



# Narrative Training Outline

Broadly speaking, biblical truth comes in two basic literary forms, narrative and discourse. Narratives are stories or dramas, and about one third of the Bible is narrative. With few exceptions, such as Jesus' parables, biblical narratives are historical.

*What precisely is narrative? Narrative is history, and yet it does more than report what happened. It conveys moral lessons, but it is more than a morality tale. Biblical narratives describe the redemptive acts of God. They all lead to the climactic work of Christ in his life, death, and resurrection. The authors of biblical narratives present God's perspective on these redemptive events. The authors use story to teach their readers about God, humanity, and the relations between them. — Getting the Message by Daniel M. Doriani*

## OVERVIEW

### PRAY

Confess any sin that may hinder your study of God's Word and pray for God to open your eyes to see him and his truth—Psalm 119:18 / Psalm 86:11

### READ

You will want to read the book multiple times, and if possible in one sitting. God will open your eyes and bring understanding. Many have said that the more times they read through the book, the more they see. First, look for background information: author, audience, time, genre. Second, look for the phases: setting, characters, problem, conflict, climax, resolution, following actions.

### BACKGROUND

#### Author/Audience/Time/Genre

With a narrative you may need to consult a Study Bible or Commentary to help answer:

- Who is the author?
- Who is the original audience?
- When was this book originally written?
- What is the genre of this writing?

Within the Narrative genre there are three types:

- Dramas – Narrative accounts with sufficient length and detail to create vivid characters and dramatic tension as the story unfolds and moves toward a resolution.
- Reports – Describe simple events and lack full characterization and dramatic tension. By itself, a report may reveal little, but taken together, a series of reports imparts much about the works of God.
- Speech Stories – When the main event is a speech given in a historical narrative. A speech story is a hybrid genre that may be ill suited to narrative analysis.

*(Putting the Truth to Work by Daniel Doriani, p.167)*

Recommendations: ESV Study Bible and Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary

## PHASES

### Setting

Includes location and time period. The author will set up the story by identifying the location or locations as well as the time period. A study Bible is helpful in providing the details of the location and time period.

### Characters

Normally, a story will include at least one believer and nonbeliever, or group. The author sometimes will develop the character by providing details about their moral character. Dialogue is helpful when determining character.

### Conflict

The author will introduce the problem and then develop the problem depending on the length of the story.

### Climax

The author will bring the reader to a point of tension. This is where the original readers would have been holding their breath. The reader is usually asking, "What is going to happen?"

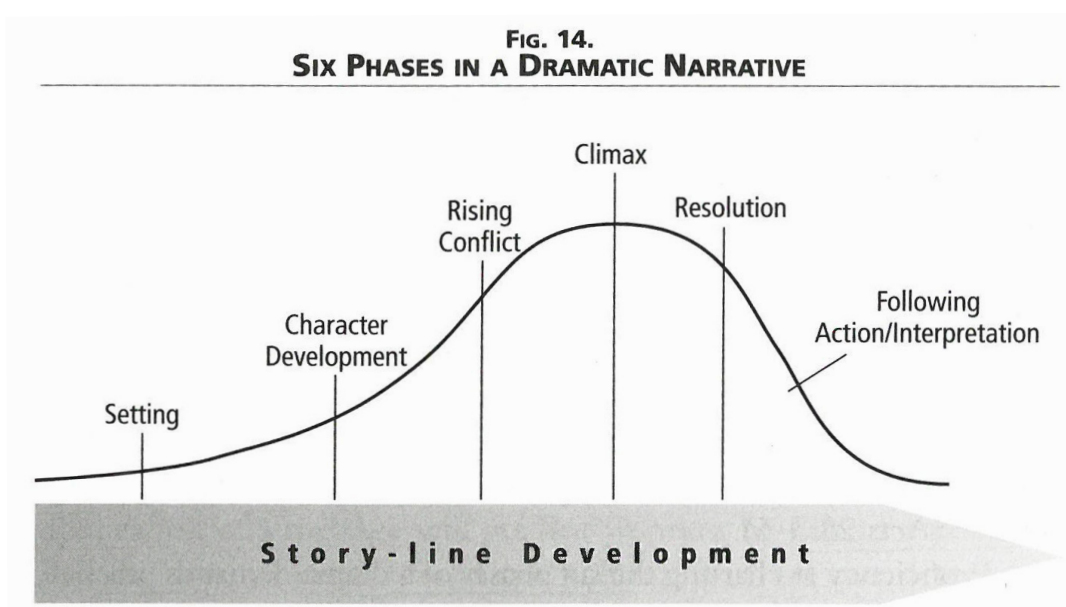
Helpful Hint: It is usually right here, between Climax and Resolution that you find the main point of the story – the act of God. (*Putting the Truth to Work* by Daniel Doriani, p.168)

### Resolution

The author gives the answer to the problem! The reader finally knows what happened.

### Following Actions

"A following action or saying commonly interprets a biblical drama. It may indicate the main lesson or show how the event fits into redemptive history. The following episode can help explain the significance of a drama." (*Getting the Message* by Daniel Doriani, 65-69.)



Graphic from *Putting the Truth to Work* by Daniel Doriani, p.167

## Thematic Statement

Identifying the Thematic Statement is extremely helpful in identifying the main point of the narrative. This statement brings all the points of the narrative into focus and directs how you will interpret what the author wants his audience to know, be, and do.

“Sometimes an author will begin his work or a section of his work with a thematic statement that helps us to understand the remainder of the work.”

(40 Questions About Interpreting the Bible by Robert L. Plummer)

Ex. Acts 1:8 – The rest of the book of Acts is the outworking of this verse.

## Where is this story in God’s plan of redemption?

Biblical narratives describe the redemptive acts of God. They all lead to the climactic work of Christ in his life, death, and resurrection. The authors of biblical narratives present God’s perspective on these redemptive events.

Vaughn Roberts, in his book *God’s Big Picture* provides a helpful outline to identify the place this story falls in redemptive history.

### The Old Testament

- The pattern of the Kingdom
- The perished Kingdom
- The promised Kingdom
- The partial Kingdom
- The prophesied Kingdom

### The New Testament

- The present Kingdom
- The proclaimed Kingdom
- The perfected Kingdom



# Passage Study

The following process will help you study through scenes/passages of the Book you are studying. The goal is understanding what the original author wanted the original audience to know, be, and/or do, so that you can then apply God’s Word accurately to your own life. Doing so, will lead you to worship and enjoy God for who He is, grow in godliness (likeness to God), and unite your heart to God’s people and God’s mission.

## PREPARE (no card)

Pray... for God to open your eyes to see Him and His truth. Psalm 119:18

Confess ...any sin that may hinder your study of God’s Word. Psalm 86:11

Read the story/passage ...multiple times. You may also want to read your story/passage in multiple translations, and read the chapter before and after your passage as well.

Review... your notes from the overview to help set your passage in the context of the book.

Author/Audience/ Time	Characters	Climax	Following Actions
Setting	Conflict	Resolution	

Every author uses literary tools in which to communicate their message to a group of people. Identifying these tools brings clarity in understanding the author’s original meaning but not every literary tool is used in every passage.

### Thematic Statement (Main Point)

The main point the author wants his audience to know through this story. At this point, try to ask the Thematic Statement in the form of a question.

- Ex. Salvation belongs to the Lord
- How does the Lord save?
  - Who does the Lord save?
  - When does the Lord save?
  - Why does the Lord save?

### Before/After

Briefly summarize the scene/passage before the scene/passage you are studying.

Briefly summarize the scene/passage directly after the scene/passage you are studying.

### Scene

Merriam-Webster defines scene as “a division of an act presenting one continuous action in one place / a single situation or unit of dialogue in a play.

The story or part of the story you have selected to study may have one scene or multiple scenes. You will want to identify each scene and ask the following questions for each.

Daniel Doriani provides insightful tools to help define the “Spatial Setting”

- Space: Inside or Outside
- Place: Holy Space or Common Space
- Territory: Home / Enemy / Pagan

It is also helpful to look for the following:

- Time: When does the action occur? Ex. Night/Day, Time of Harvest, Etc.
- Movement: Does the author provide a sense of direction the character(s) are heading? This can be positive or negative.  
Ex. Jonah – “He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish so he paid the fare and went down into it.”

### Human Characters

List the main characters and answer the following questions for each. Remember that God is always a character, but you will not need to list Him. You will want to list Jesus, since he is God incarnate.

It may also be helpful to view the story through each character’s eyes.

Daniel Doriani helps us again by providing some insightful tools to help define the traits of the “Characters”

- Safe / Threatened: You will determine if the character is currently safe or is being threatened either by others or by nature.
- Free / Restricted: Again you will determine if the character is currently free or restricted. A character can be restricted in multiple ways, such as by others, by nature, by geography, etc.
- Crowded / Isolated: Determine if the character is within a large group of people or currently isolated and alone.

- Trial / Goal / Decision –
  - Is this character facing...
  - Trial (Test) – “Events which try or probe the mental, moral, or spiritual character of the story.”
  - Goal (Quest) – “Character pursues a goal, which he usually obtains despite obstacles in the path.”
  - Decision (Choice) – “Character must decide between two courses of action.”
  - It is possible to have different characters facing a trial, pursuing a goal, or on a quest within the same story.
- Descriptive Statement – A statement made by the author, character or another character which provides insight and helps the reader better understand the character’s trustworthiness.
 

“Whether directly or indirectly, the author clues the reader as to which characters are to be believed or imitated.”

*(40 Questions About Interpreting the Bible by Robert L. Plummer)*

## Comparison / Contrast

Many times an author will use comparisons and/or contrasts to bring clarity to his main point.

“The primary difference between contrast and comparison is that contrast focuses on differences while comparison tends to highlight some aspect of similarity.”

*(Inductive Bible Study, Richard Alan Fuhr Jr and Andreas J. Kostenberger)*

## Significant Truth

Truth Claims are timeless. Statement from the text, which is true for all times and in all circumstances.

# UNDERSTAND

## Miracle

“An event which runs counter to the observed process of nature.” *(Evangelical Dictionary of Theology)*

“Works of supernatural origin and character, such as could not be produced by natural agents and means.” *(Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words)*

Miracles reveal the following of God/Jesus:

- Lord — How does this miracle reveal God/Jesus’ power over men, nature, sin, disease, etc.?
- Savior — How does this miracle reveal God/Jesus’ authority to forgive sins?
- Restorer — How does this miracle reverse the effects of the curse and/or foreshadow the proper and future condition of humankind?
- Compassionate — How does this miracle reveal God/Jesus’ mercy?

*(Putting the Truth to Work by Daniel Doriani)*

## Parable

"A short fictitious story that illustrates a moral attitude or a religious principle."

(*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 10th ed.)

"Jesus often employed parables to teach about the Kingdom of God – the graciousness of God, the demands of discipleship, and the dangers of disobedience."

(*40 Questions About Interpreting the Bible*, p.271)

Here are some tools to help us get to the meaning of the parable, to the main point.

(*40 Questions About Interpreting the Bible*, Robert L. Plummer)

- Comparison — "The most fundamental component of a parable is that there must be a comparison."
- Characters — Who are the characters and who receives the most attention?
- Conversation (quotation marks) — "Direct quotations draw the readers' or listeners' attention to the parable's emphasized point."
- Most Space — "To whom or what are the most verses devoted?" "Simply by giving the most literary space to a certain person or item in the parable, Jesus showed us where his emphasis lay."
- Ending — "Jesus often stresses his most important point at the end of a parable."
- Purpose — Normally the main point can be expressed in one sentence.

## What does this story reveal about:

God the Father, The Son, The Spirit — Answering the above question regarding God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is the most important question you will answer in your study. It will also be the most rewarding!

"Sound interpretation of a biblical narrative always focuses first on the acts of God. God is always the main character, the main actor, in biblical narratives. Indeed, the Bible is one long drama that begins when God creates heaven and earth, and ends when he restores them (Gen. 1:1; Rev. 21-22). The intervening chapters describe God's activity, God's grace, God's achievement of his aims..." (*Putting the Truth to Work* by Daniel Doriani, p.164)

"Folks struggle to understand the Bible because they are trying to unlock what the Bible is teaching with the wrong key. They believe the key to the story is me, when the key is realizing that every story is about God." (*Seven Arrows*, p.95)

Mankind — You may want to break this down into believers and non-believers to help identify who the author is speaking to, or about.

## Restate the Thematic Statement

Look back to what you have already found:

From the Overview:

Thematic Statement – “Sometimes an author will begin his work or a section of his work with a thematic statement that helps us to understand the remainder of the work.”

(*40 Questions About Interpreting the Bible*, Robert L. Plummer)

Ex. Acts 1:8 – The rest of the book of Acts is the outworking of this verse.

From See:

Thematic Statement in the form of a question.

Ex. Salvation belongs to the Lord

How does the Lord save? Who does the Lord save?

When does the Lord save? Why does the Lord save?

## What did the author want the audience to:

Know (Knowledge) / Be (Character) / Do (Action)

As you determine what the author wants the audience to Know, Be, and/or Do, remember that it should tie back to the Thematic Statement.

# RESPOND

This is where you will apply to your own life what the author is saying to the original audience. Remember, “That which is meaningful for our day must have its foundation in correct interpretation, the meaning of the text in its original context.” (*Inductive Bible Study*, Richard Alan Fuhr Jr and Andreas J. Kostenberger. p. 291)

## What does God specifically desire me to: Know, Be, Do

“God gives the eyes. God gives the mind. And when all our work of careful, expectant study is done, it was God who gave the work and the riches.” (John Piper, *The Legacy I want to Leave*, April 29, 2014)

God has opened your eyes to see and your mind to understand, now pray for God to reveal to you how He desires to apply these truths, and promises, and commands to your life. Meditate on His Word and pray for God to personally work in you.

The following questions may help you to respond personally to what you have learned.

Now that you understand what the author wanted the original reader to know, ask yourself:

Do I live like... this is true?

Does my life reveal this truth in the way I am living right now in... (situation, relationship, etc.)?

If so, rejoice and give thanks!

If not, what needs to change?

Now that you know what the author wanted the original reader to understand about who they are, or who they are suppose to be, you may want to ask:

Do I live like I am...?

If so, rejoice and give thanks!

If not, what needs to change?

Now that you know what the author wanted the original reader to do, you may want to ask:  
Am I living in obedience to this command?  
If so, rejoice and give thanks!  
If not, what needs to change?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer says in his little book *Life Together*, "In our meditation we ponder the chosen text on the strength of the promise that it has something utterly personal to say to us for this day and for our Christian Life, that it is not only God's Word for the Church, but also God's Word for us individually. We expose ourselves to the specific word until it addresses us personally."

Paul says to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:15-16 "...the sacred writings are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness."

A few helpful guidelines: (*40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*, p.172)

- "Are there details in the text that would cause one to conclude that the instructions are only for a specific place or time?"
- "Are there details in the text that would cause one to conclude that the instructions have a supra-cultural application (that is, the command applies unchanged in different cultures)?"
- "Do your conclusions about the debated passage cohere with the author's other statements and the broader canonical context?"

### **How will this affect my relationship with others if I believe and obey or if I don't?**

It may be helpful to think and pray through the relationships in your life; work, home, church, school, etc. Is there a specific relationship to which you are to apply the truth of this passage?

### **Write a prayer**

Prayer, is simply "Communicating with God." He goes on to say that prayer is an "expression of our relationship with God and a confession of our dependence on him."

(*Potential and Power of Prayer*, Chuck Lawless)

As we listen to Him in His Word we then have the opportunity to speak to him in prayer!

This is a critical piece of your response. Please take this time to praise Him, thank Him, and respond in obedience to the truth He has revealed to you.

### **Who will I share this truth with?**

Who has God put into your life to share this truth with? Plan a time to meet with them. Pray for boldness. Pray for God to use this truth to accomplish his will in their life. Proclaim the truth!