes the text and our own understanding of how things work are not enough. This is why we go to books which tell us what has been discovered about the general customs, authority structures, relationships (marriage, friendship, employment), and commerce (agricultural/urban) in the first-century world. The combination of this data with actual descriptions of these things we have read in the text will give us a clearer picture of everyday life and the people we are trying to understand.

WHAT?

What does the text say? Make a simple outline of the text or biblical passage you are studying. Identify the major events or points of teaching and then list a couple of minor points that help to describe the event or point of teaching. Identify the form and style of writing/speaking: Is it a story? A warning? A lecture? A sermon? A poem? A hymn? Do not worry about using “correct” style terms at first. The important thing in your first look at the text is to identify what the author/speaker is trying to do.

Consult commentaries for their description of the form or style of writing/speaking. Pick out two to three key words in your text and look them up in a biblical dictionary. Check a couple of commentaries for ideas on key words as well as for studies on those words. How does the study of these words help you understand what the author/speaker is trying to say?

WHERE?

What is the geographical setting of the text? Look for clues in the sections right before and after your text for the geographical setting. Is a town or city name mentioned? Are there animals or crops talked about? Try to answer the question, “How does this geographical setting affect how the people would have heard/read your text?”

Read the introductory sections to your specific book in study Bibles, commentaries, and New Testament introductions, and find out if the author or audience would have been familiar with the geography of your text. How would they have understood the text from their geographical perspective?

WHEN?

Here we are not so much after a date as we are concerned about the historical setting and what the text came before or after. What was occurring in the world surrounding the text? Look for clues in the sections right before and after your text for the historical setting. Is a political or civil event mentioned? Is a ruler mentioned?


NOTES

Try to answer the question, “How does this historical setting affect how the people would have heard/read your text?” Read the introductory sections to your specific book in study Bibles, commentaries, and New Testament introductions and find out if the author or audience would have been familiar with the history of your text. How would they have understood the text from their historical perspective?

WHY?

The why question has three parts:

- Why did the speaker say what he or she did?
- Why did the author include this section in the book?
- Why is it important for us today?

Step back mentally from the Who, What, Where, When, and Why questions and answers, and think about what you have learned in the process. What is the central point of the passage, and why is it important in each of the three situations above?

FOLLOW THESE PRINCIPLES

In addition to the preceding five questions, others items are of importance in understanding and interpreting a biblical text.

- Always interpret a verse in agreement with its context. That is, the meaning of the part must be consistent with the whole. Words take on meanings in specific literary contexts. To illustrate, we need only think of the word “cold.” Does it refer to temperature, illness, or an emotional response? The literary context provides the answer.
- When interpreting a passage, consider the customs and events when it was written. Interpret a text in the light of its probable meaning for the persons to whom it was written. For example in Matt. 18:20, two to three witnesses were required in court.
- Interpret a passage in the light of all other Scripture. Do not use an obscure passage to disprove one with clear and obvious meaning, and do not interpret a passage in such a way as to make it deny what we know to be true of God from other scripture. For example, the interpretation of 1 Tim. 2:15 must be in light of John 3:16.

NOTES

- Interpret a passage according to the best use of the original language. John 21:15-17 uses in Greek the two words *phileo* (friendship love) and *agapao* (committed love). Most of our English translations translate them all as love, which misses the point of the conversation between Jesus and Peter. Jesus asks His questions the first two times using *agapao*, and the last time using *phileo*. Peter answers Jesus' questions all three times with *phileo*. The point of the story was that Jesus gave up His stronger word, *agapao*, and used Peter's word, *phileo*, questioning that Peter was even His friend.
- If there is a principle set forth in the passage, do not interpret or apply the passage in such a manner as to deny or reverse the principle. Interpret social teaching in line with doctrinal teaching in the text. Eph. 5:21-28 has the principle stated in.

GOSPEL DISCOVERY



NOTES

MATTHEW

The Gospel of Matthew was one of the most loved Gospels in the Early Church. Its teachings were seen as being normative for the Christian life. Reasons for its popularity include its stress upon the connection between Jesus and Judaism, its teachings that were of value in early Christian training and teaching, and its comprehensive nature. It includes most of the information in Mark's Gospel, as well as a portion of the narrative sections of Luke.

Matthew is usually characterized as a Jewish-Christian Gospel. It is symbolized in art and literature by a man or a man's face representing Christ's humanity, His human sympathy, wisdom, and character. An exploration of the Who, What, Where, When, and Why questions reveals the following:

Who? (This question is not obvious in scripture – resources needed to explore)

- Author: Traditionally ascribed to Matthew, a disciple of Jesus, former tax collector, Jew. (It is important to note that titles were only added to the Gospels in the second century based on traditions in the Church. Titles were not part of the autographs or original documents.)
- Audience: Christian Jews in Syria, Diaspora Jews.

Where? (This question is not obvious in scripture – resources needed to explore)

- Author: Antioch in Syria.
- Audience: Syria.

When?

- AD 60-70 (Scholars commonly date Matthew after the fall of Jerusalem, 70 to 80's).
- Before the destruction of the Jewish Temple in AD 70 (if earlier dating is accepted).
- Written during the first Jewish rebellion and increasing tension between Rome and the Jewish people as well as between the Jews and Jewish Christians. If a later dating is accepted, the Gospel is still often recognized as being set in a context of increasing tension between Jews and Jewish Christians.

*What?*

- Jesus the Messiah is the fulfillment of prophecy (1:22, 2:15, 17, 23, 4:14-16, 8:17, 12:17, 13:35, 21:4, 26:53-54, 27:9, 35). Jesus calls his audience to a type of higher righteousness as seen in the Sermon on the Mount, chapters 5-7 (5:21-22, 27, 33, 38, and 43).
- Characteristics: Jewish-Christian; systematic arrangement; gospel of the Kingdom; church gospel; Hebrew poetic form, parallelism; use of Old Testament quotations.

Why?

- To preserve traditions of what Jesus said and did.
- To show Jesus was the promised Messiah.
- To stress the radical nature of moral transformation and obedience for followers of Christ.
- To encourage Christian Jews in the midst of Roman/Jewish tensions (earlier dating), as well as Jewish/Jewish-Christian tensions.

MARK

Many scholars view Mark as the earliest of the Gospels and as a source used by both Matthew and Luke. In terms of length, it is the shortest. It is the fast-action Gospel which seems to want to get the facts down so they can be preserved and passed to the next generation. In art and literature its symbol has been the Lion, representing Christ's kingship as the lion of the tribe of Judah. The Lion is the symbol of royal authority and strength.

Who?

- Author: According to tradition, Mark was a disciple of Peter, but not necessarily of Jesus because of his age. He wrote down Peter's recollections and was striving for accuracy. His version is not a strictly chronological narrative.
- Audience: Christian Gentiles and Jews in Rome, Diaspora Jews.

Where?

- Author: Rome.
- Audience: Rome.


NOTES
When?

- Late 50s to 60s AD (Dating between AD 66 and 70 is common).
- Written before the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. Some scholars date Mark after the destruction of the Temple, 70s.
- Often seen as being written in the context of a life setting in Rome during Nero's persecution of Christians in the late 60s.

What?

- Theme: Jesus the supernatural, Suffering Servant, and Conqueror.
- The supernatural nature of Jesus as the Son of God: 1:24, 2:5, 8-10, 3:11, 5:7, 26-27, 40-42, 6:39-44, 47-48.
- Characteristics: Messianic secret (which means Jesus tried to keep His Messiahship a secret until His death and resurrection), realism, action, Peter's influence, historical mode, vivid detail, little of Jesus' teachings, no genealogy or infancy stories, Jesus as Son of Man and Son of God, a stress on the Cross, emphasis on the radical nature of discipleship.

Why?

- To show Jesus as the supernatural Son of God.
- To stress Jesus' role as Son of Man.
- To preserve what Peter remembered of what Jesus said and did.
- To give an accurate account of the life of Jesus of Nazareth, who He was and the impact He made on those who came in contact with Him.
- To emphasize the Cross.
- To depict the radical nature of discipleship that involves self-denial and suffering.

LUKE

The Gospel of Luke is volume one of a two volume work (Luke-Acts) which comprises a fourth of the New Testament. Both volumes are addressed to the same person, Theophilus, who was likely a patron or friend of Luke. The Gospel is unique in that it begins with a formal preface (1:1-4) as might be found a Greco-Roman literary work of the period. The preface reads:


NOTES

“Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the truth about which you have been instructed” (NRSV).

Luke is usually characterized as the Gentile Christian Gospel concerned for the common person. In art and literature, it has been symbolized by the ox, the bull, or the calf. These represent Christ’s patient work, service, and power.

Who?

- Author: Luke, a traveling companion of Paul, a well-educated Gentile, a doctor, and close friend of Paul. He was with Paul near the end of his life.
- Audience: Gentile Christians, “Most excellent Theophilus.” Luke’s explanation of Jewish practices, geography, and the use of Greco-Roman names for places suggest this.

Where?

- Author: Rome, especially if written during Paul’s imprisonment there (Debated: Greece [Achaia], Caesarea, Alexandria).
- Audience: Unknown, could be Rome, Philippi, or Antioch but author could have had a wider audience in mind.

When?

- Late 50s to early 60s AD (many scholars date Luke later [commonly AD 80-85] because of the seeming dependence of Luke on Mark’s chronology).
- Before the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in AD 70 (earlier dating).
- Before the Jewish Rebellion (AD 66-70), so relations between Gentiles and Jews are fairly good. Christianity would still be considered a part of Judaism and therefore treated as a *religio licita*, or legal religion.

What?

- Theme: Jesus is the Son of Man. He is the Universal Savior, not just the Jewish Messiah.


NOTES

- Luke highlights social concern, concern for the poor. Individuals and women are highlighted along with a few more details of Jesus' childhood. The use of some medical and technical terms suggests Luke is a physician, although there is some debate as to whether the terms he uses are all that technical. Luke also emphasizes prayer and poetry.
- Luke's purpose: He wants Theophilus to know that faith in Jesus rests on historical facts that stand up under the most severe scrutiny and are founded on first-hand testimony.

Why?

- To show the universal nature of God's dealings with the world; Jesus as Savior of the World; the events of the early life of Jesus and His mother, Mary.
- Special emphasis on the place of women in Jesus' ministry; the work of the Holy Spirit (continues through Acts, which is the second volume of Luke's two-volume work on the beginnings of Christianity).

JOHN

The most distinctive of the four Gospels is that of John. John is characterized as the theological or reflective Gospel because it tends to dwell on the meaning of Jesus' life and His divinity. This Gospel is symbolized in art and literature with an eagle. This symbolizes Christ's deity and His soaring heavenliness.

Who?

- Author: John, the son of Zebedee, one of the 12 apostles. Modern scholars debate this on the basis that this author is too theological and mystical, the words of Jesus are not in the same order as the other Gospels, and his Christology is too well developed. Compare Paul's Christology (Rom. 8:31-39, Phil. 2:1-11) which was written much earlier. Paul's Christology is every bit as developed as John's Gospel suggests.
- Audience: Jewish and Gentile Christians in Asia Minor.

Where?

- Author: Ephesus was John's headquarters in the last part of his life. But if the author is not John, his location could be anywhere outside of Palestine.
- Audience: Asia Minor in the region around Ephesus and the area of the seven churches named in Revelation.



When?

- AD 80-100
- After the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple.
- There is tension between the Gentiles and Jews.
- There is tension between the Jews and Christians because the Christians include Gentiles in their community.
- The Jewish Council of Jamnia took place around this time in AD 90. It was at this council the Jewish leaders closed the Jewish Canon, our Old Testament Scriptures, in response to the rise of Jewish Christian literature. Non-Christian Jews were distancing themselves from Christianity. The closing of the canon was to identify what was Jewish and what was heresy. John's reference to the synagogue of Satan in Revelation 2:9, as well as his use of the term the Jews to identify those against Jesus, and his emphasis on the Jews' unbelief reflect the fact that Christianity was now seen as totally separate from Judaism. It should be mentioned that most scholars recognize a difference in authorship between the fourth Gospel and Revelation. They choose to speak of a Johannine school in view of certain points of correspondence between these two documents.

What?

- Theme: Jesus is the Son of God. Therefore, He is God Incarnate and existed before creation.
- It is a theological Gospel and reflects on the human Jesus; the preexistence of Jesus; and the contrasts of light and darkness, life and death, belief and unbelief; and the generic adversaries of Jesus and the Christians are called the Jews and sometimes the world.
- Purpose: He is writing in order that readers might believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and by believing have life in His name (John 20:31). An alternate reading of this text stresses the idea of the readers continuing to believe that Jesus is the Christ. In this case, John writes to encourage believers to hold fast to their faith.

Why?

- To emphasize the divine glory of Jesus.
- To describe the divine qualities and essence of Jesus.

**NOTES**

- Jesus is a unique, divine messenger. He is not just one of the prophets; He is God.
- Jesus is the answer to humanity's deepest needs.
- To indicate that ideas often relegated to the future (eternal life, 3:36) are experienced now in part (realized eschatology). To some degree, the future has broken into the present.

APPLICATION



NOTES

1. Briefly answer the five hermeneutics questions for one passage of your choosing from each of the four Gospels listed below. Since we have just answered the questions relating to the whole book, concentrate specifically on the passages themselves. Also consider what you think are the most important applications of these passages for our contemporary society/church.
 - Matt. 1:18-25: The angel announces Jesus' birth to Joseph.
 - Matt. 2:1-12: The wise men from the east
 - Matt. 5:3-12: The Beatitudes
 - Matt. 6:9-13: The Lord's Prayer
 - Matt. 28:18-20: The Great Commission
 - Mark 13:1-37: Signs of the End of the Age or Little Apocalypse
 - Mark 16:15-18: The Great Commission
 - Luke 1:5-25: The announcement of John's birth to Zechariah
 - Luke 1:26-56: The announcement of Jesus' birth to Mary (includes Magnificat of Mary)
 - Luke 1:57-80: Birth of John the Baptist (includes the Benedictus of Zechariah)
 - Luke 2:1-20: Birth of Jesus and the adoration by the shepherds
 - Luke 2:21-38: Circumcision and presentation of Jesus in the Temple (includes the Nunc Dimittis of Simeon)
 - Luke 10:25-37: The parable of the Good Samaritan
 - Luke 15:1-32: The parables of the Lost Sheep, Lost Coin, Lost Son
 - Luke 24:13-25: Jesus and the two disciples on the Road to Emmaus
 - John 1:1-18: John's prologue (In the beginning was the Word)
 - John 3:1-21: Jesus and Nicodemus and the new birth (John 3:16)
 - John 4:4-42: The Samaritan woman at the well
 - John 11:1-46: The raising of Lazarus from the dead


NOTES

- John 13:1-20: Jesus washes the disciples' feet
 - John 14:16-17 and 16:12-15: The promise of the Holy Spirit
 - John 17:1-26: Jesus' high priestly prayer
 - The "I Am" passages found in various places in John:
 - 6:35 ff., Bread of Life
 - 8:12, Light of the World
 - 10:7-9, Door (Sheep gate)
 - 11:25, Resurrection and the Life
 - 14:6, the Way, the Truth, and the Life
 - 15:1-15, the Vine
2. Having surveyed the four Gospels in terms of Who, What, Where, When, and Why, compare and contrast how each Gospel treats events during the last week of Jesus' life and His resurrection as listed below. Discuss the significance of the similarities and differences. How do they affect your understanding of Jesus?
- Sunday: The Triumphal Entry (Matt. 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-10; Luke 19:29-44; John 12:12-19)
 - Monday: Jesus cleanses the Temple (Matt. 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-18)
 - Tuesday: Jesus teaches in the Temple (Matt. 21:23-23:39; Mark 11:27-12:44; Luke 20:1-21:4) and Jesus anointed at Bethany (Matt. 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; John 12:2-11)
 - Wednesday: The plot against Jesus (Matt. 26:14-16; Mark 14:10-11; Luke 22:3-6)
 - Thursday: The Last Supper (Matt. 26:17-29; Mark 14:12-25; Luke 22:7-20; John 13:1-38) and Gethsemane (Matt. 26:36-46; Mark 14:32-42; Luke 22:40-46) and Jesus' arrest and trial (Matt. 26:37-27:26; Mark 14:43-15:15; Luke 22:47-23:25; John 18:2-19:16)
 - Friday: Jesus' crucifixion and death (Matt. 27:27-56; Mark 15:16-41; Luke 23:26-49; John 19:17-30) and Jesus' burial in Joseph's tomb (Matt. 27:57-66; Mark 15:42-47; Luke 23:50-56; John 19:31-42)
 - Sunday: The empty tomb at Jerusalem and other resurrection appearances (Matt. 28:1-8; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-10; John 20:1-9)

EXAM



NOTES

1. Exegesis involves the process of determining the significance of a biblical text for the modern world.
 - A. True
 - B. False
2. Generally, the questions of Who, What, Where, When, and Why can be answered solely through a close reading of a passage in its literary context.
 - A. True
 - B. False
3. The exegetical question of _____ is primarily concerned with the historical setting or world surrounding the text.
 - A. Who
 - B. What
 - C. Where
 - D. When
4. Different audiences can account for differences in style by the same author/speaker.
 - A. True
 - B. False
5. Words have fixed meanings that must be recognized apart from their specific locations in Scripture.
 - A. True
 - B. False
6. The titles of the four Gospels were provided by their authors.
 - A. True
 - B. False
7. _____ Gospel demonstrates a special concern for the poor.
 - A. Matthew's
 - B. Mark's
 - C. Luke's
 - D. John's

**NOTES**

8. The Gospel of _____ stresses the connection between Jesus and Judaism.
 - A. Matthew
 - B. Mark
 - C. Luke
 - D. John

9. The Gospel of John emphasizes _____.
 - A. suffering as part of the Christian life
 - B. the Messianic secret
 - C. Jesus as the Universal Savior
 - D. the idea of the future breaking into the present

10. John's Gospel is symbolized in art and literature with _____.
 - A. a man or man's face
 - B. a lion
 - C. an eagle
 - D. an ox, bull, or calf

11. In _____ Gospel, Jesus calls for a type of higher righteousness than that found in the Law.
 - A. Matthew's
 - B. Mark's
 - C. Luke's
 - D. John's

12. _____ Gospel is generally recognized to have been written by a Gentile author.
 - A. Matthew's
 - B. Mark's
 - C. Luke's
 - D. John's

13. _____ was the author of a two-volume work.
 - A. Matthew
 - B. Mark
 - C. Luke
 - D. John

**NOTES**

14. Mark's Gospel stresses _____.
- A. the cross of Christ
 - B. the preexistence of Jesus
 - C. the importance of prayer in the life of the disciple
 - D. Jesus as the fulfillment of Scripture
15. The Gospel of Mark has traditionally been associated with a disciple of _____.
- A. Stephen
 - B. James
 - C. John
 - D. Peter

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT

**NOTES**

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor.

1. How do you believe your study of exegesis will contribute to your future reading of the Bible?
2. We have observed that scholars are not in agreement concerning responses to the Who, What, Where, When, and Why, questions. This is particularly true relating to such issues as authorship and the dating of the Gospels. How important are such issues? Consider and discuss the implications of such matters for your study of the Gospels.
3. Have you ever heard four different people give their eyewitness account of an event? Why is there such a difference?
4. Reflect on the similarities and differences in the four Gospels. How do these enrich your understanding of Jesus and His life?