

CREW Bible Study

Youth XP3 Message Series – EXPLAINED – Week 2

- **BOTTOM LINE:** Context creates clarity.
- **GOAL:** To help students understand that reading Scripture can be less confusing when they take time to discover its context, including who wrote it, why they wrote it, where they were when they wrote it and more.
- **SCRIPTURE:** *Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of things you have been taught. – Luke 1:1-4*

MESSAGE

Have your words ever been taken out of context? Has anyone ever misunderstood what you really meant because they didn't have the whole story?

Here's an example - Someone sees a text from you that says these three words: "I hate you!" Well, over text, that can be interpreted a million different ways.

- Were you serious?
- Were you kidding?
- Were you being sarcastic?

Without the whole story – without the context - it's hard to know.

Quoting and sharing things out of context is so common now, in our world of "fake news." The only way to truly be sure of what you see, read or hear is to dig a little deeper yourself and verify what is true.

In a way, the same can be true for us when we are reading the Bible. We talked last week about how confusing the Bible can be sometimes. Some verses seem weird, some stories seem beyond crazy, and some of the commands just don't make sense in the reality of life today. For a book that is supposed to help us and guide us, it sure doesn't feel like it sometimes. But if we dig a little deeper to understand the context behind the verses and the stories and the commands, it can make a lot more sense. And that's exactly why we are doing this message series called "Explained" – to hopefully, "explain" a little more about the Bible and make it easier to understand.

Let's start with the basics – with the two halves of the Bible. The Old Testament, which is the pre-Jesus section, and the New Testament, which includes stories about Jesus' life and the start of the Church after Jesus died.

But you need to understand that within these two halves, there is a lot going on. The Bible is actually 66 different documents put together. When we read the Bible without understanding that and remembering that, we miss a HUGE piece of the puzzle. We can easily misunderstand the context.

It might be helpful for you to think of it this way: Don't just say you're reading "the Bible." Say you're reading, "a document found in the Bible." You're not just reading a book, you're reading:

- A letter written to some of the first followers of Jesus.
- Pieces of really good advice a father wrote down for his son.
- A history book recording everything that happened.
- A song written to God by someone who knew Him well.
- An eyewitness account of someone who actually hung out with Jesus.

Just like a text that you send, context matters here too. It matters because it affects how we read and interpret the words. You don't want someone to misread or misinterpret what you meant by your words. God doesn't want that with His words either.

Let's take a look at a passage from the Bible to see what I mean. Maybe you've heard this one before. It was written by Paul, who was a follower of Jesus. Paul wrote many letters to churches that were just starting out after Jesus' death. In this passage, Paul writes to the followers of Jesus in Philippi. Hear what he says in Philippians chapter 4, verse 13:

For I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.

Does this verse sound familiar? It gets quoted a lot, almost like magic words for any situation. Like, "I can win this game through Christ who gives me strength." Or "I can pass Calculus without studying through Christ who gives me strength."

From this one verse, it sounds like Paul is living the life of his dreams, super confident about anything and everything. But there's a lot more to the story – so much more context to understand.

Paul wrote this phrase in his letter to the people of Philippi from prison after being arrested for speaking out about his faith in Jesus. And in this part of his letter, Paul was thanking the people of Philippi for sending him money. He was thanking them for their kindness. At the same time, Paul was assuring these people that they didn't need to feel obligated to send anything more. Paul let them know that he would be okay whether he had a little or a lot. This section of his letter is about contentment, about not needing or wanting more. Paul says that he has figured out how to be at peace and content with his life, whether things are good or bad.

And how does he find contentment, even as he writes to them from prison? He says, *"For I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength."*

Paul's close relationship with Jesus gave him the power and the strength and the understanding of how to persevere and find peace, even when things were tough.

So, the point isn't for you to think, "I can win this game because God is on my side." It's more like "Because of Jesus, I can be okay whether I have a little or a lot, whether life is going my way or not, whether my circumstances are great or not, whether I make the shot or not, whether I win this game or not."

Do you see how context matters? The meaning of the verse changes when we discover who said it, why they said it, where they said it and who was listening to it. All of that helps us understand the verse better and helps us know what WE are supposed to do with this same verse now, today, in our own lives. Context creates clarity for us as we try to apply the Bible's words to our lives.

Many times, we randomly pick verses or passages from the Bible, have no idea why they were written or who they were written to, and we either struggle to understand how to apply them to our lives, or assume we need to do exactly what the verse says, even though that might not exactly be the case.

Last week we said that the point of the Bible is to get to know God better. And if we really want to get to know God better, we shouldn't just guess what's going on.

The next time you come across a verse you don't understand, ask yourself these five questions:

1. Who wrote it?
2. Who was this written to?
3. Why was it written down?
4. What made people think this information should be written down or saved?
5. Is it helpful to me or not?

Dig deeper to find this information. Flip to the start of the book of the Bible where the passage came from to see if the context is provided or check the margins of the page. Information might be there. Or, you can search for it on your Bible app.

Instead of looking at the Bible with confusion, start looking at it with courage and curiosity. Keep looking at it as a way to get to know God better. He wants to guide you through this life. If His words seem confusing, the explanation you need might be found in the context.

FAMILY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Have your words ever been taken out of context? Has someone misunderstood a situation you were in because they didn't know the whole story? How did that make you feel? How did you get them to understand the situation?
2. Have you ever read a story or verse in the Bible that was so confusing you didn't know how it could possibly apply to your life now? What was it?
3. Think of a quote from your favorite movie and try to answer these questions: Who said it, why did they say it, where did they say it and who was listening to it?
4. How does knowing the context of a story you are reading - or a story someone is telling you - help you understand it better?
5. Who and where can you turn to for help learning the context of passages in the Bible?
6. The point of the Bible is to get to know God better. How does understanding the context of the Bible help us get to know God better?
7. How does understanding the context of the Bible help us apply Scripture to our lives?