

Working with a Paragraph II

Things that are alike & unlike - The moment you see two of anything alike, especially when you least expect it, the similarity immediately draws your attention. The same is true in Bible study. Similarities stick out and so do contrasts.

- Similes - The biblical writers give you a number of terms that flag similarities.
 - The two most common expressions to look for are *as* and *like*.
 - They indicate a figure of speech called a simile, which is a word picture that draws a comparison between two things.
 - For instance, Psalm 42 begins, “As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for Thee, O God”. That’s a grabbing image, isn’t it? It creates atmosphere. The psalmist compares his longing for God to a hot, thirsty deer.
 - Metaphors - A device related to the simile is the metaphor, where comparison is made without using *as* or *like*.
 - Jesus says, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine dresser” (John 15:1). He’s obviously talking figuratively, not literally. He’s painting a picture that illustrates His relationship to the Father, and, as the passage develops, to believers as well.
 - Keep in mind that similarities have a way of drawing attention to themselves. Nevertheless, get into the habit of looking for them. You’ll find them especially in the wisdom literature, particularly in Psalms.
 - Whenever you find one, mark it. The writer is trying to communicate with you through the effective tool of comparison. Just as metaphors can point out things that are alike, they can also show us things that are unlike.
- Things that are unlike - The flip side of comparison is contrast - things that are unlike. We could say that in Bible study, as in love, opposites attract. At least, they attract the eye of the observant reader. There are several ways the biblical writers signify contrast.
 - Use of *but* - The word *but* is a clue that a change of direction is coming.
 - In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus repeatedly says, “You have heard that it was said...but I say to you” (Matthew 5).
 - *But* is one of the most important words you’ll ever come across in your study of Scripture. Whenever you see it, always stop and find out, what is the contrast being made?
 - Irony - This is the expression of one’s meaning by using language that normally signifies the opposite.
 - For example, when the woman with the issue of blood fights through the crowd to touch Jesus and He asked, “Who touched me?” (Luke 8:45) The question is almost comical and even the disciples stated that people had been touching Him since He got off the boat. But the contrast that Luke wants us to see is that in the midst of a crisis, in the middle of a crowd, an unknown woman privately and quietly approaches the Savior in faith - and He recognizes it. She stands out from the crowd because of her faith. Luke sets it up so that we notice her, and benefit by her example.
 - Things that are alike and unlike make use of the strong human tendency to compare and contrast.

Things that are true to life - The issue here is authenticity: What does the passage tell you about reality? What aspects of the text resonate with your experience? This is where you use your sanctified imagination and look for principles. We live in a culture that is dramatically different from the biblical era, yet we have the same human condition that the biblical characters experienced, we experience and we feel the same kinds of emotions they felt.

REAL TALK FROM THE WORD

So we need to ask ourselves:

- What were the person's ambition?
- What were his goals?
- What problem was he or she facing?
- How did he or she feel?
- What was their response?
- What should be my response?

Often we study or teach Scripture as if it were some academic lesson, rather than real life. That may be the reason so many of us are bored with our Bibles. We're missing out on the best lessons of God's Word by failing to pick up on the experience of the people in it.

Listed below are a few individuals that will help us see the text in realistic terms:

- Abraham - In Genesis 22:2, God says to Abraham, "Take your son, I mean your only son, I mean the one whom you love, the seed-and offer him up as a sacrifice." So Abraham starts walking up Mount Moriah with his son, Isaac, and Isaac says to him "Hey Dad, we've got the wood, we've got the fire, but where is the sacrifice?" Abraham knows that his son is to be the sacrifice.
 - How do you suppose he felt?
 - How would you feel?
- Moses - Moses was an incredible leader, probably the best leader of all time. But he never gets into the Promised Land. Why? Because he struck a rock twice (Numbers 20:1-13). One act of bad temper, and he's eliminated from going in.
 - How did that punishment affect him?
 - How might it have made him feel toward God?
 - Toward life?
 - How do I respond to the consequences of my own sin?
- Noah - Noah was a man of great righteousness. In a generation shot through with wickedness, he obeyed God and thereby saved his family from the Flood. And yet the account tells us that he got dead drunk (Genesis 9:20-21). I think, How was this possible? Well, the Scriptures paint him not as a perfect individual but as a real, live person. Righteous? Honored by God? Absolutely, but also failing, weak, and sinful.
 - What insight does that shed on me?

When we study the Word of God, we want to make sure that we plug it into real life. Then we will discover that the people in the biblical narrative are just like you and me. They are cut from the same cloth.

So the 6 clues we want to look for when we open our Bibles are

1. What things are emphasized?
2. What things are repeated?
3. What things are related?
4. What things are alike?
5. What things are unlike?
6. What things are true to life?