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**Core Seminar**

**How To Study the Bible**

**Class 11: Repetition--Making the Point Again and Again and Again**

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*“Surely he took up our infirmities*

*and carried our sorrows,*

*yet we considered him stricken by God,*

*smitten by him, and afflicted.” (*Isaiah 53.4*)*

### **Introduction**

An American author once observed, “Any idea, plan, or purpose may be placed in the mind through repetition of thought.”[[1]](#footnote-1) This seems to me to be an correct observation of something already known by the Bible’s divine and human authors. The repetition of words, phrases and ideas within Scripture is one method of drawing the attention of the reader so as to highlight important--or even the central--points of a text. The repetition tool, like many of the other tools we have discussed, is not a *skeleton key* that magically unlocks all of a passage’s meaning; however, it does assist us in our study and can provide clarity to our understanding. Today we will consider several passage that employ repetition and we will work together to see how this tool can enliven our Bible study.

**Uses of Repetition**

**Example One: John 6.47-59**

*Repetition highlights the main point of the text*

47 I tell you the truth, he who believes has ***everlasting life***. 48 I am the bread of ***life***. 49 Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they ***died***. 50 But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not ***die***. 51 I am the ***living*** bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will ***live*** forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the ***life*** of the world." 52 Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" 53 Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no ***life*** in you. 54 Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has ***eternal life***, and I will raise him up at the last day. 55 For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. 56 Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. 57 Just as the ***living*** Father sent me and I ***live*** because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will ***live*** because of me. 58 This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and ***died***, but he who feeds on this bread will ***live forever***." 59 He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

* 1. Reviewing some of the repetition in this passage, what would you say is the main thrust here?
  2. Besides what is highlighted, what other repetition did you see? How would you apply this to your interpretation?
     1. Jesus comes/came down from heaven

**Example Two: Daniel 3.1-7 (in Bible)**

*Repetition reveals the author’s opinion/interpretation of the narrative*

 1 King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, ninety feet high and nine feet wide, and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. 2 He then summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials to come to the dedication of the image he had set up. 3 So the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up, and they stood before it. 4 Then the herald loudly proclaimed, "This is what you are commanded to do, O peoples, nations and men of every language: 5 As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. 6 Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace." 7 Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the peoples, nations and men of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

* 1. What repetition do you see here?
  2. In what way does it influence your interpretation of the text?
     1. Do you sense a mocking tone?

**Example Three: 2 Timothy 2.3-6**

*Repetition emphasizes the main idea*

The repetition tool is not always repeated words or phrases, occasionally it consists of repeated ideas, like this example:

3 Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. 4 No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs—he wants to please his commanding officer. 5 Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules. 6 The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops.

* 1. What would you say is the idea that is being repeated in this passage?
     1. A: Hardship *now* brings reward *later*
        1. A solider fights on the battlefield and pleases his commander
        2. An athlete trains hard but wins the crown
        3. A farmer works in the field but collects the harvest
  2. Why would you say Paul makes these specific appeals to Timothy? What can we learn from this today?
  3. Later, Paul makes this same point regarding Jesus (vss 8), his own life (9-10), and again in two *trustworthy* sayings (11-12)

**Example Four: Revelation 18.9-11, 15-20**

*Repetition sets the tone/feeling of the text*

Sometimes the repetition tool can act sort of like the tone and feel tool, providing sense or mood of a passage so as to heighten our sensitivity to the text’s point. For example,

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When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her. Terrified at her torment, they will stand far off and cry:

“Woe! Woe, O great city,

O Babylon, city of power!

In one hour your doom has come!”

The merchants of the earth ... will stand far off, terrified at her torment. They will weep and mourn and cry out:

“Woe! Woe, O great city,

dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet,

and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls!

In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin!”

Every sea captain, and all who travel by ship, the sailors, and all who earn their living from the sea, will stand far off. When they see the smoke of her burning, they will exclaim, “Was there ever a city like this great city?” They will throw dust on their heads, and with weeping and mourning cry out:

“Woe! Woe, O great city,

where all who had ships on the sea

became rich through her wealth!

In one hour she has been brought to ruin!

Rejoice over her, O heaven!

Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets!

God has judged her for the way she treated you.”

* 1. The importance of this passage is not primarily the distance of the ungodly from Babylon (“far off”), or the exact wording of their cry (“Woe! Woe, O great city”), or even the time taken for the prophets of godless materialism to be destroyed (“one hour”).
  2. The repetition in this passage is there to drill home the nature of Babylon’s judgment so that you understand and feel the full weight of the last sentence; “God has judged her for the way she treated you.”

***Why is it important to understand the tone or feeling of a text?***

**Two Final Examples**

**Example Five: Isaiah 53.4-6 (Work this example on the board)**

4 Surely he took up our infirmities        and carried our sorrows,        yet we considered him stricken by God,        smitten by him, and afflicted.

 5 But he was pierced for our transgressions,        he was crushed for our iniquities;        the punishment that brought us peace was upon him,        and by his wounds we are healed.

 6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray,        each of us has turned to his own way;        and the LORD has laid on him        the iniquity of us all.

* 1. What is the central point being made in this passage and how does the repetition signal that to you?
     1. A: Jesus Christ suffered and died as a substitution for us ... **He** took on **our** “iniquities”

**Read all of Psalm 33**

Tone and Feel:

1. What would you say is the tone or feel of verses 1-9? Why?
2. What would you say is the Author’s intent?

Genre:

1. What Genre is this? Why do you say this?

Quotation/Allusion Tool:

1. Verse six harkens back to Genesis 1.3 ... Talk about that
2. How does this impact your understanding of the passage?

Translation Tool:

1. Verse 7: The ESV says the sea is gathered into a “heap.” The NIV made a rational choice to use jars since water does not gather into heaps; however, the Hebrew word is “heaps” and there are two other OT “heaps of water,” both of them in the context of God providing safe passage for his people on their journey out of slavery in Egypt and into the promised land.

“At the blast of Your nostrils the waters were piled up,

The flowing waters stood up like a heap.” (Exodus 15.8; NASB)

“Now the Jordan is in flood all during harvest. Yet as soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water’s edge, the water from upstream stopped flowing. It piled up in a heap a great distance away ... So the people crossed over opposite Jericho.” (Joshua 3.15-16)

1. What, if any, impact does this have on your thinking?

Parallels Tool:

1. What parallels do you see?
2. Verse 4: You might expect the second line to say that God is faithful in all he *says.* But instead, the author parallels a statement about God’s word with a statement about his action. That is because God acts by speaking as we’ve noted already
3. Verse 6: “breath” and “spirit”
4. Verse 8: Fear and reverence

Repetition Tool:

1. What do you see coming up multiple times? (God’s word or the fact that he speaks; his creation)

Linking Words:

Let all the earth fear the Lord;

let all the people of the world revere him.

*For* he spoke, and it came to be;

he commanded, and it stood firm (8-9)

The imperative to praise/fear God with a reason for doing so, namely that God made everything by speaking

Structure:

1. What structure do you see?

Verses 1-3 Instruction to praise God

Verses 4-7 *Reason*: He is the Creator

Verse 8 Instruction to revere God

Verse 9 *Reason*: He is the Creator

Bible Timeline Tool?

1. We’re being told something timeless about God

*Pray*

1. Napoleon Hill, [↑](#footnote-ref-1)