

## Exegeting a Passage of Scripture

**Exegesis:** critical explanation or interpretation of a text, especially of scripture. Exegesis means "to draw out" the meaning from a text and to let the text speak.

**Eisegesis:** The direct antonym of exegesis. Eisegesis means "to lead into" or read into the text one's own ideas or preconceived notions

Good exegesis answers the question "What is the text saying?" not "What do I want the text to say?"

## The TAN Method: Then, Always, Now



The TAN Method (Then, Always, Now) seeks to answer the questions of "What did the text say then? What does the text say always? What does the text say to us now?" Understanding the original context will help us determine the theological and practical truth that can then be applied today.

The TAN Method is a simple way to understand and draw the truth out of a passage of scripture. It matches the Inductive approach of teaching and follows the pattern of good storytelling. When we share a narrative story of Jesus the natural pattern of the story unfolds the biblical truth of what was true then (found in the specifics of the story), what is true always (expressed through the general principle and theological truth that the story communicates), and what is true now (application for us now). We call this **Completing the Pattern** and reflects good exegesis and application across the entire talk.

The following pages lay out the process of exegeting a narrative passage of scripture using the TAN Method.

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## THEN: What was True Then?

Explore the story elements of the Gospel Narrative

Identify the key story elements of the gospel narrative. All narratives follow a typical format and contain typical elements that will be important in communicating with your audience. A club talk should be viewed as a story, with the Gospel narrative centered and prominent throughout. Answer the following questions about the narrative you have selected for your talk.



Setting & Characters    Rising Action    Encounter with Jesus    Big Idea    Response

**Context: Setting and Characters:** This gives us the background of the story and significance of the characters. Below are some questions that can help you understand the story. This will also help kids see themselves in the story.

- What were the historical, political, economic, religious settings of the narrative?
- Who were the characters?
- What do we know about them?
- What are their needs and desires?
- Who is the protagonist? Who is the antagonist?

**Person of Christ:** What does this passage reveal about Jesus.

- What is amazing, surprising, astonishing about Jesus
- What is revealed about his character
- What do we learn about God through this picture of Jesus
- What aspects of the Person of Christ are in this talk

**Rising Action:** This is where the story comes alive and where tension builds. Below are some questions that can help you understand the story and that will lead to kids seeing the story as relevant to themselves. This will also help kids see themselves in the story.

- What is the story line?
- What tensions arise?
- When thinking about the narrative, recognize that there are often presenting issues and deeper issues.
  - What are the external or presenting issues
  - What are the internal or deeper issues
- What needs resolution?
- What is the common human condition? Experience? (This is where you will work to connect the listener to the story)

**Common Human Experience:** How can people across time see themselves in the Narrative. Every Gospel story has a common human condition connected to it. Many have more than one. Identifying the Common human condition will help people see themselves in the story, care about the outcome, and see Jesus as relevant for themselves today. (This will be worked out in more detail in Step 3: Apply.) Below are examples to look for as you are exploring the narrative.

- Fear
- Being left out
- Being overlooked
- Being misunderstood
- Loss
- Grief
- Confused
- Lost
- Lonely
- Hopelessness
- Sin
- Guilt
- Shame
- Being shamed
- Desire for Love
- Desire for belonging
- Need for Grace
- Need for Mercy
- (what could you add to this list?)

**Encounter with Jesus:** How does the interaction with Jesus add to and resolve the tensions. Often this speaks to the common human condition as well. Below are some questions to consider.

- How did Jesus interact with the people in the narrative?
- What did Jesus say or not say?
- What did Jesus do or not do?

**Big Idea:** What is revealed about Jesus and the Kingdom? Below are some questions to consider.

- Why does this matter?
- What matters in this story?
- What do we learn about ourselves from the story?
- What do we learn about Jesus from the story?
- What do we learn about the Kingdom of God in this story?

**Response:** All club talks should invite kids to respond. A club talk is not just informational, it should also be invitational. Below are some questions to consider.

- What transformation occurs and why?
- What response do we see in the story?
- Is there a call to believe, to respond or a call to action in the story?
- What is the invitation for us toward Jesus?
- What is the invitation for us toward the Kingdom?

## ALWAYS: What is True Always?

After exploring the story and its context, identifying the theological truth(s) in the passage, and connect them into the larger macro story of scripture. When thinking through the biblical story recall what you learned from "Gospel Conversations," namely, the paradigm ought/is/can/will.

The "is" is where you will find issues on a couple of levels. In either case, the Presenting Issue and the Deeper Issues are dilemmas because what "ought to be" isn't. In each case there is a Presenting Issue in the story. In Luke 19 there is a man who wants to see Jesus but can't. John 8 portrays a woman caught in adultery. In Mark 10 there is a man who is blind crying out to Jesus. These are issues that get our attention because they are real dilemmas. And they get Jesus's attention, too. But in each case, there is a Deeper Issue that also gets Jesus' attention. There is a man who wants to see Jesus but can't because of the crowd and because of both his social standing as a hated tax collector and his own conscience. He has aligned with Rome and is viewed as an oppressor yet wants to see Jesus. Could Jesus be for him too, despite being so despised? And how would that impact others? There is a woman caught in adultery. A group of religious leaders bring her to Jesus, without the man who committed adultery with her, in an attempt to trap Jesus with a sticky question about the Law. But was this act willing or was she tricked? Can Jesus address all of this - the religious leaders? The woman? There is a man named Bartimaeus who is held back by a social environment that excludes him because he is blind. He sits by the road crying out for mercy. Can Jesus address all of this - the crowds? Bartimaeus?

In both the Presenting Issue and the Deeper Issues, the reality of "what is" becomes clear only because of the sense that this is not the way things "ought to be." The pain of the "is," which is drawn from the shadow of what "ought" to be but unfortunately isn't, creates tension in the story. Each of these people experience the consequences of what "is," both internally and externally. What compels Jesus is that none of this is as it "ought" to be. This is also often where we can find and connect people to the Common Human Conditions. An important part of our communication is bringing clarity to "what is," the reality of the Presenting Issue. This is a way of bringing the Common Human Condition to light. The Deeper Issue is more subtle but equally important. People often have the sense that "what is" isn't right or fair. Why do they feel that way? We get to confirm that impulse by bringing to light the deeper truth that this, in fact, is NOT the way things "ought to be."

This sets the stage for Jesus to enter the situation and intervene. He provides a solution, a different direction, hope and healing. Now, this is an important thing to keep in mind. The problems can be individual and/or corporate. The solution, then, isn't always what we might expect. The solution often brings individual change and opens up corporate belonging that didn't exist before. In other words, Jesus points to what, "can," be here and now. At the same time, what "can" be also serves as a signpost to what one day "will," be,

when God finishes the work of “making all things new” (Rev 20:5).

Finally, something happens after Jesus enters the story. It is what happens after Jesus addresses the key issues in the story. It could be a response from an individual, the crowd, the religious leaders, Jesus’ disciples, or all of the above.

So whatever narrative you’ve chosen for your talk, find and state by writing out as simply as possible the Story including insight from the Ought/Is/Can/Will paradigm.

## NOW: What is True Now?

After you have done the work of understanding the story and the theological implications, the next step in the TAN Method will help you to capture and communicate the Big Idea and the Invitation from the specifics of the narrative. You will use these statements to move your talk from the specifics of the story (what was true then), to the general Big Idea (true always), to the invitation (what is true now) for people to respond to. This is what we call Completing the Pattern.

It might be helpful to think of Completing the pattern in two parts. First, in thinking about what is true NOW from this passage that applies to the listener, consider that our audience may still have some significant internal questions. Common questions adolescents are often asking include:

- Is God good?
- Am I enough?
- Will you accept me?
- Do all people matter to God?
- Can I trust you?
- What is true?
- Am I safe?

Just mentioning one of these questions in a talk can be hugely important to let our audience know you are taking them seriously. In a talk using the woman caught in adultery, you could say something like, "You might be thinking, 'That all sounds good for that woman but not for me.' You might be wondering, 'Will God accept *me*?' I hope we see in Jesus what was true then and is true now. He will not reject you."

In the second part of completing the pattern, consider ways of concluding the talk. Often one of the most neglected parts of talk preparation is actually thinking through how to summarize what's been said, offer a simple application or encouragement and bring the talk to an end. Consider the narrative and the talk:

- Is there an invitation?
- Is there something to obey?
- Is there something to believe?
- Is there an encouragement, admonition, or warning?
- What is a personal and/or corporate application?

Briefly summarizing the answer to one of these questions might be a simple straightforward way to develop the Now. For example, if you are using Jesus' encounter with Bartimaeus, you could say, "If you're wondering if Jesus sees you, I hope you're encouraged that, in the same way he sees Bartimaeus, he sees you and he invites you on a journey of discovering life the way it was truly meant to be."

## Summarize

Write three statements to capture and summarize the truth in the story and for us.

### What was true THEN?

Your past tense summary is the, "then." It answers the question, "What did the text say THEN?" What did the author intend to communicate to his original audience? Take into account the culture and context. What did John intend to communicate in the shortest verse in the Bible, John 11:35, "Jesus wept." Simply put, he meant that Jesus wept. Tears streamed down the face of the Son of God. But we don't stop there.

### What is true ALWAYS?

We next want to answer the question, "What does the text say ALWAYS?" What's true about what happened across all time regardless of the audience and where or when they happen to have lived? This is the "Big Idea" in the story. Yes, Jesus wept but He's not constantly crying all the time. What we can say is true, however, is that God cares. No matter who you are or when you've lived, God cares about His people.

### What is true NOW?

Lastly, we need to answer the question, "What does the text say NOW?" What does God's word have to say to me and others where we live today in the 21st century? John 11:35 teaches us that God cares about you, so go to God with your cares, concerns and needs.

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You can see how the Then, Always, Now method fits naturally with the story format of a Biblical narrative. Building your talk around this method will allow your overall talk to be a story that invites people to discover something in the narrative and then apply it to themselves. You will be slowly revealing the story and its truth as the listener engages and consequently sees himself in the story. We don't start our talk with the Big Idea and then try to prove it. Rather we draw people into a biblical narrative that eventually intersects the listeners narrative. Our hope is that the listener arrives at the Big Idea and application before we actually state it. This is called the inductive approach to communication.