

"Skill in reading God's Word serves the sweetness of relishing God's glory.
So choose your reading guides wisely. Andy Naselli is one of the best."

—JOHN PIPER, Founder and Teacher, Desiring God

"A truly one-stop-shopping resource. An outstanding tool not likely
to be superseded anytime soon."

—CRAIG L. BLOMBERG, Distinguished Professor of New Testament, Denver Seminary

This comprehensive, conversational book is for anyone who wants to understand and apply the Bible—and the New Testament in particular—in a responsible, well-informed, and God-glorifying way. Naselli is an able guide, walking readers through a carefully field-tested twelve-stage interpretive process that pastors, scholars, teachers, and laypeople can use with benefit.

- Move from genre to textual criticism, take Greek grammar and literary context into account, and journey through the passage all the way to practical application.
- Learn how to track an author's thought-flow, grasp the text's message, and apply the ancient Word in this modern world, all in light of Christ's redeeming work.
- Go further in your studies using the extensive recommended resources for every step of the way.

With engaging illustrations and practical answers at their fingertips, readers will master the skills needed to deepen understanding and shape theology with confidence and wisdom.

"An outstanding resource. [Naselli's book] is wonderfully clear and accessible and hence interesting to read. At the same time, it is packed with information so that readers are instructed in the art of interpretation. There are many resources out there on how to interpret the Scriptures, but this is surely one of the best."

—Thomas R. Schreiner, James Buchanan Harrison Professor of New Testament Interpretation and Associate Dean, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

"This book is profitable for grasping a comprehensive view of how to handle the text, serving also as a reference tool that I will go back to again and again."

—Jen Wilkin, Bible Teacher

"I cannot think of another introduction to New Testament exegesis that combines this degree of clarity and comprehensiveness, all with the design of helping us live in light of the gospel for the glory of God."

—Justin Taylor, Executive Vice President of Book Publishing and Book Publisher, Crossway

"Andy Naselli is one of my favorite authors because of the combination of his soundness as a theologian and his giftedness as a teacher. Both qualities are on bright display here."

—Tim Challies, Blogger, challies.com

Andrew David Naselli (Ph.D., Bob Jones University; Ph.D., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) is Assistant Professor of New Testament and Theology at Bethlehem College & Seminary in Minneapolis and an elder of Bethlehem Baptist Church.

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HOW TO UNDERSTAND AND APPLY
THE NEW TESTAMENT



Naselli

"I have long awaited and prayed
for this book." — Sam Storms

HOW TO UNDERSTAND AND APPLY THE NEW TESTAMENT

TWELVE STEPS FROM EXEGESIS TO THEOLOGY



Andrew David Naselli

FOREWORD BY D. A. CARSON

“This is an exceedingly practical guide that will truly help every minister of the Word understand and apply the New Testament. Naselli has a knack for explaining the principles well and then clarifying them with helpful examples. How I wish every pastor and teacher of the Word would absorb and practice the contents of this book. The church would thrive and grow with the kind of solid preaching that this would produce.”

—**Clinton E. Arnold**, Dean and Professor of New Testament, Talbot School of Theology, Biola University; Member, ESV Translation Oversight Committee

“The task of biblical interpretation is sometimes presented as a special ‘hermeneutic’ (whatever that is) or even as a checklist of tasks to follow whenever one sits down to interpret a Bible passage. The fact is that to gain a detailed understanding of Scripture and of any one portion of it takes a serious amount of effort and commitment to mastering a whole armada of subjects: theological, historical, linguistic, and more. And it takes devotion to the Lord and to his ways (Ps. 119:100). In this book, Andy Naselli introduces students who are starting out in this most exciting and enriching enterprise to the multitude of study areas that one engages in as an exegete. Naselli writes in a personal way to guide beginners through this labyrinth, and he adds value to his own presentation with many references to other works for further study throughout. This work will certainly help many beginning Bible students.”

—**S. M. Baugh**, Professor of New Testament, Westminster Seminary California

“Andy Naselli has written a thorough and substantive book on how to interpret the Bible. It covers all the bases. In addition, it is very practical for Christians who may not be scholars, teachers, or pastors, though scholars, teachers, and pastors will definitely benefit from it. If you want to better learn how to interpret the Bible and apply it to your life, then Naselli’s book is for you. If you want to be better prepared to teach Bible study groups and Sunday school classes, this is the book for you. If you are a pastor and you want to be better prepared to preach, then this is the book for you. If you want to learn how to memorize Scripture, then this is the book for you. In sum, if you are really serious about wanting to understand Scripture better, then this is the book for you. It does not contain technical jargon but is written in a very understandable way, yet it is not lightweight. I heartily commend Andy Naselli’s book.”

—**G. K. Beale**, J. Gresham Machen Chair of New Testament, Westminster Theological Seminary

“Any introduction to New Testament exegesis must strive to accomplish three goals: it must be succinct, it must be readable, and it must be up to date. Andy Naselli’s book not only meets but surpasses these goals. Each of the twelve steps of exegesis is carefully introduced and amply illustrated. In addition, students will appreciate the annotated ‘Resources for Further Study’ section that concludes each chapter. The Spirit is fully able to speak through the Scriptures to us today, and this excellent resource will surely

help us to hear his voice with greater clarity and accuracy. I cannot recommend Andy's book enthusiastically enough."

—**David Alan Black**, Dr. M. O. Owens Jr. Chair of New Testament Studies, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary; New Testament Editor, International Standard Version

"This is an astonishing book—clear enough with all the basics, sophisticated enough with numerous topics not usually found in a hermeneutics primer, abreast of cutting-edge scholarship with thorough and helpful bibliographies, warmly pastoral in spirit, and filled with practical illustrations of each interpretive step applied to key biblical texts. Whereas other works of partially comparable scope have required two or three authors, Naselli has mastered all the pieces himself and produced a truly one-stop-shopping resource. An outstanding tool not likely to be superseded anytime soon."

—**Craig L. Blomberg**, Distinguished Professor of New Testament, Denver Seminary; Member, NIV Committee on Bible Translation

"As a career Bible translator, I heartily recommend Andy Naselli's book on how to understand and apply the timeless message of God's Word. Good Bible translation must begin with good exegesis. The thorough approach and accessible style of this book will make it a valuable resource for Bible translators around the world."

—**Dave Brunn**, International Bible Translation Consultant, New Tribes Mission

"Naselli wrote this book with the serious layperson in mind, and it shows. We don't just want to read the New Testament; we want to understand it, meditate on it, and live in response to it. Showing the skill of a distinguished teacher, Naselli anticipates and articulates the questions of his readers while providing helpful illustrations and practical solutions. If you have been looking for a guide to help sharpen your exegesis and grow as a theologian, grab this inspiring, thorough, and pertinent resource."

—**Aimee Byrd**, Cohost, *Mortification of Spin*; Author, *Housewife Theologian*, *Theological Fitness*, and *No Little Women*

"Though there are many introductions to New Testament exegesis, there are few volumes with which to compare this title by Andy Naselli. It admirably combines a wealth of information with clarity and ease of use. But perhaps most distinct is its overarching devotional approach to the art and science of reading the New Testament. These three characteristics blend to create a formidable and edifying resource that will strengthen the skill, knowledge, and resolve of all who endeavor to study and teach the New Testament."

—**Constantine R. Campbell**, Associate Professor of New Testament, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

"You may spot a notable difference between most of the other people who have endorsed this book and me: while most of them are professors and scholars with academic

pedigrees, I am just a guy with a blog. But I'm a guy with a blog who loves to read and loves to learn. I have found significant value in what I call 'stretch reading': reading that pushes me to the edge of my understanding and sometimes even a little beyond. This book was just such a stretch read but represented a challenge that I am glad I accepted. Andy Naselli is one of my favorite authors because of the combination of his soundness as a theologian and his giftedness as a teacher. Both qualities are on bright display here as he encourages and equips readers to better appreciate, understand, interpret, apply, and teach the precious Word of God. Let this be a personal encouragement from me to you: Consider reading this book. Take the challenge and through it enjoy a deep, compelling, exciting look at God's Book."

—**Tim Challies**, Blogger, challies.com; Pastor, Grace Fellowship Church, Toronto

"Naselli has provided a resource rich with insights that will aid students of Scripture for years to come. As I worked through his approach to understanding and applying Scripture, I became excited about implementing many of his insights in my exegesis courses. This book is immensely practical and challenging, providing many examples to illustrate proper interpretation."

—**David A. Croteau**, Professor of New Testament and Greek, Columbia International University

"Andy Naselli is to be congratulated for putting together this superb introductory volume for a new generation of New Testament students. From beginning to end, Naselli's thoughtful, substantive, and reliable work is presented in a pedagogically sound and reader-friendly manner. I am confident that it will find a warm welcome among its readers, offering them outstanding guidance along the way. It is a genuine delight to recommend this fine book."

—**David S. Dockery**, President, Trinity International University

"Here is a work that asks all the right questions, and then answers them. Naselli has written a comprehensive, readable, and wise guide to New Testament exegesis. Because of its balanced interest in the art and the science, the heart and the methods of exegesis and theology, this book belongs on the shelf of seminary students and seasoned pastors alike."

—**Dan Doriani**, Professor of Theology and Vice President of Strategic Academic Initiatives, Covenant Theological Seminary

"Naselli's book is a lively and inviting resource for anyone who wants to move faithfully from text and interpretation to theology and life in studying the New Testament. In twelve clear, well-organized chapters, he surveys various steps in the process, giving just the right mix of detailed explanation and illuminating examples of what is important and why. I especially recommend his chapters on Bible translation, historical-cultural context, biblical theology, and practical theology. Each chapter includes a richly packed

annotated bibliography of printed and online resources for further study. This is a thoughtful, engaging presentation for beginners as well as more experienced students of the New Testament. Heartily recommended!”

—**Buist M. Fanning**, Department Chair and Senior Professor of New Testament Studies, Dallas Theological Seminary; Translator, NASB, NET Bible

“There are so many good things about Andy Naselli’s *How to Understand and Apply the New Testament* that it is hard to know where to begin. Not-so-common, good sense graces every page. Yet the greatest strength of this accessible, pedagogically useful text is not its constituent parts, which are very strong, but its integration—integration of the movements of exegesis and integration of that process with its purpose. Naselli writes not only as a well-trained, clearheaded New Testament scholar, but as one who has thought deeply about the role of New Testament studies in a Christian life and ministry well lived. I can’t recommend this book strongly enough.”

—**George H. Guthrie**, Benjamin W. Perry Professor of Bible, Union University; Translation Consultant, ESV, CSB, NLT, NCV

“Andy Naselli is one of evangelicalism’s best and brightest. And yet this book captures what so many love about his work: it is written with an evident heart to help Christians understand their Bibles and to love their God more deeply. There can be no greater ambition for a theologian. Naselli has provided us with an excellent resource to be more fully equipped to mine the life-giving treasures of the New Testament.”

—**Matthew J. Hall**, Dean, Boyce College

“Here is a unique, sparkling jewel. A jewel, because for any interpreters of the New Testament it is an exceptionally valuable resource. A unique jewel, because no other comparable work in the field is so comprehensive and thorough. A sparkling jewel, because it is so user-friendly with its consummate clarity and engaging style. And do not miss the superlative appendixes!”

—**Murray J. Harris**, Professor Emeritus of New Testament Exegesis and Theology, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School; Member, original NIV Committee on Bible Translation

“With this volume Naselli has produced a model primer for the discipline of New Testament exegesis. Like other handbooks on the subject, Naselli offers ‘steps’ to the exegetical process in a logical order without insisting on the exact sequence. To the relief of student readers, this is not an exhaustive-but-exhausting textbook; and to the relief of scholarly professors, neither is it a tantalizing-but-merely-tolerable survey. It is comprehensive, comprehensible, compassionate, and courageous. This volume introduces exegesis—and its relationship to the other theological disciplines—with the simplicity needed by students and laypeople and yet in terms that do not make scholars wince. Conversely, in fact, scholars will want to use this text in their classrooms precisely

because Naselli has accomplished much of the labor of making theological technicalities accessible without unnecessarily dumbing them down. The book contains many illustrative examples and engages directly in many of today's debated interpretation issues. The book is captivating to read, and I found myself wondering with anticipation how the author would treat the next step in the process. Yes, Naselli has written an ideal introductory textbook for New Testament exegesis."

—**Douglas S. Huffman**, Professor and Associate Dean of Biblical and Theological Studies, Talbot School of Theology, Biola University

"This book is an excellent comprehensive introduction to biblical exegesis and more. Its evenhanded presentation, well-chosen examples, logical organization, and winsome writing provide a superb 'nuts and bolts' guide for students, pastors, and anyone else interested in how to better read the Bible."

—**Karen H. Jobes**, Gerald F. Hawthorne Professor Emerita of New Testament Greek and Exegesis, Wheaton College and Graduate School; Member, NIV Committee on Bible Translation

"Andy Naselli's *How to Understand and Apply the New Testament* is an accessible and thorough introduction to the disciplines of biblical interpretation. Its noteworthy strengths include an abundance of examples showing how principles work out in practice and its emphasis on the spiritual and pastoral dimensions of the study of God's inerrant Word. Sound, sensitive practices in studying the Bible are as much caught as taught, and this book comes as close as a book can come to offering the opportunity to look over the shoulder of a seasoned exegetical 'coach' as he explores the Scriptures' varying terrain."

—**Dennis E. Johnson**, Professor of Practical Theology, Westminster Seminary California

"In contrast to insecure academicians who disguise their own limits with unfamiliar language, truly good scholars should be able to make complex matters simpler. That's what Naselli does in this work, communicating effectively even in the way he explains what to many readers are less familiar subjects, such as grammar and how to understand Greek language. (Less extraordinarily, Naselli also keeps most simple matters simple.) Well informed on current translation principles and grammatical debates, Naselli also bridges the sometimes inappropriate divides among studying Scripture passages, recognizing biblical themes, and articulating coherent theology."

—**Craig S. Keener**, F. M. and Ada Thompson Professor of Biblical Studies, Asbury Theological Seminary

"Many young preachers feel the need to 'connect to the culture' today, and that is right. But many do so before or even without taking great pains to be sure they understand the scriptural text thoroughly. Careful exegesis will unlock more riches in the passage than the preacher will be able to cover! There are many good books on interpreting

the biblical text, and Andy Naselli lists many of them. But his own volume is as accessible and user-friendly for the working expositor as any I've seen. I recommend it!"

—**Tim Keller**, Senior Pastor, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York City;
Cofounder, The Gospel Coalition

"Eduard Haller once said, 'Nobody needs to be afraid of exegesis unless he is lazy or careless.' Fear not! Naselli gives us the motivation to get off our tails and the method to ensure that we're not chasing them. His counsel is wise, his commentary is witty, and his convictions are worthy of *the Book!*"

—**J. Ed Komoszewski**, Coauthor, *Reinventing Jesus* and *Putting Jesus in His Place*

"Although it is sometimes forgotten, Christianity has always been a movement focused on a text. The fundamental question must always be: What does the Bible say about that? And this wonderful new volume by Andy Naselli helps answer that question. With precision, clarity, and an eye for the practical, Naselli has given the church a much-needed handbook on how to better understand God's Word."

—**Michael J. Kruger**, President and Professor of New Testament, Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte

"Naselli has produced a book that is both comprehensive and yet amazingly accessible. Not only does he guide the reader through the various issues that should be addressed when interpreting the Bible and doing exegesis, he also provides numerous helpful examples that demonstrate the very concepts that he is teaching. This book is loaded with both foundational and practical material that will prove beneficial to any reader. If someone wishes a guide to interpret the Bible faithfully, this is definitely the right book."

—**Benjamin L. Merkle**, Professor of New Testament and Greek, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

"Andy Naselli's guide to interpreting the New Testament comprehensively covers the methods and issues involved. He guides the reader through the thicket of current issues and takes a sensible approach to them. The book is very readable, with frequent use of effective illustrations. I recommend it to beginning New Testament students as well as to more experienced interpreters looking for a refresher."

—**Douglas J. Moo**, Wessner Chair of Biblical Studies, Wheaton College; Chair, NIV Committee on Bible Translation

"By the time you have finished the last page of Andy Naselli's profound work, you will have walked through a resource designed to help you become a better student and a more effective communicator of the Word. His perspective has that rare balance between clarity and brevity, simplicity and profundity, depth and warmth. Dr. Naselli has produced a unique book that can help everyone. Whether or not you agree with

every interpretive conclusion presented in the book, you will intellectually and spiritually grow through the process. Andy's book is a must-read for every seminary student."

—**Steve Pettit**, President, Bob Jones University

"Andy Naselli argues that 'exegesis exists because worship doesn't.' This has two implications: the goal of life is worship, and the way to get there is exegesis. There is an all-encompassing worldview behind those two implications—a worldview that I believe in with all my being. It's a worldview that says: The highest spiritual experiences (such as worship) arise through the most ordinary mental acts (such as reading). Which means that skill in reading God's Word serves the sweetness of relishing God's glory. So choose your reading guides wisely. Andy Naselli is one of the best."

—**John Piper**, Founder and Teacher, Desiring God; Chancellor and Professor of Biblical Exegesis, Bethlehem College & Seminary

"As I read through Naselli's new book, I kept finding myself thinking, 'Yes! That's the way to say that!' or 'This will really help students!' or 'Why didn't I think of that?' I expect God to use this book to shape thousands of Christians to be more faithful readers, teachers, and disciples of his Word."

—**Robert L. Plummer**, Professor of New Testament Interpretation, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

"A confident and faithful reading of the New Testament requires the mastery of a range of skills. For many years I've struggled to recommend a textbook to students that covers all of them adequately. My search is over. Andy Naselli's gem of a book is comprehensive in scope, lucid, engaging, and practical. It is an excellent introduction to the art and science of responsible New Testament exegesis."

—**Brian S. Rosner**, Principal, Ridley College, Melbourne, Australia

"Naselli's book on how to do exegesis is an outstanding resource. It is wonderfully clear and accessible and hence interesting to read. At the same time, it is packed with information so that readers are instructed in the art of interpretation. There are many resources out there on how to interpret the Scriptures, but this is surely one of the best."

—**Thomas R. Schreiner**, James Buchanan Harrison Professor of New Testament Interpretation and Associate Dean, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; Cochair, CSB Translation Oversight Committee

"Naselli has produced a surprisingly comprehensive textbook in remarkably clear fashion. I cannot think of a single significant issue that he has failed to address. Moreover, the book is replete with levelheaded comments and helpful suggestions. Highly recommended."

—**Moisés Silva**, Retired Professor of New Testament, Westmont College (1972–81), Westminster Theological Seminary (1981–96), and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (1996–2000); Comité de traducción bíblica, Nueva Versión Internacional (the Spanish NIV); Translation Consultant, NASB, ESV, NLT

“This outstanding text should catapult to the top of the heap in the field of exegetical handbooks. It is clear and practical, simple but not simplistic. Refreshingly personal and pastoral, Naselli’s illustrations and anecdotes flesh out what is often seen as a sterile academic exercise. In short, it offers the best of both worlds: sound theoretical foundations and timely applications of those principles. Naselli has written a real keeper. I recommend it enthusiastically.”

—**Jay E. Smith**, Professor of New Testament Studies, Dallas Theological Seminary

“Naselli has compiled an impressive compendium of information and suggestions for interpreting biblical texts covering such areas as textual criticism, translation, Greek grammar, diagramming biblical arguments, the importance of understanding historical and literary contexts, and biblical, historical, systematic, and practical theology. I found the chapter on Bible translation especially helpful.”

—**Robert H. Stein**, Senior Professor of Biblical Interpretation, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“I have long awaited and prayed for this book. I didn’t know that Andy Naselli would be the one who would finally write it, but I can think of no one more qualified to do so. If you are an average, adult-educated layperson in the local church who wants to know how to read and interpret Scripture, this book is for you. If you are a young pastor who entered ministry without the benefit of a seminary education, this book is for you. If you are a pastor who has allowed his earlier training to slip away because of the business of ministry, this book is for you. It is challenging yet user-friendly, remarkably exhaustive yet readily accessible, and above all else deeply devoted to the life-changing power of God’s written Word. In a day when the Bible is badly read, poorly preached, and horribly misapplied, we need this wise and nearly comprehensive guide to bring us back on track. So you pastors, teachers, and all other Christians who long for the deep things of God: get this book and devour it!”

—**Sam Storms**, Lead Pastor for Preaching and Vision, Bridgeway Church, Oklahoma City; President, Enjoying God Ministries

“This is a great book! It is clear, accurate, balanced, well organized, readable, practical, and chock-full of good examples and illustrations. Naselli has no bones to pick or axes to grind, just lots of light to shine on fundamental principles of biblical interpretation. Highly recommended.”

—**Mark L. Strauss**, University Professor of New Testament, Bethel Seminary San Diego; Vice-Chair, NIV Committee on Bible Translation

“If you want to learn how to study, practice, and teach the Word of God (Ezra 7:10), then ideally you would want to have a skilled and godly teacher who not only models good interpretation but knows how to put it into practice. Further, you would want someone who knows how to communicate the principles clearly, giving lots of examples. Finally, you would want someone who could give you a comprehensive

approach—from beginning to end, from understanding to application. All of this is found in this remarkable book from Andy Naselli. I cannot think of another introduction to New Testament exegesis that combines this degree of clarity and comprehensiveness, all with the design of helping us live in light of the gospel for the glory of God. The people of God will be strengthened in their walk with the Lord to the degree that they understand and apply the principles of this excellent book!”

—**Justin Taylor**, Executive Vice President of Book Publishing and Book Publisher, Crossway; Managing Editor, *The ESV Study Bible*

“S. Lewis Johnson Jr. complained that biblical scholars—both exegetes and theologians—had ignored, as he called it, ‘the holy bonds of matrimony’ between the two disciplines. This divorce has hardly been amicable. Both arid exegesis and ungrounded theology are the result. Forty years later, Naselli has boldly reconciled the two in a single volume. As professor of New Testament and theology, he’s the right man for the job. Comprehensive, clear, convincing, and convicting, this irenic and witty book is the outpouring of a mind devoted to the text and of a life lived to the glory of King Jesus.”

—**Daniel B. Wallace**, Senior Professor of New Testament Studies, Dallas Theological Seminary; Executive Director, Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts; Senior New Testament Editor, NET Bible

“Books on the study of the Bible can often be like bowls of shredded wheat—nutritious, filling, . . . and flavorless. Andy Naselli has admirably remedied that problem. *How to Understand and Apply the New Testament* informs and engages. Readers of all levels will find rich food for thought as Naselli leads them through nuanced, up-to-date, and bibliographically informed discussions of the steps of studying the New Testament. Even if one does not always agree with its conclusions, one will leave *How to Understand and Apply the New Testament* with a firmer grasp of both the message of the New Testament and the methods of its study, and with a clear challenge to read and apply the New Testament to the glory of God.”

—**Guy Prentiss Waters**, James M. Baird Jr. Professor of New Testament, Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson

“What Andy Naselli has done in this work is remarkable. He has taken what multiple volumes focus on and in one book written on how to move from exegesis to theology with precision, clarity, and biblical fidelity. I know of no other book that so helpfully and carefully enables the reader to understand the basics of literary forms, textual criticism, translation theory, Greek grammar, and numerous other crucial points of exegesis with such accuracy and written in such a readable and engaging way. But Naselli does more. He not only describes these helpful points of exegesis, but also helps the reader do exegesis, and he clearly illustrates how to move from the biblical text to proper biblical and theological conclusions by offering specific examples and illustrations. Our day desperately needs the church to be faithful Bible readers and

doers in order to know our great and glorious triune God truly. In fact, the life and health of the church is directly related to our reading and application of God's Word to our lives. This book is greatly needed to help pastors, students, and all other Christians to rightly divide God's Word and to apply it to their lives. I highly recommend it, and I pray that it will have a wide use in the church."

—**Stephen J. Wellum**, Professor of Christian Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; Editor, *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*

"Unlike the author of this book and writers such as Don Carson, Tom Schreiner, and others who have endorsed it, I am neither a technical scholar nor one who teaches hermeneutics. Although I am honored and eager to endorse it, my guess is that I was invited to do so because of my connection to the *Apply* part of the title, for that's been more of the emphasis of my published work. So while parts of this book may not reveal their full value if you don't have at least a working knowledge of New Testament Greek, don't conclude that there's no benefit here for you. *Mē genoito* ('God forbid!'—and see chapter 8). Andy Naselli has written a book that's both interesting and useful for anyone who wants to know the New Testament better, whether that person is reading it in Greek or English. Naselli furnishes not only valuable insights to many key New Testament passages, but also tools for the reader to use on his or her own in future Bible study. Moreover, Naselli provides the reader with a great deal of unexpected bonus material along the way, such as why and how to organize your personal theological library, why and how to memorize an entire New Testament book, and more. If you had enough interest in this volume to pick it up and also to read this far into my hearty endorsement, then I'm certain that there's much here you will enjoy and find profitable."

—**Donald S. Whitney**, Professor of Biblical Spirituality, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

"In my years of teaching the Bible, the most common refrain I hear from those wanting to teach or study is: 'Where do I start?' Andy Naselli offers twelve steps to place us on the path with a map and a compass. Bible study requires a careful balance of humility and confidence. Andy helps us consider the weight of the joyful task, offering the resources to encourage us to take up the burden responsibly. This book is profitable for grasping a comprehensive view of how to handle the text, serving also as a reference tool that I will go back to again and again."

—**Jen Wilkin**, Bible Teacher; Author of *Women of the Word* and *None like Him*

"This remarkable book assembles, organizes, and synthesizes the wisdom of great biblical interpreters of both yesteryear and today. It adds in the energy and shrewdness of Naselli's own omnivorous reading and wide-ranging informational quests. The result is a grounded but decidedly current manifesto for serious Bible interpreters. It covers advanced Greek-language matters without getting mired in minutiae and

escorts readers onward into theological domains to which Scripture, rightly handled, inexorably leads. It performs the service of providing numerous lists of other books that go into more detail on every subject covered. It makes fine contributions in its own right to understanding and living Scripture and to avoiding pitfalls along the way. It deserves a wide readership in college and seminary classrooms. It will also appeal to serious disciples of Christ everywhere who want to freshen and upgrade what they bring to the table as Bible readers seeking more than what good intentions and devotional dedication alone can provide.”

—**Robert W. Yarbrough**, Professor of New Testament, Covenant Theological Seminary

“It’s no secret that exegetical/hermeneutical guidebooks are not created equal. They are not equally informed, they are not equally useful, and they are not equally enjoyable. As a class they provide a vital service to the church, of course—after all, what could be more important than understanding God’s Word rightly? But find one that is at once informative, useful, and enjoyable, and you have a winner. Andy Naselli’s book is a winner, one that will without doubt strengthen the preaching of all who read and follow his counsel. Wonderfully comprehensive yet pleasantly concise, well informed yet easily accessible, the book is a delightfully enjoyable read. Read it through quickly as a needed refresher course; read it through carefully and slowly for weeks of learning and equipping for increasingly faithful ministry of God’s Word.”

—**Fred G. Zaspel**, Pastor, Reformed Baptist Church, Franconia, Pennsylvania; Executive Editor, *Books at a Glance*; Associate Professor of Christian Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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TWELVE STEPS FROM EXEGESIS TO THEOLOGY

Andrew David Naselli

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To John Piper,
who inspires me to look at the Book—
and to keep looking

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3. Weigh the Internal Evidence
4. Weigh the External Evidence
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 - 2. The Middle Ages (600–1500)
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 - 2. It Displays the Fruit of Orthodoxy and Heresy
 - 3. It Can Foster God-Glorifying Unity When Fellow Christians Disagree on Nonessential Issues
 - 4. It Helps You Think Globally
 - 5. It Can Reveal Your Theological Blind Spots
 - 6. It Gives You Perspective regarding Seemingly Novel Views
 - 7. It Cultivates Humility
 - 8. It Guards You against Chronological Snobbery
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 - 2. Where Did Keswick Theology Come From?
- XII. Systematic Theology: Discern How a Passage Theologically Coheres with the Whole Bible
 - A. What Is Systematic Theology?
 - B. Ten Corresponding Strengths and Dangers of Systematic Theology
 - 1. It can enrich how you exegete a particular text, but it can distort how you exegete a particular text.
 - 2. It can give you an accurate theological grid, but it can substitute for the Bible.
 - 3. It can precisely identify doctrinal tensions, but it can tempt you to errantly resolve tensions.
 - 4. It can help you correlate how a particular text harmonizes with others, but it can lead you to develop your own “canon within the canon.”

5. It can directly address contemporary issues in a way that exegesis and biblical theology can't, but it can more easily overlook the text because it is further removed from it.
6. It can make necessary and helpful logical inferences from texts, but it can irresponsibly speculate in a way that is not tethered to a text.
7. It can efficiently package what the whole Bible teaches, but it can irresponsibly proof-text the Bible.
8. It can help you refute error, but it may be erroneous.
9. It can help you correlate how the Scriptures cohere on a particular topic, but it can focus so much on historical theology, theological prolegomena, and philosophy that it fails to correlate what the Bible teaches.
10. It can help you do theological triage, but it does not automatically churn out the right answer.

C. Example: What Is the Gospel?

1. What Does the Word *Gospel* Mean?
2. News Can Be Good to Various Degrees
3. The Bad News Is Very Bad
4. The Good News Is Very Good
5. We Can Summarize the Bad News and Good News with Four Words:
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6. So What Exactly Is the Gospel?

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1. What Is Evil?
2. What Are the Logical and Emotional Problems of Evil?
3. What Are Some Unbiblical/Inadequate Solutions to the Logical Problem of Evil?
4. What Does a Biblical Approach to the Logical Problem of Evil Include?

XIII. Practical Theology: Apply the Text to Yourself, the Church, and the World

A. What Is Practical Theology?

1. Why Do We Need to Apply the Bible to How We Live?
2. Are There Traditional Categories for Practical Theology?
3. Does Exegesis Always Precede Application?
4. It's Complicated

B. Six Guidelines for Applying the Bible

1. Recognize That Exegesis and Theology Control Application
2. State a Truth from a Passage as a Universal Principle
3. Exegete Your Audience and Their Culture
4. Target Specific Categories of People
5. Apply a Universal Principle to a Specific Contemporary Situation regarding Duty, Character, Goals, and/or Discernment
6. Recognize That Applications Have Different Levels of Authority

C. Example: How Paul Uses Isaiah and Job in Romans 11:34–35

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2. God Is without Counselors: His Wisdom Is Deep (Rom. 11:34b)
3. God Is without Creditors: His Riches Are Deep (Rom. 11:35)
4. Conclusion

D. Example: How Should You Work?

1. Work Heartily and Sincerely as for the Lord, Not Other People
2. Work Hard; Don't Be Lazy
3. Work Hard, but Don't Overwork
4. Work Shrewdly, but Don't Work Dishonestly
5. Be Ambitious, but Don't Be Greedy

XIV. Conclusion: Look at the Book!

- A. Look at the Fish!
- B. Why Should You Look at the Book?

FOREWORD



MANY HAVE REMARKED that New Testament scholars who teach elementary Greek for twenty or thirty years very often decide to write their own introductory Greek grammars, firmly believing that the particular slant or emphases they introduce make their textbooks the best option in a sea of introductory Greek grammars. And indeed, each such volume tends to be very good when used by the scholar whose experience over two or three decades has produced it: the published work nicely fits the style and teaching priorities of that particular teacher. Some such works are too idiosyncratic to find broad popularity, of course, but the best of them win the approval of other teachers and gradually find their niche in the smorgasbord of introductory Greek grammars.

Something similar could be said about works designed to introduce students to New Testament exegesis. In this field, too, numerous handbooks of exegesis and introductions to exegesis have appeared over the last few decades. But this field is far more complex than the field of Greek grammar; indeed, Greek grammar is merely one topic within the comprehensive sweep of exegesis. As a result, there is far more scope for variations in emphasis, comprehensiveness, clarity, and the like.

And that's where this book by Andy Naselli comes in. As a first-level introduction, there is nothing quite like it. The range of its topics is remarkable: literary genre, textual criticism, translation, grammar, phrase diagramming, historical-cultural and literary contexts, word studies, biblical theology, historical theology, systematic theology, practical theology—and two remarkable appendixes, about which more in a minute. Doubtless some teachers will prefer to include a little more of this, a little less of that. What is really striking about this introduction, however, is its combination of five strengths: (1) the range of topics that Dr. Naselli introduces is remarkable; (2) the mass of detail that he presents on most of the topics, without making the reader choke on the sheer quantity, is wholly impressive; (3) Dr. Naselli manages to combine an attention to little details with an eye on the big picture; (4) he knows how to organize his material in ways that are pedagogically helpful, not least to beginning students; and (5) he writes with rare clarity and simplicity. The book is a delight to read.

And then we remember the appendixes. The first one underscores the importance of (digital) filing systems and suggests in some detail one useful approach. Over the long haul, good and faithful exegesis demands the ability to find and retrieve good material, often material that one has already read. The second appendix tells us “Why and How to Memorize an Entire New Testament Book.” That’s not a separate topic: the best exegesis immerses the student in the text, and memorization of the text is an important part of the discipline. But the impact of this second appendix is broader: it reminds all of us that we must avoid such a focus on tools and genres and disciplines and skill sets and historical trends that we never really soak in holy Scripture. The aim, as always, is not to master the text, but to be mastered by it.

D. A. Carson
Research Professor of New Testament
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School;
President and Cofounder
The Gospel Coalition

PREFACE



I LOVE GOD, and I love studying his Word and his world. I wrote this book to help you study the New Testament, specifically how to do exegesis and theology.

Whom is this book for?

- *Students.* This book could be a textbook for a college or seminary course on interpreting the Bible. (My school uses it for a course that our seminary students take during their first semester.)
- *Pastors and people with theological training.* This book could refresh and enhance how you understand and apply the New Testament.
- *Thoughtful men and women who have little or no formal theological training.* This book is also for thoughtful Christian laypeople. As I drafted this book, I requested feedback from some men and women who don't have any formal theological training. I incorporated many of their suggestions because I want this book to serve everyone who is eager to understand and apply the Bible. A few parts of the book may be challenging for you if you do not have a lot of theological education, but if you are convinced that it is worth the effort (and it is!), then you can rise to meet that challenge.

The book's structure is simple. It begins by introducing exegesis and theology, which I break down into twelve steps. Those twelve steps are the book's twelve chapters.

I drafted this book in summer 2015 as I prepared to record a course called "New Testament Exegesis" for Logos Mobile Ed in a studio at the Faithlife headquarters in Bellingham, Washington. At the end of that process, John J. Hughes from P&R Publishing casually asked me whether I had any book ideas in mind, and it occurred to me that I could serve the church by taking the course notes I had drafted for a teleprompter and revising them as a book. This book maintains the informal tone and personal anecdotes from those lectures.

As we study how to understand and apply the New Testament, let's follow Johann Albrecht Bengel's advice: "Apply yourself wholly to the text; apply the text wholly to yourself."

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



THIS BOOK EXPLAINS how to interpret and apply the Bible. Where do I even begin thanking God for all the people he has used to help me? I'll limit the scope to seven individuals or groups:

First, my doctoral mentor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School was D. A. Carson, and I served as his research assistant for about nine years. That was like a young lawyer's getting to clerk for a Supreme Court Justice. If you are familiar with Carson's work, you will no doubt see his fingerprints all over this book. He is a model exegete and theologian, and it's an honor that he wrote the foreword.

Second, I dedicate this book to John Piper, who inspires me to look at the Book—and to keep looking. He influenced me so deeply that when I started dating my wife-to-be, I lent her my marked-up copies of *The Pleasures of God*, *Desiring God*, and *Rediscovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, and I asked her to read them to make sure that we were on the same page theologically. (She loved them.) John models how to look at the Book and exult in it.

Third, in my college and early seminary years, Mark Minnick and Layton Talbert taught me how to exegete the Bible and do theology. I listened to hundreds of Minnick's sermons on cassette tapes, and he was my pastor for four years and my professor for a few seminary courses. Talbert was my professor for ten courses in college and seminary, and he was a groomsman in my wedding, which Minnick performed. I thank God for how they mentored me.

Fourth, I'm grateful to my school, Bethlehem College & Seminary, for encouraging and empowering me to research and write in order to spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ. I love my school's theology, team, and strategy.

Fifth, it's a joy to serve shoulder to shoulder with Jason DeRouchie at Bethlehem College & Seminary. He embodies Ezra 7:10. I can't think of another Old Testament seminary professor I'd rather team up with. We spend about three hours together each week while commuting, and the better I get to know him, the more I thank God for

him. I especially love coteaching a fourth-year graduate course with him on biblical theology. Jason is both an Old Testament scholar *and* a biblical theologian. He helps me see Jesus more clearly in the Old Testament. It was an honor to collaborate with Jason as I prepared this book and he prepared the companion volume *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology*.

Sixth, some friends graciously offered incisive feedback on drafts of this book, including Don Carson, Tim Challies, Jason DeRouchie, Abigail Dodds, Doug Huffman, Scott Jamison, Jeremy Kimble, Matt Klem, Pam Larson, Daniel Kleven, Rob Marcello, Jenni Naselli, Dane Ortlund, Brian Tabb, and Dan Wallace. Special thanks to my teaching assistant, Matt Klem, for his detailed feedback, to Andy Hubert for helping my diagrams from Biblearc.com fit this book's format, to Karen Magnuson for her outstanding copyediting, and to John Hughes for overseeing the entire process.

Finally, I thank God for my excellent wife, Jenni. My heart trusts in her. She enthusiastically supports the research-writing-teaching-shepherding ministry that God has called me to, and she makes our home—"The Burrow"—my favorite place to be. (It's where I wrote this book.)

ABBREVIATIONS



ASV	American Standard Version
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BDAG	Walter Bauer, Frederick William Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, eds., <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000)
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BSac	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
CEB	Common English Bible
CEV	Contemporary English Version
CSB	Christian Standard Bible
ESV	English Standard Version
GNT	Good News Translation
GW	God's Word Translation
HALOT	Ludwig Köhler, Walter Baumgartner, M. E. J. Richardson, Johann Jakob Stamm, and Benedikt Hartmann, eds., <i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> , 3 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1994–2000)
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JSNT	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
KJV	King James Version
LB	Living Bible
LEC	Library of Early Christianity

LXX	Septuagint
NA ²⁸	Nestle-Aland, 28th edition (Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger, eds., <i>Novum Testamentum Graece</i> , 28th ed. [Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012])
NAB	New American Bible
NAC	New American Commentary Studies in Bible and Theology
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NCV	New Century Version
NET	The NET Bible
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIDNTT	<i>New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</i>
NIDOTTE	<i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i>
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIV	New International Version
NIVAC	NIV Application Commentary
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NKJV	New King James Version
NLT	New Living Translation
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
TDNT	Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., <i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> , 10th ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984)
TLG	<i>Thesaurus Linguae Graecae</i>
TNIV	Today's New International Version
TR	<i>Textus Receptus</i>
UBS ⁵	United Bible Societies, 5th edition (Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger, eds., <i>The Greek New Testament</i> , 5th ed. [Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; United Bible Societies, 2014])
WTJ	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZECNT	Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament

INTRODUCTION



What Is Exegesis?

One of the few framed items in my school office features the words of Ezra 7:10: “For Ezra had set his heart [1] to study the Law of the LORD, and [2] to do it and [3] to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.” The pattern has three steps:

1. *Study* the Word.
2. *Practice* or *do* the Word.
3. *Teach* the Word.

Before you teach the Word to others, you need to practice it. You must practice what you teach and preach. But before you practice and teach the Word, you have to know what it says. So you must study it. That’s what this book is about: How should you study the Word so that you can practice and teach it? More specifically, how should you understand and apply the New Testament?

New Testament refers to the second part of the Christian Bible, the twenty-seven books that are the counterpart of the Old Testament. In order to understand the New Testament, you must exegete it. But what does *exegesis* mean?

I remember the first time I heard someone use that word. My face twisted up in puzzlement, and I thought, “*Exe-Jesus?! Did he just take the name of Jesus in vain?*” But I soon learned that *exegesis* is the opposite of *eisegesis*. Exegesis draws the meaning *out* of a text (that’s good!), and eisegesis reads a meaning *into* a text (that’s bad!). In other words, exegesis interprets a text by analyzing what the author intended to communicate. Exegesis is simply *careful reading*. For example, when a young lady who is deeply in love with her fiancé receives a letter from him, she reads it carefully. She wants to understand what her fiancé meant.

Exegeting the New Testament includes but is not limited to parsing Greek words, doing word studies, and analyzing syntax at various levels (i.e., clause, sentence, discourse, genre) while being sensitive to literary features and the running argument. *The text means what the text’s author meant*. Exegetes are primarily concerned with interpreting a text, that is, discovering what the author meant. And when the text is the

Bible, we must never stop with exegesis: we must also do theology—biblical, historical, systematic, and practical theology. We must *apply* what the text means in our contexts.

This may raise a couple of questions:

- What's the difference between *exegesis* and *hermeneutics*? Herman who?! *Hermeneutics*. Hermeneutics concerns *principles* of interpretation (i.e., it's about how the interpretive process works), and *exegesis applies* those principles. Hermeneutics supplies the tools to discover a text's meaning, and exegesis uses those tools.
- Where does expository preaching fit into this process? Expository preaching communicates not only what a text means but how it applies to people in their contexts. Expository preaching is sermons that build on sound exegesis. That is, the sermons explain and apply the Bible based on sound exegesis. In general, this means that the main point of the biblical text from which a preacher is preaching should be the main point of the sermon.¹ So hermeneutics is to exegesis what homiletics is to preaching. Homiletics concerns *principles* of preaching (i.e., preparing, structuring, and delivering sermons), while exposition *applies* those principles (e.g., preaching a sermon on Romans 3:21–26).

For example, you can study how to make pizza, but that is different from applying that knowledge while you make pizza. Or you can study rules and strategies for playing soccer, but that is different from applying that knowledge while you play soccer. Similarly, homiletics studies how to preach, which is different from applying those principles while you preach. And hermeneutics studies how to interpret the Bible, which is different from applying those principles while you interpret or exegete the Bible (i.e., carefully read it by drawing meaning out of it, analyzing what the author intended to communicate).

Exegesis may sound complicated, but it's really not. You know how to exegete a text. If I randomly opened an e-mail thread in my Gmail inbox and if I asked you to exegete it, what would you do? You would probably do the following (though not necessarily in this order):

1. Recognize that the style of literature is e-mail, so the thread consists of messages that two or more individuals electronically wrote to each other.
2. Look at the subject line to see whether it tells you what the thread is about.
3. Look at the names of the authors in the thread.
4. Look at the time stamps of the e-mails.
5. Figure out who the authors are.
6. Read the messages in the order in which people sent them.

1. Mark Dever and Greg Gilbert, *Preach: Theology Meets Practice*, 9Marks (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2012), 36–38.

If you were to *eisegete* an e-mail thread, you would read your own meaning into it. You might select a word or phrase or sentence from an e-mail that strikes you and then invest it with a meaning totally foreign to what the authors in the thread meant. You may unintentionally *eisegete* it because you do not sufficiently understand the language or historical context.

When people interpret the Bible, even though they may have the best motives in the world, they can still read their ideas into the Bible rather than draw out what the author originally intended. Throughout this book, you can examine many specific New Testament texts that people *eisegete* rather than *exegete*, and you can learn how to responsibly *exegete*.

Twelve Steps for Exegesis and Theology

In this book I'm breaking down the process of doing exegesis and theology into twelve steps. These twelve steps are the book's twelve chapters:

1. *Genre*. Establish guidelines for interpreting a passage's style of literature.
2. *Textual Criticism*. Establish the original wording.
3. *Translation*. Compare translations.*
4. *Greek Grammar*. Understand how sentences communicate by words, phrases, and clauses.*
5. *Argument Diagram*. Trace the logical argument by arcing, bracketing, or phrasing.*
6. *Historical-Cultural Context*. Understand the situation in which the author composed the literature and any historical-cultural details that the author mentions or probably assumes.
7. *Literary Context*. Understand the role that a passage plays in its whole book.
8. *Word Studies*. Unpack key words, phrases, and concepts.
9. *Biblical Theology*. Study how the whole Bible progresses, integrates, and climaxes in Christ.
10. *Historical Theology*. Survey and evaluate how significant exegetes and theologians have understood the Bible and theology.
11. *Systematic Theology*. Discern how a passage theologically coheres with the whole Bible.
12. *Practical Theology*. Apply the text to yourself, the church, and the world.

* I plan to use New Testament Greek throughout the book, especially in steps 3–5. If you don't know Greek at all, this book is still for you. I am not assuming that you know intermediate Greek grammar and syntax, though it will certainly help if you know at least a little bit of Greek, such as basic forms and vocabulary. But those who don't know Greek can easily follow the vast majority of this book.

Steps?

It's somewhat artificial to break down exegesis and theology into twelve steps because in practice I don't know of any New Testament scholars who think, "OK: Step 1: do this. Step 2: do that," and so on.

It's like asking Lionel Messi how he plays soccer. He doesn't think, "Well, step 1 is that I dribble. Step 2 is that I run and dribble at the same time." There are so many facets to playing soccer at a high level. That's why soccer players can improve their overall game by focusing on individual areas such as dribbling and passing and sprinting and cutting and shooting and lifting weights to get stronger and studying strategies to win. But in the heat of the moment during a game, soccer players aren't thinking, "Step 1: do this. Step 2: do that." At that point they're just playing by instinct and employing all the skills they've developed as best they can. They go with the flow of the game and adjust to their opponents' defensive schemes and strategize how to improve on both ends of the field. But they're not following a clear twelve-step list.

So it is with exegesis and theology: When a world-class scholar exegetes a passage, he is not thinking, "Step 1: do this. Step 2: do that." After decades of exegeting the Bible, he has found that the exegetical process has become more intuitive and integrative for him.

But I'm not assuming that you're a scholar. So as we study New Testament exegesis, we'll break it down into logical steps so that we can analyze the whole process piece by piece and see how it works. Focusing on these steps one at a time is like a soccer player's focusing on aspects of soccer one at a time: dribbling, passing, shooting, and the like.

So these twelve steps are "steps" only in theory. They are interrelated. And you won't necessarily need to spend time on each step for every passage you exegete or even deliberately proceed from one step to the next, checking off items on a list as you go. But presenting twelve steps like this helps us focus on various aspects of exegesis as we attempt to understand the process better.

Exegesis Is Both a Science and an Art

I don't want to imply that exegesis is a mechanical, robotic process, that if you simply follow the instructions you will inevitably churn out the right interpretations. No, exegesis is both a science and an art because it involves weighing factors, not just counting them. It's complicated. And that's why it's important for you to posture your heart correctly before you even begin. Approach the exegetical process humbly and prayerfully. Ask God to open your eyes. You need the Holy Spirit to illumine your mind.

John Piper, chancellor of Bethlehem College & Seminary, defines education as instilling habits of mind and heart that incline and enable students for the rest of their lives to do six actions for the glory of God and the good of the world:

1. Observe the Word and the world carefully.
2. Understand what you observe clearly.
3. Evaluate what you have understood fairly.

4. Feel that evaluation proportionately.
5. Apply your discoveries to all of life wisely.
6. Express your discoveries clearly and accurately and creatively and winsomely.²

That's a daunting task for which you need God's help. So you may want to pray something like this as you exegete God's Word: "Father, this is the one to whom you will look: the one who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at your Word (Isa. 66:2). Please give me grace to be humble and contrite in spirit and to tremble at your Word."

How Do Exegesis and Theology Interrelate?³

Five Theological Disciplines

There are five theological disciplines:⁴

1. *Exegesis* interprets a text by analyzing what the author intended to communicate. It draws the meaning out of a text. The first eight steps in this book are components of exegesis: genre, textual criticism, translation, Greek grammar, argument diagram, historical-cultural context, literary context, and word studies.

2. *Biblical theology* studies how the whole Bible progresses, integrates, and climaxes in Christ. It makes organic, salvation-historical connections with the whole canon on its own terms, especially regarding how the Old and New Testaments integrate and climax in Christ. It focuses on the turning points in the Bible's story line, and its most pivotal concern is how the New Testament uses the Old. Old and New Testament theology are subsets of whole-Bible biblical theology. We must read the whole Bible—including the Old Testament—with *Christian* eyes.

3. *Historical theology* surveys and evaluates how significant exegetes and theologians have understood the Bible and theology. How has Christian doctrine developed? In particular, how has it responded to false teaching? This focuses on periods of time earlier than our own.

4. *Systematic theology* discerns how a passage theologically coheres with the whole Bible. This builds on but goes beyond exegesis. It answers the question "What does the whole Bible say about _____ [fill in the blank]?" It presupposes that the whole Bible is coherent, that it doesn't contradict itself.

5. *Practical theology* applies the text to yourself, the church, and the world. It answers the question, "How should we then live?"⁵

2. See John Piper, *Think: The Life of the Mind and the Love of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 181–98.

3. This section condenses Andrew David Naselli, "D. A. Carson's Theological Method," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 29, 2 (2011): 245–74.

4. These are the five major categories I use to organize my library. See "Appendix A: Why You Should Organize Your Personal Theological Library and a Way How."

5. This question borrows the title of a well-known book: Francis A. Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?*, in *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: A Christian Worldview*, 5 vols. (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1985), 5:79–277.

Describing each of those final four final theological disciplines with a single adjective—*biblical*, *historical*, *systematic*, and *practical*—can be confusing because those adjectives also describe the other disciplines. Biblical theology, for example, is not *ahistorical*, *unsystematic*, and *impractical*! And systematic theology should be *biblical*. Those terms are simply traditional labels for interrelated theological disciplines.

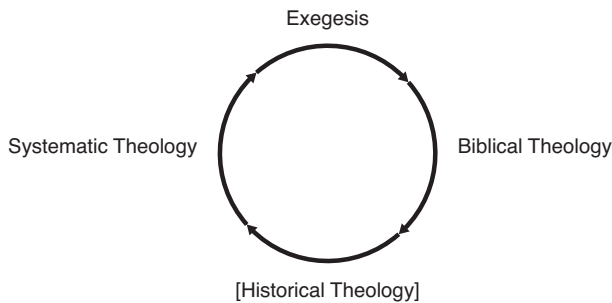
The Complex Interrelationship between the Five Theological Disciplines

D. A. Carson explains:

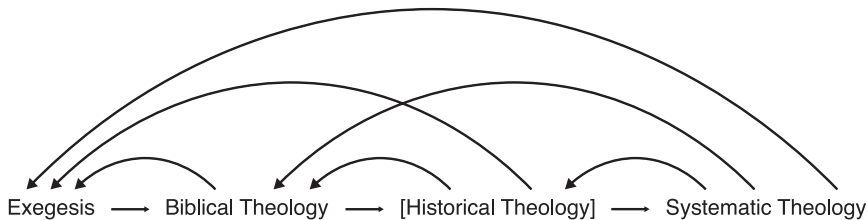
It would be convenient if we could operate exclusively along the direction of the following diagram:

Exegesis → Biblical Theology → [Historical Theology] → Systematic Theology

(The brackets around the third element are meant to suggest that in this paradigm historical theology makes a direct contribution to the development from biblical theology to systematic theology but is not itself a part of that line.) In fact, this paradigm, though neat, is naïve. No exegesis is ever done in a vacuum. If every theist is in some sense a systematician, then he is a systematician *before* he begins his exegesis. Are we, then, locked into a hermeneutical circle, like the following?



No; there is a better way. It might be diagrammed like this:



That is to say, there are feedback lines (and more lines going forward, for that matter). It is absurd to deny that one's systematic theology does not affect one's exegesis. Nevertheless the line of final control is the straight one from exegesis right through biblical and historical theology to systematic theology. The final

authority is the Scriptures, and the Scriptures alone. For this reason exegesis, though affected by systematic theology, is not to be shackled by it.⁶

Now let's briefly think through how the theological disciplines interrelate, how they influence one another. Consider seven relationships:

1. *Exegesis and Biblical Theology*. These are the two most similar theological disciplines. In general, exegesis analyzes, and biblical theology synthesizes. Exegesis helps you read the Bible's story line with precision, and biblical theology helps you exegete with the Bible's story line in view.

2. *Exegesis and Historical Theology*. Creeds and theologians are not ultimately authoritative; only Scripture is. But many Bible interpreters move straight from exegesis to systematic theology without pausing to consider historic creeds and significant theologians. Historical theology reveals orthodox exegetical options and shows how many contemporary views are not as novel as they may seem.

3. *Exegesis and Systematic Theology*. You might think that you exegete the Bible neutrally and objectively and that you build your systematic theology on such discoveries. But that's not how it works: your systematic theology profoundly influences your exegesis. One danger here is that you can develop your own "canon within the canon"—your own list of favorite passages that you think are most important and that operate like a controlling interpretive grid—so that your systematic theology controls your exegesis. (And sometimes your systematic theology may simply be your church tradition.) This helps explain how, for example, some covenant theologians and dispensationalists can exegete the same texts with such different results.⁷ Or sometimes you might overemphasize one biblical truth at the expense of another.

4. *Historical Theology and Systematic Theology*. When studying what the Bible teaches about a particular subject (i.e., when you are doing systematic theology), you must integrate historical theology. Systematic theology uses categories from historical theology, but what often drives systematic theology is what you think are the most important current issues to address.

5. *Biblical Theology and Historical Theology*. Since we are finite, we do biblical theology best when we interact with historical theology. How have other significant exegetes and theologians done biblical theology?

6. *Biblical Theology and Systematic Theology*. Biblical theology is inductive, historical, and organic; systematic theology is relatively deductive, ahistorical, and universal. For biblical theology, the text sets the agenda. For systematic theology, the text is important, but other factors often set the agenda—such as a philosophical question. Here's how Carson puts it:

6. D. A. Carson, "Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: The Possibility of Systematic Theology," in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 91–92.

7. See Stephen J. Wellum, "Covenants in Biblical-Theological Systems: Dispensational and Covenant Theology," in Stephen J. Wellum and Peter J. Gentry, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 39–80.

Systematic theology tends to be a little further removed from the biblical text than does biblical theology, but a little closer to cultural engagement. Biblical theology tends to seek out the rationality and communicative genius of each literary genre; systematic theology tends to integrate the diverse rationalities in its pursuit of a large-scale, worldview-forming synthesis. In this sense, systematic theology tends to be a culminating discipline; biblical theology, though it is a worthy end in itself, tends to be a bridge discipline.⁸

7. Practical Theology and the Other Theological Disciplines. Practical theology applies (i.e., culturally contextualizes) exegesis, biblical theology, historical theology, and systematic theology to help people glorify God by living wisely with a biblical worldview. It includes pastoral theology, preaching, counseling, evangelism, ethics, education, culture, worship, and much more. It answers such questions as “How should people respond to God’s revelation?” You simply can’t do responsible practical theology unless its foundation is exegesis, biblical theology, historical theology, and systematic theology.

If you emphasize “what the Bible means *to me*,” you might completely ignore the distance between yourself and the text. But if you read more responsibly, you will read a passage of the Bible on its own terms, discern how it contributes to the whole Bible, and ask how that applies to yourself, the church, and society.

Doing exegesis and theology well is a lot of work. Where does prayer fit in?

Which Is More Valuable: Ten Minutes of Prayer or Ten Hours of Study?

God did not reveal the Bible merely to satisfy our curiosity about intellectual questions. He reveals himself and his ways in order to transform how we live. So on the one hand, we don’t want to superficially exegete the Bible and then irresponsibly and prematurely apply it. But on the other hand, we don’t want to rigorously exegete the Bible and stop there.

Some people perceive a massive tension between (1) rigorously exegeting the text and (2) cultivating a prayerful devotional life. But do you have to choose between being academic and being devotional?

Enter B. B. Warfield (1851–1921). He was a scholar—one of the best. And he refused to separate theology and spirituality. Warfield strikes an outstanding balance in five articles, reprinted in his *Selected Shorter Writings*. Here are the five titles in chronological order:⁹

1. “Authority, Intellect, Heart,” 2:668–71.
2. “The Indispensableness of Systematic Theology to the Preacher,” 2:280–88.

8. D. A. Carson, “Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 103.

9. Benjamin B. Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings*, ed. John E. Meeter, 2 vols. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970–1973).

3. "Spiritual Culture in the Theological Seminary," 2:468–96.
4. "The Religious Life of Theological Students," 1:411–25.
5. "The Purpose of the Seminary," 1:374–78.

Those five articles by B. B. Warfield are hugely helpful and motivating. So here is a little taste of Warfield.

Warfield argues that pitting doctrine against devotion is a false dichotomy because God intends them to go together. They are not mutually exclusive; one without the other is incomplete. Here's a sample from his essay "The Religious Life of Theological Students":

The ministry is a "learned profession"; and the man without learning, no matter with what other gifts he may be endowed, is unfit for its duties. But learning, though indispensable, is not the most indispensable thing for a minister. "Apt to teach"—yes, the minister must be "apt to teach"; and observe that what I say—or rather what Paul says—is "apt to *teach*." Not apt merely to exhort, to beseech, to appeal, to entreat; nor even merely, to testify, to bear witness; but to teach. And teaching implies knowledge: he who teaches must know. Paul, in other words, requires of you, as we are perhaps learning not very felicitously to phrase it, "instructional," not merely "inspirational," service. But aptness to teach alone does not make a minister; nor is it his primary qualification. It is only one of a long list of requirements which Paul lays down as necessary to meet in him who aspires to this high office. And all the rest concern, not his intellectual, but his spiritual fitness. A minister must be learned, on pain of being utterly incompetent for his work. But before and above being learned, a minister must be godly.

Nothing could be more fatal, however, than to set these two things over against one another. Recruiting officers do not dispute whether it is better for soldiers to have a right leg or a left leg: soldiers should have both legs. Sometimes we hear it said that ten minutes on your knees will give you a truer, deeper, more operative knowledge of God than ten hours over your books. "What!" is the appropriate response, "than ten hours over your books, on your knees?" Why should you turn from God when you turn to your books, or feel that you must turn from your books in order to turn to God? If learning and devotion are as antagonistic as that, then the intellectual life is in itself accursed, and there can be no question of a religious life for a student, even of theology. . . . Just because you are students of theology, it is understood that you are religious men—especially religious men, to whom the cultivation of your religious life is a matter of the profoundest concern—of such concern that you will wish above all things to be warned of the dangers that may assail your religious life, and be pointed to the means by which you may strengthen and enlarge it. In your case there can be no "either-or" here—either a student or a man of God. You must be both.¹⁰

10. Ibid., 1:411–12.

Here's one more taste, from Warfield's essay "Spiritual Culture in the Theological Seminary":

The entire work of the seminary deserves to be classed in the category of means of grace; and the whole routine of work done here may be made a very powerful means of grace if we will only prosecute it in a right spirit and with due regard to its religious value. . . .

I beseech you, brethren, take every item of your seminary work as a religious duty. I am emphasizing the adjective in this. I mean do all your work religiously—that is, with a religious end in view, in a religious spirit, and with the religious side of it dominant in your mind. Do not lose such an opportunity as this to enlighten, deepen, and strengthen your devotion. Let nothing pass by you without sucking the honey from it. If you learn a Hebrew word, let not the merely philological interest absorb your attention: remember that it is a word which occurs in God's Holy Book, recall the passages in which it stands, remind yourselves what great religious truths it has been given to have a part in recording for the saving health of men. . . . Apply every word to your own souls as you go on, and never rest satisfied until you feel as well as understand. . . . Treat, I beg you, the whole work of the seminary as a unique opportunity offered you to learn about God, or rather, to put it at the height of its significance, to learn God—to come to know him whom to know is life everlasting. If the work of the seminary shall be so prosecuted, it will prove itself to be the chief means of grace in all your lives. I have heard it said that some men love theology more than they love God. Do not let it be possible to say that of you. Love theology, of course: but love theology for no other reason than that it is THEOLOGY—the knowledge of God—and because it is your meat and drink to know God, to know him truly, and as far as it is given to mortals, to know him whole.¹¹

11. Ibid., 2:478–80. The section entitled "Warfield the Affectionate Theologian" at the end of this book is spot on: Fred G. Zaspel, *The Theology of B. B. Warfield: A Systematic Summary* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 567–70. Zaspel nails it when he describes Warfield as "a theologian of the heart" (568):

He will surrender neither doctrine nor experience. There is no genuinely Christian experience apart from truth, and it is this depth of Christian experience that characterizes Warfield throughout his writings. If he argues for an inerrant Bible, it is to find in it certain truth about the God whom we can trust. If he explores the mysteries of the Trinity, it is to deepen worship. If he argues for the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination, he finds in it cause for praise and comfort and assurance. If he argues for a clear understanding of the two natures of Christ, it is to rest in a uniquely qualified Redeemer and to know and glory in the greatness of his condescending love; only an informed reflection on the redeeming grace of the incarnation "more ardently kindles the affection of faith." If he argues against Pelagian and Arminian and for Calvinistic views of humanity and salvation, it is to heighten our sense of dependence upon and appreciation for divine grace and thereby cultivate piety that is distinctly and thoroughly Christian. If he argues for justification by faith, it is because in no other place can the conscience find rest and be at peace with God and enjoy fellowship with him. When he reads the narrative of Jesus' trials, he highlights not simply the evil of humanity as displayed in Pilate, the priests, and the mob; rather, he adores the contrasting perfections of the One they condemn. For Warfield the academic study of Scripture is to be not only a means to minister to others but also "a religious exercise out of which you draw every day enlargement of heart, elevation of spirit, and adoring delight in

Academia didn't master Warfield; Warfield mastered academia.¹² He refused to separate what God has joined together. Serious theological study and spirituality go together.

Which is more important: an airplane's left wing or right wing? That's a bad question. And so is this one: Which is more valuable: ten minutes of prayer or ten hours of study? Answer: Ten hours of study *on your knees*.

Key Words and Concepts

Argument diagram
Biblical theology
Canon within the canon
Eisegesis
Exegesis
Expository preaching
Genre
Greek grammar
Hermeneutics
Historical-cultural context
Historical theology
Homiletics
Literary context
Practical theology
Systematic theology
Textual criticism
Translation
Word studies

Questions for Further Reflection

1. Some preachers eisegete the Bible instead of exegeting it. How can you discern whether a preacher is explaining what the author intended to communicate?
2. Do you ever exegete your e-mail more carefully than you exegete the Bible? If so, why?
3. Of the twelve steps for exegesis and theology, which are you most and least passionate about? Why?
4. Regarding how exegesis and theology interrelate, do you think some of the five theological disciplines are more important than others? Why?

your Maker and your Savior." . . . He was, in his heart of hearts, a sinner rescued by divine grace, and it is this consideration that seems to have driven both his devotional life and his polemic endeavors. (569–70)

12. See Andrew David Naselli, "Three Reflections on Evangelical Academic Publishing," *Themelios* 39, 3 (2014): 428–54.

5. Do you ever feel a tension between carefully reading the Bible and cultivating a prayerful devotional life? What practical steps can you take so that you don't separate what God has joined together?

Resources for Further Study

- Adler, Mortimer J., and Charles Van Doren. *How to Read a Book*. 2nd ed. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972. A classic on how to read carefully. The authors do not have biblical exegesis in mind, but their principles apply to reading any book—including the books of the Bible.
- Black, David Alan, and David S. Dockery, eds. *Interpreting the New Testament: Essays on Methods and Issues*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001. About 550 pages to reference. It includes chapters on most of the twelve steps that we address in this book.
- Blomberg, Craig L., with Jennifer Foutz Markley. *A Handbook of New Testament Exegesis*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010. One of the most helpful introductions to New Testament exegesis. It lays out the exegetical process in ten steps: (1) Textual Criticism, (2) Translation and Translations, (3) Historical-Cultural Context, (4) Literary Context, (5) Word Studies, (6) Grammar, (7) Interpretive Problems, (8) Outlining, (9) Theology, and (10) Application.
- Bock, Darrell L., and Buist M. Fanning, eds. *Interpreting the New Testament Text: Introduction to the Art and Science of Exegesis*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006. Surveys most of the twelve steps that I address in this book for over 300 pages and then includes 150 pages of detailed examples.
- Cameron, Andrew J. B., and Brian S. Rosner, eds. *The Trials of Theology: Becoming a "Proven Worker" in a Dangerous Business*. Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2010. Part 1 excerpts writings from six past voices: Augustine, Luther, Spurgeon, Warfield, Bonhoeffer, and C. S. Lewis. Part 2 includes present voices, and the highlight is D. A. Carson's chapter: "The Trials of Biblical Studies" (109–29). Carson's essay reflects on five interrelated domains that students in biblical studies must address: (1) four forms of integration, such as not separating technical and devotional Bible study; (2) polar temptations regarding work; (3) five facets of pride; (4) pressures to manipulate Scripture; and (5) three priorities regarding writing. What ties these together is humility.
- Carson, D. A. "Approaching the Bible." In *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, edited by D. A. Carson et al., 1–19. 4th ed. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994. See especially the second half of the article under the heading "How to Interpret the Bible."
- . *New Testament Commentary Survey*. 7th ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013. Carson shrewdly advises what the best New Testament resources are.
- Croteau, David A. *Urban Legends of the New Testament: 40 Common Misconceptions*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2015. Debunks forty "urban legends" such as these: (1) there was no room at the inn; (2) Jesus died when he was thirty-three;

(3) *hell* referred to a first-century garbage dump near Jerusalem; and (4) women should not wear jewelry. Croteau skillfully uses the appropriate exegetical tools for each job. Sometimes he uses textual criticism or grammar or the literary context or the historical-cultural context. This book is well researched and enjoyable to read.

Duvall, J. Scott, and J. Daniel Hays. *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012. A good college-level introduction that covers most of the twelve steps that we address in this book.

Dyer, John. *Best Commentaries: Reviews and Ratings of Biblical, Theological, and Practical Christian Works*. www.bestcommentaries.com/. John Dyer, who has a Th.M. from Dallas Theological Seminary, started this website in 2008. It is especially helpful if you are wondering about the best commentaries to consult on a certain book of the Bible. Dyer is a web developer who has thought a lot about technology (e.g., he wrote a book in 2011 called *From the Garden to the City: The Redeeming and Corrupting Power of Technology*), and he puts his skills to good use for this website. He uses a scoring algorithm for commentaries that takes into account how other scholars such as D. A. Carson rate them.

Fee, Gordon D. *New Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors*. 3rd ed. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002. Another excellent introduction to New Testament exegesis. Fee methodically lays out fifteen steps for exegesis, primarily to help students write research papers. (Blomberg's book is more user-friendly and up to date.)

Guthrie, George H., and J. Scott Duvall. *Biblical Greek Exegesis: A Graded Approach to Learning Intermediate and Advanced Greek*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998. The second half of the book is called "The Exegetical Method" (97–165), and it walks through twelve steps of exegesis that overlap with most of the steps in this book.

Köstenberger, Andreas J., and Richard D. Patterson. *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology*. Invitation to Theological Studies. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011. Nearly 900 pages thoroughly introduce students to hermeneutics. In 2015 Kregel released an even more accessible version of this book that is half the size: *For the Love of God's Word: An Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*.

Naselli, Andrew David. "D. A. Carson's Theological Method." *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 29, 2 (2011): 245–74. I follow D. A. Carson's theological method in this book.

Osborne, Grant R. *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. 2nd ed. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006. Comprehensively introduces students to hermeneutics.

Piper, John. *Reading the Bible Supernaturally: Seeing and Savoring the Glory of God in Scripture*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017. Part 1 argues from the Bible that our ultimate goal in reading the Bible is to worship God by exalting his infinite

worth and beauty, and parts 2 and 3 explain how reading the Bible is both a supernatural and a natural act.

Plummer, Robert L. *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*. 40 Questions. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010. A master teacher clearly and accessibly introduces readers to hermeneutics.

Schreiner, Thomas R. *Interpreting the Pauline Epistles*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011. An outstanding handbook for New Testament exegesis that focuses on Paul's letters.