

Grasping God's Word

Context

Context

1 Corinthians 7:36c

“They should get married.”

John 13:27

“What you are about to do, do quickly.”

Context

1 Corinthians 7:36-38

³⁶ If anyone is worried that he might not be acting honorably toward the virgin he is engaged to, and if his passions are too strong and he feels he ought to marry, he should do as he wants. He is not sinning. *They should get married.* ³⁷ But the man who has settled the matter in his own mind, who is under no compulsion but has control over his own will, and who has made up his mind not to marry the virgin – this man also does the right thing. ³⁸ *So then, he who marries the virgin does right, but he who does not marry her does better.*

Why Context?

- Context determines meaning!
- Literary context relates to the particular form a passage takes (the literary genre) and to the words, sentences, and paragraphs that surround the passage you are studying (the surrounding context).

Genre

- Genre is the different categories or types of literature found in the Bible.
- In the Old Testament you will encounter major genres of narrative, law, poetry, prophecy, and wisdom.
- The New Testament major genres include gospel, history, letter, and apocalyptic literature.

Genre

- One of the best ways to think of genre is as a game, with its own, unique set of rules.
- Each literary genre in the Bible comes with its own set of built-in rules for interpretation.

Genre

- For communication to occur, the reader must be on the same page as the author in terms of genre. In other words, they must understand the rules of the game in order to participate in the game.
- To disregard literary genre in the Bible is to violate our covenant with the biblical author and with the Holy Spirit who inspired his message.

Surrounding Context

- Surrounding context simply refers to the texts that surround the passage you are studying.
- This includes the words, sentences, paragraphs, and discourses that come before and after your passage.

Surrounding Context

- We cannot read the author's mind, but we can trace his thought as it flows through each sentence and paragraph to form the whole book. We want to see how the smaller units connect to form the larger units.
- It is safe to say that the most accurate interpretation of a passage is the one that best fits that passage's surrounding context, or is the one that best accounts for how the smaller sections fit into the larger sections.

Surrounding Context

Philemon 4-7

"⁴ I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, ⁵ because I hear about your love for all his holy people and your faith in the Lord Jesus. ⁶ I pray that your partnership with us in the faith may be effective in deepening your understanding of every good thing we share for the sake of Christ. ⁷ Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the Lord's people."

Surrounding Context

Finding the surrounding context of any passage consists of three steps.

- 1) Identify how the book is divided into paragraphs or sections.
- 2) Understand the main idea of each section.
- 3) See how your particular passage relates to the surrounding sections.

Surrounding Context

NIV	KJV	CSB	NASB	ESV
1-3	1-3	1-3	1-3	1-3
4-7	4-7	4-7	4-7	4-7
8-11	8-25	8-16	8-16	8-16
12-16		17-22	17-20	17-20
17-21		23-24	21	21-22
22		25	22	23-25
23-25			23-24	
			25	

Surrounding Context

- If you want to do the work yourself, you need to look for changes in the text as clues to a shift in the author's flow of thought.
- These changes include: conjunctions, genres, topics, times, location, settings, or grammar.

Surrounding Context

- vv. 1-3: Paul identifies the letter senders/recipients and offers a greeting.
- vv. 4-7: Paul thanks God for Philemon's faith and love and prays for him.
- vv. 8-16: Paul appeals to Philemon for his "son" Onesimus and offers Philemon perspective on God's plan.

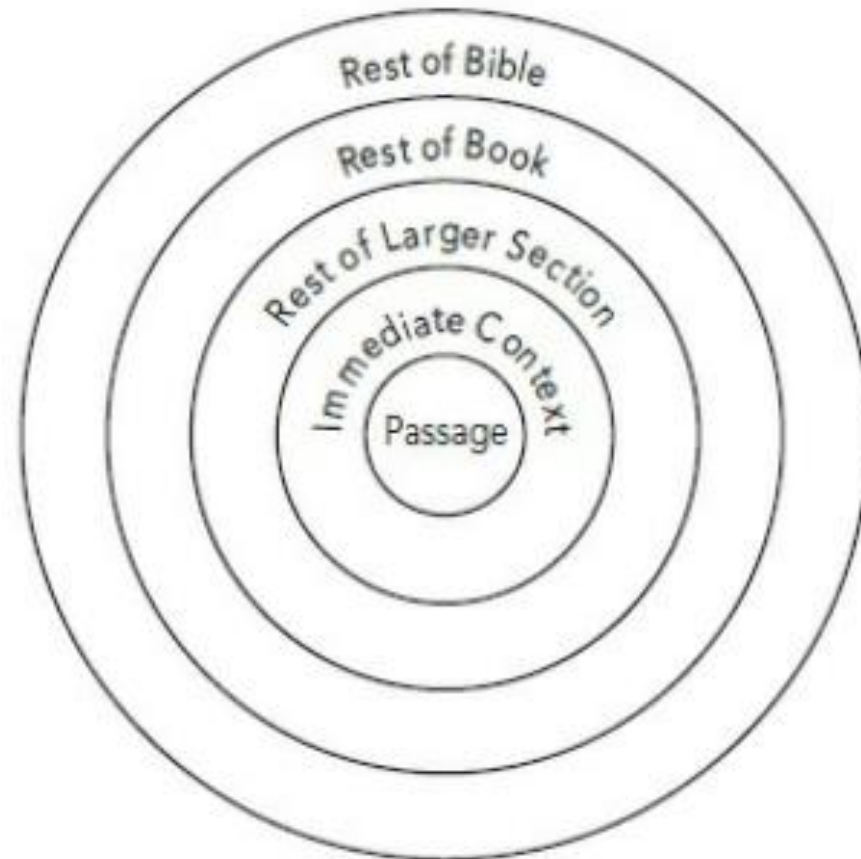
Surrounding Context

- vv. 17-20: Paul urges Philemon to receive Onesimus as he would receive Paul himself.
- v. 21: Paul expresses confidence that Philemon will do even more than he asks.
- v. 22: Paul shares his hope to come in person and visit Philemon.

Surrounding Context

- vv. 23-24: Paul shares greetings from his fellow workers.
- v. 25: Paul closes the letter with a benediction of grace.

Surrounding Context



Surrounding Context

1 Peter 5:7

“Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you”?

Surrounding Context

1 Peter 5:5-9

⁵ In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble." ⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. ⁷ Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. ⁸ Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

Surrounding Context

- Give highest priority to the immediate context when determining the meaning of your passage.

Discovering Context

- Reading a text closely and carefully is a good place to enter the world of biblical interpretation, but it is certainly not the final stopping place. The Bible is more than a collection of unrelated parts.
- The Holy Spirit moved the biblical writers to connect their words, sentences, and paragraphs into a literary whole in the normal way that people use language to communicate.

Discovering Context

"I heard an interesting story on the news the other night. The quarterback faded back to pass. Carbon buildup was keeping the carburetor from functioning properly. The two-inch steaks were burned on the outside but raw on the inside. Ten feet high snow drifts blocked the road. The grass needed mowing. The elevator raced to the top of the one-hundred story building in less than a minute. The audience booed the poor performance."

Discovering Context

- As God's communication to us, the parts of the Bible connect to form a whole, while the whole in turn provides guidelines or boundaries for understanding the parts.
- Our understanding of a specific text will always be shaped by the overall message of the book. If a reader fails to take into account what the author has already said or is about to say, he or she will miss the point of the passage.

Discovering Context

- The heart of identifying the surrounding context is to observe how your section relates to what comes before it and what comes after it.
- Our section (vv. 4-7) is sandwiched between the opening of the letter (vv. 1-3) and the body of the letter (vv. 8-22). Almost everything Paul says in this thanksgiving and prayer passage (vv. 4-7) prepares the reader for what he is about to say in the body of the letter.

Discovering Context

- The thanksgiving and prayer passage (vv. 4-7) prepares the way for the body of the letter. Philemon's good qualities that are highlighted in verses 4-7 provide the character anchor that will motivate him to do what Paul is about to request in the rest of the letter.

The Importance of Literary Context

- If you disregard literary context, you can make the Bible say anything you want, which ultimately robs you of God's truth.
- As you honor the literary context of a passage of Scripture, you will be saying through your actions that above all you want to hear what God has to say to you through his Word.