APPLYING THE BIBLE PASSAGE TO REAL LIFE

The Bible is not just there for education purposes (filling our heads with facts and theological trivia); it was given for transformation (changing our lives so that we might become more like Jesus):

> "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55:10-11)

Remember our inductive Bible Study method from last month:

CONTEXT: When or Where does the text fit?
OBSERVATION: What does the text say?
MEANING: What does the text teach?
APPLICATION: How do I respond to the text?

It is essential that we finish any time in the Bible with the question: SO WHAT?

(1) MOVING FROM "BIBLE TOWN" BACK TO "OUR TOWN"

Every time we read the Bible, we're taking a journey back in time to a different culture and country. As we read God's Words and hear about His actions, then we learn truths. We then have to take a return journey back to our time and place, taking those truths with us, and doing something with them.

Duval and Hayes, Encountering God's Word

Application is all about bridging **"Then and Them"** with **"Now and Us"**. The Holy Spirit wanted to accomplish something in the lives of the first readers/hearers of this passage, and wants to accomplish similar things in our lives today too.

(2) DETERMINING THE TEXT'S APPLICATION

God always wants to achieve something in our hearts as we encounter Him in His Word. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 tells us that the Bible is sufficient to equip us for doing every good work that God wishes us to do. Specifically Paul tells us it can do four things:

- **Teaching** right beliefs
- **Training** right behaviour
- **Correcting** wrong beliefs
- **Rebuking** wrong behaviour

It can be helpful to ask these four prompt questions of a passage as you read it, if the application is not immediately obvious.

Often a text will make clear what response God wanted the first readers to make:

- A **command** to obey
- A **warning** to heed
- A **promise** to trust
- A **truth** to believe
- A **comfort** to encourage

We need to determine if there are any factors that ***limit*** the application for us today.

- **Non-transferable applications** are things that only apply to the first readers. For example, God told Jonah to go to Nineveh. However, that was to him at that time, and not a command for where you should go on holiday next! Think about what separates us from the original audience which limits its application:
    - **Immediate context:** your name is not Jonah and you are not a prophet in 8th century BC Israel.
    - **Later Biblical context:** We are not Israelites under the Old Covenant so we can eat seafood today, because the New Testament tells us so (Mark 7:19)
    - **Cultural context:** We have aspirin today so don't need to take a little medicinal wine for our stomach complaints (1 Timothy 5:23)
    - **Unique Historical context**: We don't have to sell all and give it to the poor to be saved (Luke 18:22)

  NB: the OT is a place where there will be lots of limiting factors in application, especially in its narrative passages. However, remember the words of 1 Corinthians 10:5 "Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did" and Romans 15:4 "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope".

- **Transferable applications** are the principles and instructions that we can take for us today. You may not have to go to Nineveh, but Jonah's story illustrates God's heart of compassion for the lost, and it is your job to share God's heart and message with those around you. A good way to make transferable applications is to think about:
    - **God**: His character never changes through the ages
    - **Created Order**: the way God made this world to work never changes
    - **Humanity**: We share a common humanity: weaknesses, problems, struggles
    - **Sin**: what God has said is morally wrong remains so
    - **Counter-cultural**: Often what God says and does was controversial then and so we should continue to apply it keeping that sense

(3) WAYS TO DO APPLICATION

Think about NON-CHRISTIANS:

- **Anticipate the objection: Is what I'm hearing true?**
  Consider the barriers that people have to accepting what they are hearing. These so-called "defeater beliefs" can make them tune out of your sermon. However, by addressing them you are both training Christians how to handle their friends' objections, and showing your non-Christian hearers that the Christian faith is a reasonable faith.

- **Anticipate the disconnection: Is what I'm hearing relevant?**
  Consider how the passage addresses human felt-needs: everyone wants to be loved, wants life to count, wants to be successful (rather than failure), wants to be free from guilt, wants freed from past hurts, wants help with fear of death

Think about CHRISTIANS:

- Think about **different aims**:
  - **Instruct in doctrine**: be sure of these truths
  - **Confront false doctrine**: avoid these errors
  - **Exhortation:** do these good things required by the teaching
  - **Warning**: avoid/stop doing these bad things forbidden by the teaching
  - **Comfort**: be encouraged by the teaching
  - **Self-examination**: ask yourself how far are you living by this teaching

- Think about what this would mean for **different types of people**:
  - men/women
  - young/old
  - wealthy/poor
  - married/single
  - parents/childless
  - sick/healthy
  - employer/employee/unemployed/retired

- Think about how this could be applied to people at **different spiritual states**:
  - The backslider
  - The non-Christian
  - The young Christian
  - The suffering Christian
  - The discouraged Christian
  - The keen Christian

(4) AVOIDING MISTAKES WITH APPLICATION

(a) MORALISM

We need to beware of teaching moralism in our application ("you need to do better and try harder…").

Non-Christians cannot live the Christian life; but Christians cannot live the Christian life in their own strength and wisdom either! Always we have to come back to the fact of what God has done for us in Christ, and because of that we live different lives by the power of the Holy Spirit. This is how the epistles are often structured: what Christ has done (Ephesians 1-3), therefore how Christians should live (Ephesians 4-6).

A helpful model from Tim Keller is:

(i) "you must..." (law)
(ii) "you cannot…have not…will not" (sin)
(iii) "but Jesus has…" (gospel)
(iv) "…therefore in Christ you can…" (transformed living through the gospel and with Holy Spirit's help)

(b) OVER-REACHING

It is important to distinguish between what a text absolutely means we must do or not do, and what are its possible implications.

Necessary: What must this mean we do?
Probable: What is strongly suggested we do?
Possible: What may be an implication to think through?
Impossible: What can this not mean we are meant to do?

Doing this exercise can actually help people think about the application from different angles and reinforce it in peoples' minds.

(c) OVER-SPIRITUALISING

Aim for Monday through Friday rather than Sunday applications.
Think about the ordinary experiences, activities, challenges facing people in day to day life and their various callings.

WORKSHOP: PRACTISING APPLYING THE BIBLE

Draw out from these passages their transferable and non-transferable applications

	NON-TRANSFERABLE	TRANSFERABLE
1 Corinthians 10:14-21		
Colossians 2:8-10		
Philippians 4:2-3		
Romans 16:16		
Daniel 1:12		
Deuteronomy 20:16-18		