

Third  
Edition

# Dig and Discover

HERMENEUTICAL

# Principles

LEADERSHIP RESOURCES TRAINING



*The Core Principles*



*Leadership*  
RESOURCES



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# *Welcome!*

You're holding a booklet that contains the "Dig and Discover" hermeneutical principles taught by Leadership Resources International as part of a training program designed to "encourage and equip pastors around the world to teach God's Word with God's heart."

Even though this booklet is designed to explain hermeneutical principles, what we desire for you to understand more than hermeneutical principles is Scripture itself. Remember that hermeneutical principles are simply tools. We explain them only to help you better read, study, and understand the message of God's Word, as you fully depend on the illumination of His Spirit in prayer.

And as you study God's Word, keep in mind that the ultimate purpose and goal of studying the Bible is not knowledge, but worship. Our desire is not simply for your mind to be filled with information about the Bible. Instead, our prayer is that your heart would be transformed through its message by the Holy Spirit and would overflow in worship as you come to know God more through the person of Jesus Christ.

May God indeed do this in your heart. May He bless your study of His Word, cause you to love Him more each day, and help you live out His Word in thankful, trusting obedience - all in praise and glory and honor to Him.

# Staying on the Line\*

## What Does It Mean to “Stay on the Line”?

- Staying on the line illustrates the task of the teacher or preacher to discover what God’s Word says and to be faithful to it.
- The line itself represents what God actually says in His Word:



- To go above the line means to add something that is not really there – to say more than what God said in His Word. It leads to error, often in the form of legalism.
- To go below the line means to leave something out that is there – to not be wholly true and faithful to the truth of what God’s Word is saying. It often leads to liberalism and license.
- Staying on the line may be compared to the promise witnesses in some courts of law must make: “I promise to tell the truth, the whole truth [not to go below the line], and nothing but the truth [not to go above the line].”

## How Important Is This to God?

- Since the time of Moses, God has made it clear that His spokesmen are to say what He has said – nothing more and nothing less (Exodus 4:10-16; Deuteronomy 4:1-2; 1 Samuel 3:1-4:1; Proverbs 30:5-6; Ezekiel 3:1-11; Jeremiah 1:4-19; 23:9-40; John 7:16-18; 8:28-29; 12:29-50; 2 Timothy 2:15-18a; Revelation 22:18-19).

## How Important Is This to Our Preaching?

- God’s words are beyond compare. Throughout the Bible, we see His words are powerful, certain, and good; only His words can give life. We want people to hear God’s voice rather than ours – His truth rather than man’s opinions and ideas. We need to experience the transforming power that comes only through His words.

## What Does Staying on the Line Require?

- Submitting to God’s written Word
- Carefully discerning and understanding what God’s Word actually says
- Communicating it faithfully in our teaching, preaching, and living

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# Text and Framework\*

**The Principle:** We must let the Bible shape our frameworks rather than letting our frameworks shape our interpretations of the Bible.<sup>1</sup>

## What Do We Mean by “Text” and “Framework”?

- ▶ The **text** is any passage from the Bible that we might study and preach or teach.
- ▶ A **framework** is our basic way of understanding things. It affects how we read and understand the text.

## More on “What Is a Framework?”

- A framework is a person’s basic way of understanding what he knows. It is the underlying thought structure that shapes our comprehension of everything. Our framework organizes all of our thoughts and ideas and holds them all together in a way that makes sense for us.
- Everyone has a framework. It develops over time by our parents’ teaching, our education, culture, personal experience, and our place in history – even our reading of the Bible.
- During our lives we encounter new information. We have to figure out how it fits in with our previous understanding of things. In the end, we either decide to ignore or reject new information, or we accept it and allow it to reshape our framework.

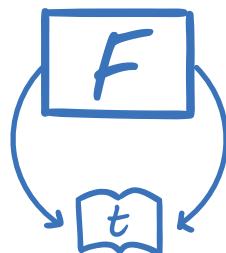
## Frameworks Affect How We Read the Bible.

- When we sit down to study the Bible, we bring our framework with us – including the way we see and understand God, man, sin, Christ, suffering, redemption, and many other important things.
- Frameworks, in and of themselves, are not necessarily bad. They are necessary in the process of reading, understanding, and communicating the Bible. However, they can wrongly influence the way we understand the text.

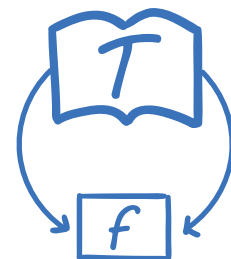
## The Text Should Rule Over and Shape Our Framework.

- We believe that the Bible is from God (2 Peter 1:21), inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16a), true and reliable (Matthew 5:17-18), and sufficient for our faith and practice (2 Timothy 3:16b). Yet we often do not recognize when our framework overpowers the way we understand the text, and sometimes, even when we are aware of it, we are unwilling to let go of our framework.
- In order to rightly understand God’s Word and preach it faithfully, we must let the text rule over and shape our framework.
- Where there is a difference between the text and our framework, we must ask God to help us recognize it and allow the text to shape our understanding.

**What often happens:**  
*Our framework influences and shapes our understanding of the text.*



**What should happen:**  
*The text rules over and shapes our framework.*



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1 The Charles Simeon Trust, “Principles of Exposition,” <http://www.simeontrust.org/media/cst-principles.pdf>



# Genre

## What Is Genre?

“Genre” is a word that refers to the type, or kind, of literature, or written material, that we find in the Bible. We know the different kinds of genres by differences in literary features like the style of writing, the form, the content, and the purpose of what is written.

## How Does Understanding Genre Help Us?

Recognizing the genre helps us know the characteristics of the kind of literature we’re reading. And understanding the characteristics of the literature helps us by giving us certain clues, even understood rules, for how to read and interpret it correctly – to understand what the author’s purpose was in writing and what he wanted to convey.

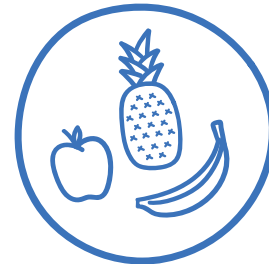
## Different Genres in the Bible

There are many different literary genres found in the Bible. Below are some of the major genres generally recognized in the Bible. Although whole books of the Bible are usually associated with certain genres, each book of the Bible can contain within itself different genres or even subgenres – more specific classifications of literary genres.

## Distinctive Use of Language

One important difference we see among the genres is the way each one uses language to express its message. Below is a spectrum that compares different genres and general characteristics of the kind of language each one uses.

### Types of Fruit

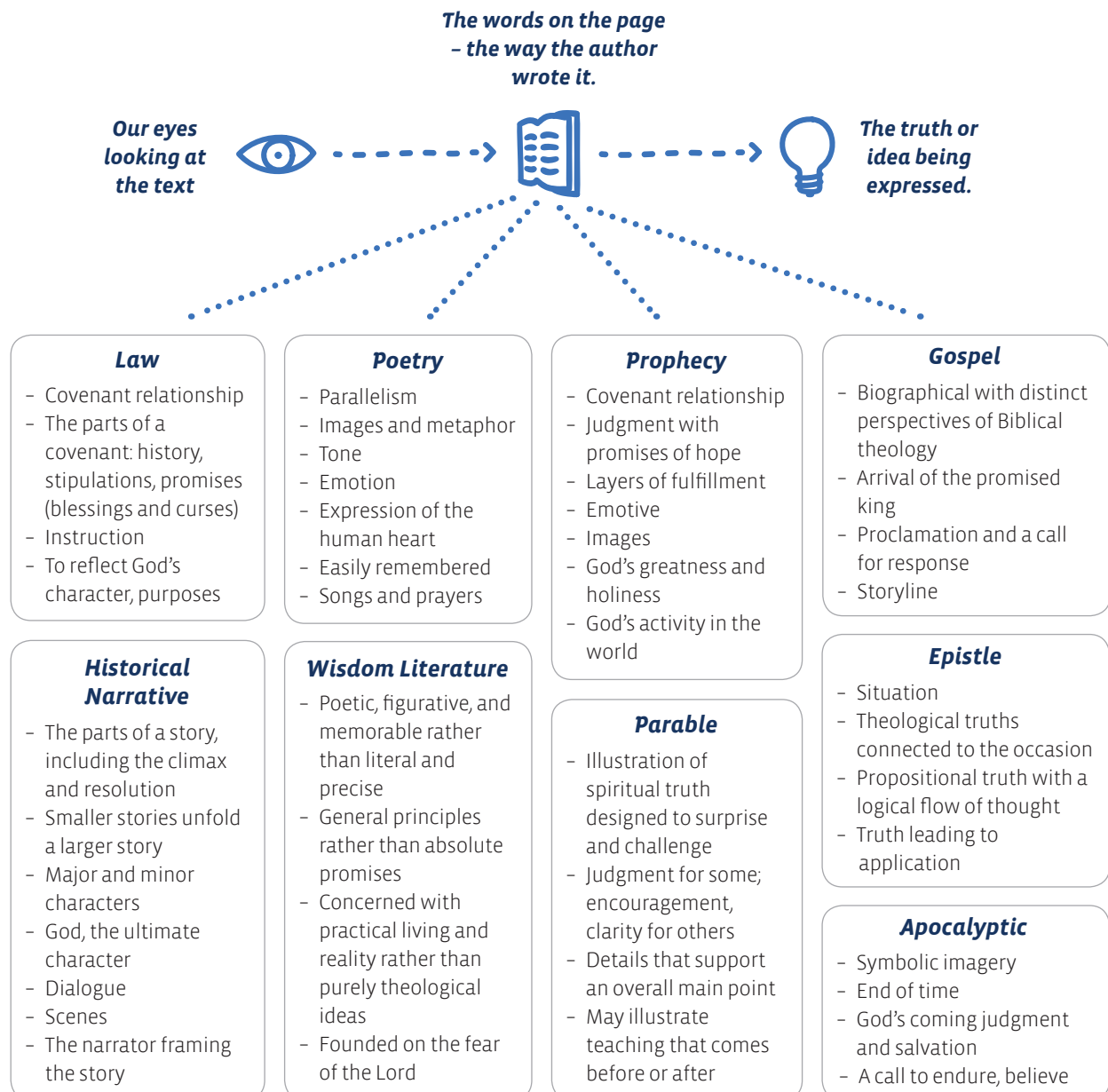


*Interpreting the different genres of the Bible is like preparing different kinds of fruit for eating. We may be able to bite directly into an apple. But if we do that with a banana, we won’t enjoy the taste very much. If we try biting into a pineapple, it could be dangerous! We have to understand the differences between each kind of fruit in order to know the proper way to prepare it for eating. In the same way, we must understand the differences between the genres of the Bible in order to properly understand the message the author was communicating.*



## How It Works

- We must remember that the author was expressing a truth through a style of writing. When our eyes read the words on the page, we need to keep in mind how the characteristics of that genre help us understand the truth or idea being expressed.
- Look through the characteristics for each of the genres below. How would you misread the Law if you ignored God's covenant relationship as a characteristic of that genre? What conclusions might you make in apocalyptic literature if you did not know that the truth is expressed through symbols and images? Take some time to consider how ignoring one or more of the characteristics in the other genres would change the way you understand the author's message.

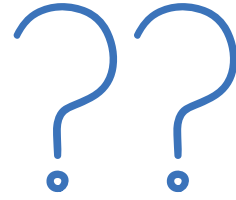




# Asking Good Questions

## The Importance of Asking Good Questions

Asking good questions helps us, first, to observe and understand what the Bible is actually saying. Then, good questions help us dig deeper to discover the heart of the message of God's Word so that we may be faithful to it and transformed by it.



## What Is a Good Question?

- A good question asks about something that may not be obvious in the text but is essential for understanding the author's intended meaning.
- A good question is one that helps us understand why the author wrote what he did and how he intended his audience to respond to what he said.

## How Do We Ask Good Questions?

Begin by asking the basic questions of observation. Then, go deeper with questions that help us understand the intention and meaning of the author's message.

### ► Basic Questions of Observation

Begin by asking questions that open our eyes to what the text actually says:

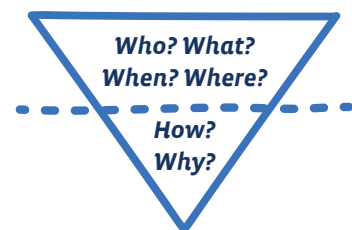
- What does the text say? (Keep asking this most basic observation question.)
- When did this happen? Who are the characters involved? What places are mentioned?
- What are the important connecting or transition words?
- Are there any comparisons or contrasts?
- Are there repeated words or ideas?

### ► Essential Questions that Go Deeper

Go beyond the basic questions and ask good questions that help us understand why the author wrote what he did.

- Why does the author say this here? Why in this way?
- What is the tone?
- What is surprising about it?
- How does it point to or speak about Christ?
- What is it saying as a whole?
- What response did the author hope to see from his readers?
- What is the response God is looking for in our hearts and lives today?

*From basic questions about  
content and information . . .*



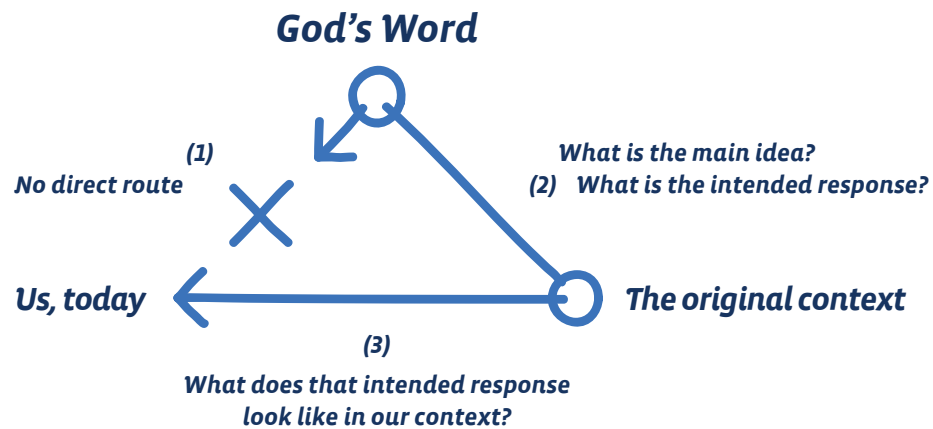
*... to deeper questions about  
intent and reasoning*

## The Attitude of the Heart in Asking Questions

Three attitudes of the heart are essential in our pursuit to know what God's Word is saying and in helping us develop the skill of asking good questions.

- **Curiosity.** Ask questions with the curiosity of a child.
- **Discernment.** Learn to ask questions that go beyond obvious answers.
- **Perseverance.** Keep working and asking questions in order to understand.

# Traveling Instructions\*



## The Principle:

- The goal is to hear God's Word with the transforming intent of the author in a way that can be applied to our lives today. In order to do that, we first need to travel back to understand the message expressed through the author in the original context.

## How Does Traveling Instructions Work?

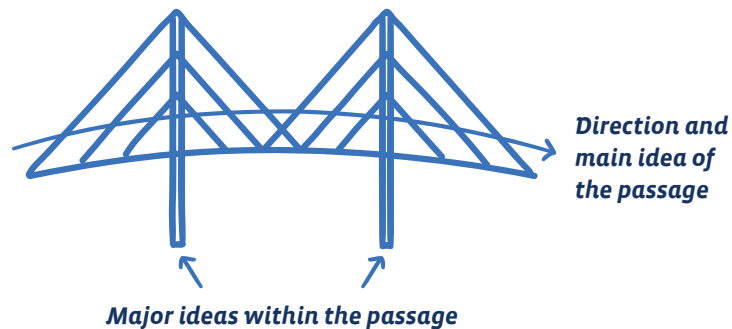
- (1) **Not Taking the Direct Route.** We are often tempted to read God's Word and try to apply what is said directly to our lives. But God first spoke through the heart of an author to readers in a different time and place. And so, instead of taking a direct route from God's Word to our lives today, we first need to travel back to consider what that author was saying to the original readers, and why.
- (2) **Hearing the Intent of the Author.** We must travel back to listen to what God was saying through an author in the original context. We need to consider both the literary context (the message of the book) and the historical context (the background situation described in the Bible). While there are many aspects of context which we could explore, we want to focus our attention on those which help us understand what the author was saying, why he said this to these people, and what response he desired from his message.
- (3) **Applying the Message to Us Today.** The end goal of Traveling Instructions is application. After we have discovered the author's intended response to the message he gave, we can then travel to our day and ask how that response would be seen in our lives and in the lives of the people where we live and minister.

## Why Is Traveling Instructions Important?

- If we take the shortcut and try to immediately apply God's Word to our lives, we risk misinterpreting what God was saying through His Word, missing the way God intends for us to respond, and misleading the people to whom we minister.
- However, when we do take the time to travel correctly, we discover the wonder of God's heart expressed through the original context, and the transforming power of His Word for our lives today.

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# Structure



## What Is Structure?

- The structure of a passage (or a book) involves:
  - (1) the **parts of a passage** – the units of thought that contain the major ideas of the passage
  - (2) the **connections of thought** that hold the sections and major ideas of the passage together

## Why Is Structure Important?

- Seeing the structure helps us **see the direction** the author's thoughts are taking us and how he unfolds his message.
- Structure is important for our preaching and teaching because we want to make sure that the way we arrange the ideas in our teaching reflects the way the author arranged his thoughts in the passage. An awareness and understanding of structure in the Bible brings a clarifying power to our preaching.

## How Do You Find the Structure of a Passage?

1. **Compare the end with the beginning.** First, read until you find the natural ending of the passage to make sure you have the right beginning and end of the author's thought. Then, look at the ending in light of the beginning. What's the significance of the conclusion in light of how the author's thoughts began?
2. **Look for patterns and shifts in thought.** As you read the passage, what kind of patterns do you see that point to the major ideas the author is trying to convey? Also as you read, look for shifts in thought or a change in direction. These can be detected by a change in patterns.

Look especially for:

- Repetitions
- Progressions
- Contrasts and comparisons
- Key transitions or summary statements

Also look for:

- Commands
- A story's climax and resolution
- Questions asked and answered

3. **Divide the passage.** After seeing the patterns and shifts in thought, divide the passage into sections that reflect the development of the author's thoughts.
4. **Describe the major ideas.** State the major idea of each section of the passage.
5. **Find the connections of thought between the major ideas.** How does one major idea connect or lead to the next? How do all of them connect together and reveal the direction of the author's thoughts?

(Seeing the structure leads naturally to discovering the main idea. In light of what you find about the structure, ask, "What is the main idea of this passage?")



# Finding the Main Idea and Intended Response

## What Is the Main Idea?

- The main idea is the main point or the central message of a passage (or a book).

## Why Is Finding the Main Idea Important?

In Scripture:

- It helps us clearly discern the message God intends us to hear through a passage of Scripture.
- It helps us see the focal point around which other ideas in the passage are organized.

In preaching and teaching:

- It helps us remain faithful to what God is saying in His Word.
- It becomes the focal point around which everything in a sermon or lesson is organized.

### ***The Melodic Line***



***The main idea and intended response of a passage or book can be compared to the melody of a song a composer has written, which we sing or respond to in the way he intended.***

## Finding the Main Idea Involves . . .

- Finding the structure and major thoughts of the passage.
  - Remember all the clues you found in the text that helped you find the structure, especially the pattern and direction of ideas.
  - Consider how the development of thought points to the main idea.
- Asking two summary questions about the passage:
  1. What general idea is the author talking about?
  2. What specifically is he saying about that idea?

## Finding the Intended Response

- Looking for the main idea causes us to ask, “What did the author say?” Looking for the intended response leads us to ask, “Why did the author say it?”
- Simply ask: In light of the message of this passage, what response did the author desire to see in the lives of his audience? In other words: What transformation was God seeking to accomplish through the words of the author in the life of the listener? . . . What was the intended response?

## How Do We State the Main Idea?

The main idea can be stated in two different ways:

- A “descriptive” main idea – in terms of what is described in the passage
- A “teaching” main idea – in terms of a timeless principle which reflects the specific message of the passage but also incorporates the transformational thrust of the intended response for our lives today

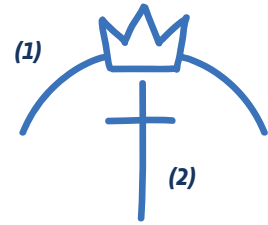
The statement of the Main Idea should be:

- Complete – including the major ideas of what the author is saying
- Concise – short enough that listeners can remember it
- Clear – expressed in a sentence, not simply a title or thought

# Biblical Theology

## What Is Biblical Theology?

- Biblical theology is a natural way of reading the Bible that helps us see ...
  - (1) the overarching story of the Bible and how each part unfolds God's message through that story
  - (2) how each part of the story points to Christ, since the overarching story about God and His purposes and plan is fulfilled in Christ



## (1) The Overarching Story

### A Rope



The Bible is like a rope. A rope has many strands, but there is one rope. The Bible has many themes, and Biblical theology helps us to see how those themes are woven together into one story with one message.

- We must read the Bible as a whole – an unfolding story, woven together with one message. Here are some questions for understanding a passage or book within the biblical story:
  - What's the story so far?
  - What's this story about?
  - What do we learn about how God does things?
  - What do we learn about how God does things through Jesus?

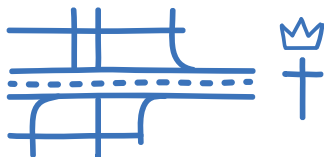
## (2) Fulfillment in Christ

### ► The Old Testament Points to Christ

- Luke 24:27 says that “beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, [Jesus] interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (see also 24:44). So when we preach from the Old Testament, we can preach Christ because all of the Old Testament as a whole is **pointing forward** to Christ.

### Main Highways on a Map

We may think about the Bible as a map, and on that map we see that all roads in the Old Testament lead to Christ. Not all roads are the main highways. The main highways are those passages from which a direct connection to Christ can be clearly seen. But all of the smaller roads, side streets, and alleys eventually connect to the main highways.



We may be studying a passage that is on a side road. The important question to ask is: How does this passage get me to the main highway? Or, How does this passage connect with a main theme or passage that points me towards Christ?

### ► The New Testament Explains Christ's Fulfillment

- While the Old Testament prepares the way for and points to Christ, the New Testament reveals and explains who He is and how He has fulfilled God's purpose and plan.
- Ask:
  - Is the New Testament author looking back at an Old Testament promise about Christ? If so, how does the author understand it?
  - How does the author see the implications of Christ's coming and ministry on this side of the cross and resurrection?
  - Is the author pointing us forward to the promise of Christ's return and the future of His kingdom? If so, what does he say about it?

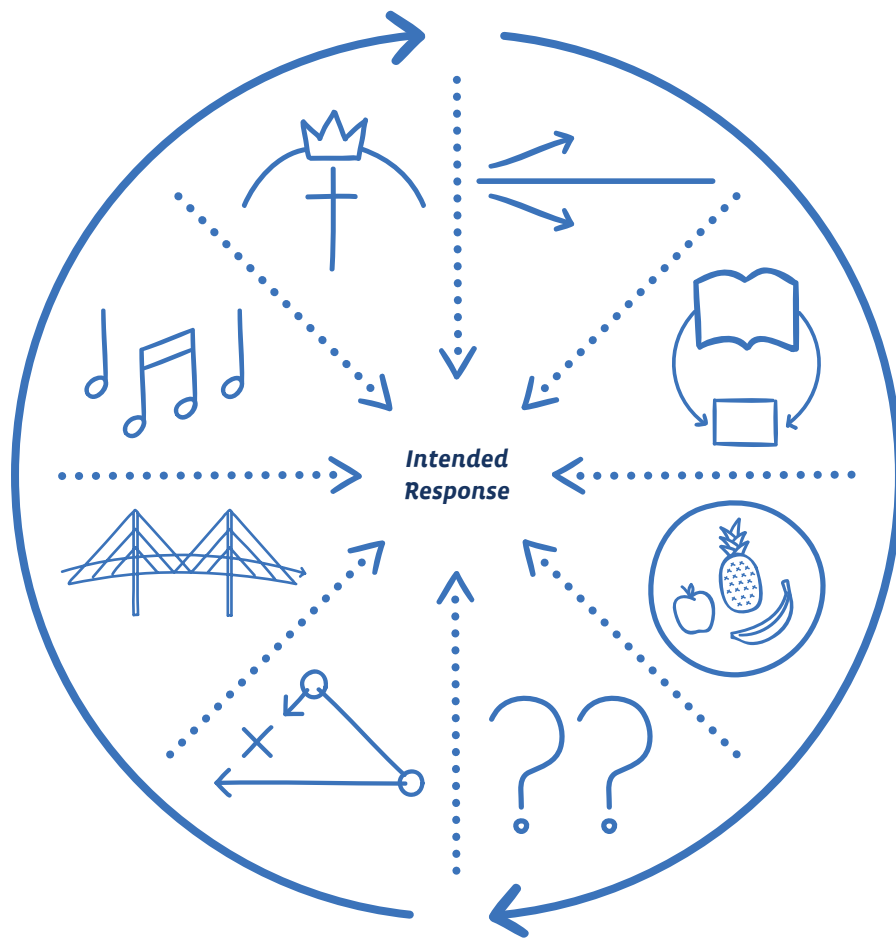
# The Connection and Goal of the Principles

## The Principles Connect Together

- The principles we've explained in this booklet are not separate and isolated from each other. They connect and work together – and even overlap at times.

## The Goal of the Principles – Responding to God's Transforming Word

- The principles share a common purpose – to help us learn how God wants us to respond to the transforming intent of His Word.





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