

## Pastoral Application of Exegesis<sup>25</sup>

The final portion of your exegetical research paper (approximately 2 pages) will be a pastoral application of the insights you gained from your research. Here are some concrete ideas about how to approach this part of your paper.

Build from your exegesis. You've spent a good deal of energy identifying the issue at the heart of your New Testament passage, and discovering the social context from which it emerged. Both the mundane circumstances of the author's/community's situation and the author's theological response are important for your pastoral application.

1. Correlate the tradition to your experience. The "tradition" will differ depending on the type of critical method you're using. For example,

If you're using ..... reflect on this aspect of the scriptural tradition

Narrative criticism ..... the dramatic flow of the story or the author's themes

Redaction criticism ..... editorial changes

Social-scientific criticism ..... aspects of the author's social world

Rhetorical criticism ..... argument and persuasive techniques

Feminist criticism ..... the situation of women in the NT world/text

A lot of people correlate scripture to contemporary situations literally, taking the first association that comes to mind and then forcing the scripture to address their needs or issues. You want to go deeper than that, to hear the scripture in new ways. So try this. Simply sit for a little while with what you've discovered in your research. Let all the details of your exegesis sift themselves out so that you're left with the "heart of the matter." Sit with *that* for a few minutes, and let your imagination raise an image, experience, emotion, or story. What rises to the surface may not seem like it connects to scripture, but the fact that your imagination has made the connection suggests that there is one there to be made. It is still your imagination that is creating the link, but perhaps now in a way that bypasses your customary ways of thinking about things, thus allowing for new insight.

2. Correlate your experience to a pastoral situation. Let that image, experience, emotion or story guide you to a related pastoral situation. Again, the relationship between your experience and the pastoral situation may not be literal or immediately obvious.
  - a. What is the situation? Narrate it as neutrally/objectively as possible. Speak about specifics, rather than generalizations. This is easiest if you're narrating a direct personal experience rather than dealing with something in the abstract or something that happened to someone else.
  - b. What is the heart of the matter? If an image or emotion led you to your correlation, these may help you discern the heart of the matter.
  - c. How does the New Testament situation and message speak to the pastoral situation? That is, how does the NT heart of the matter speak to the pastoral heart of the matter?

After you've reflected on 3 a-b-c, write them up. They will be the basis for the pastoral application in your paper.

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<sup>25</sup> These suggestions are based on Patricia O'Connell Killen and John De Beer, *The Art of Theological Reflection* (New York: Crossroad, 1994). Their method is outlined on the course Web site (see the Theological Reflection tab).