ABIDE 101 · LESSON 5

The Literal Guardrail

Meditate and Obey. Study and Apply. Hear and Do.



SECTION 1 · MATTHEW 18:8–9

Break a Leg: Reading the Bible as Literature

“If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away.”

Matthew 18:8 · BSB

[8] If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than to have two hands and two feet and be thrown into the eternal fire.

9 And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.

SECTION 1 · WHAT KIND OF WRITING IS THIS?

Name the family, then the subgenre

Narrative

History, gospel, parable, genealogy

Poetry

Songs, wisdom, prophecy

Prose discourse

Law, sermons, letters

Apocalyptic

Visions full of symbols, as in Daniel and Revelation

Literal asks *what kind* of words they are; Contextual's literary layer asks *where* the words are located.



SECTION 2 · DEUTERONOMY 4:2
PROVERBS 10:4

The Two Cliffs

“Idle hands make one poor, but diligent hands bring wealth.”

Proverbs 10:4 · BSB

SECTION 2 · A CLIFF ON EACH SIDE

Stay on the road between

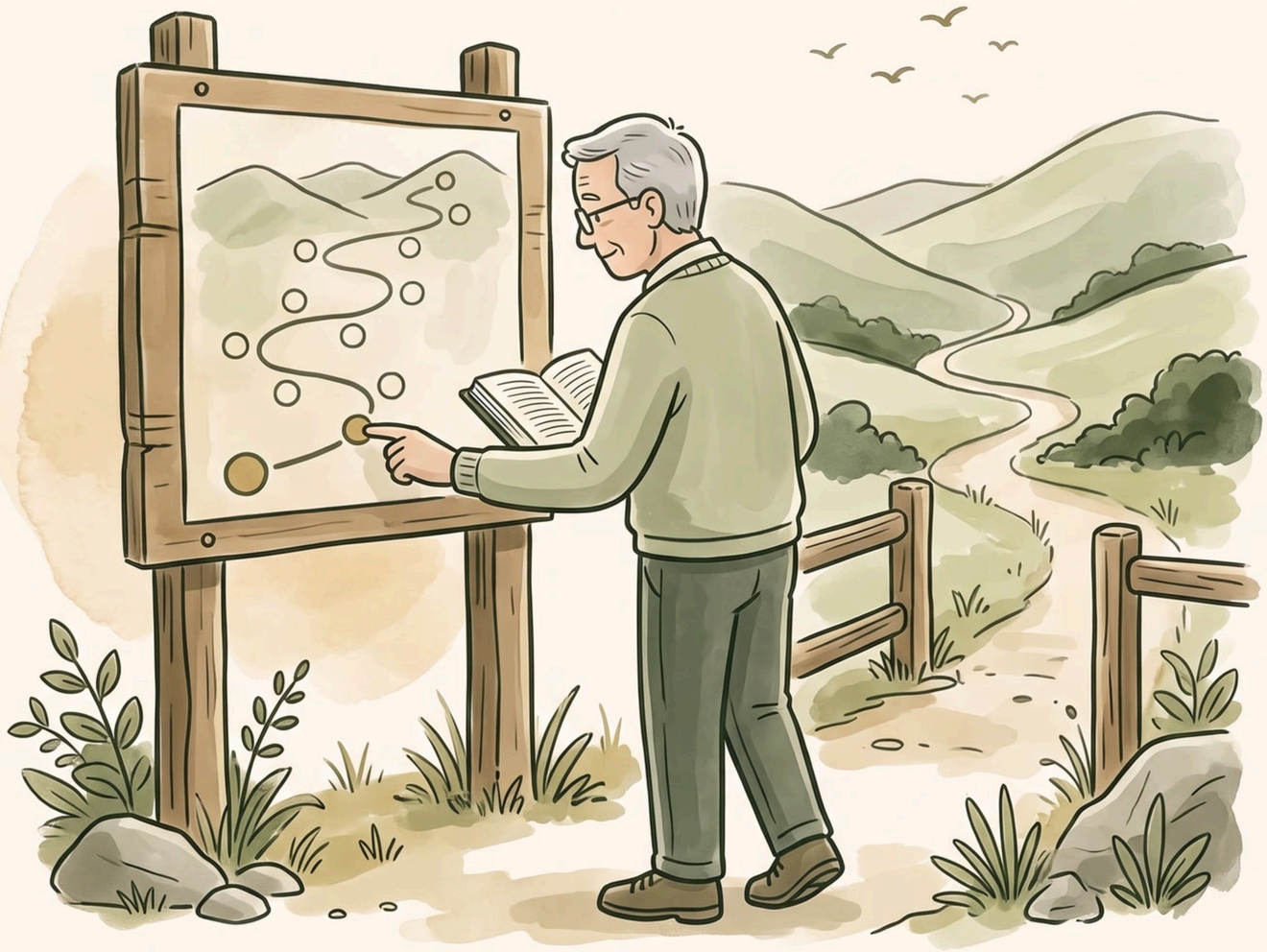
The wooden cliff

Reads every word flat, whatever kind of writing it is. It sounds careful, but it takes away from what God said, because it loses the point the writer was making.

The hidden-meaning cliff

Treats ordinary words as a code. It adds to what God said, because the meaning comes from the reader instead of the writer.

Read each passage as the kind of writing it is, and look for the real point behind every figure.



SECTION 3 · QUESTION 1

The First Question

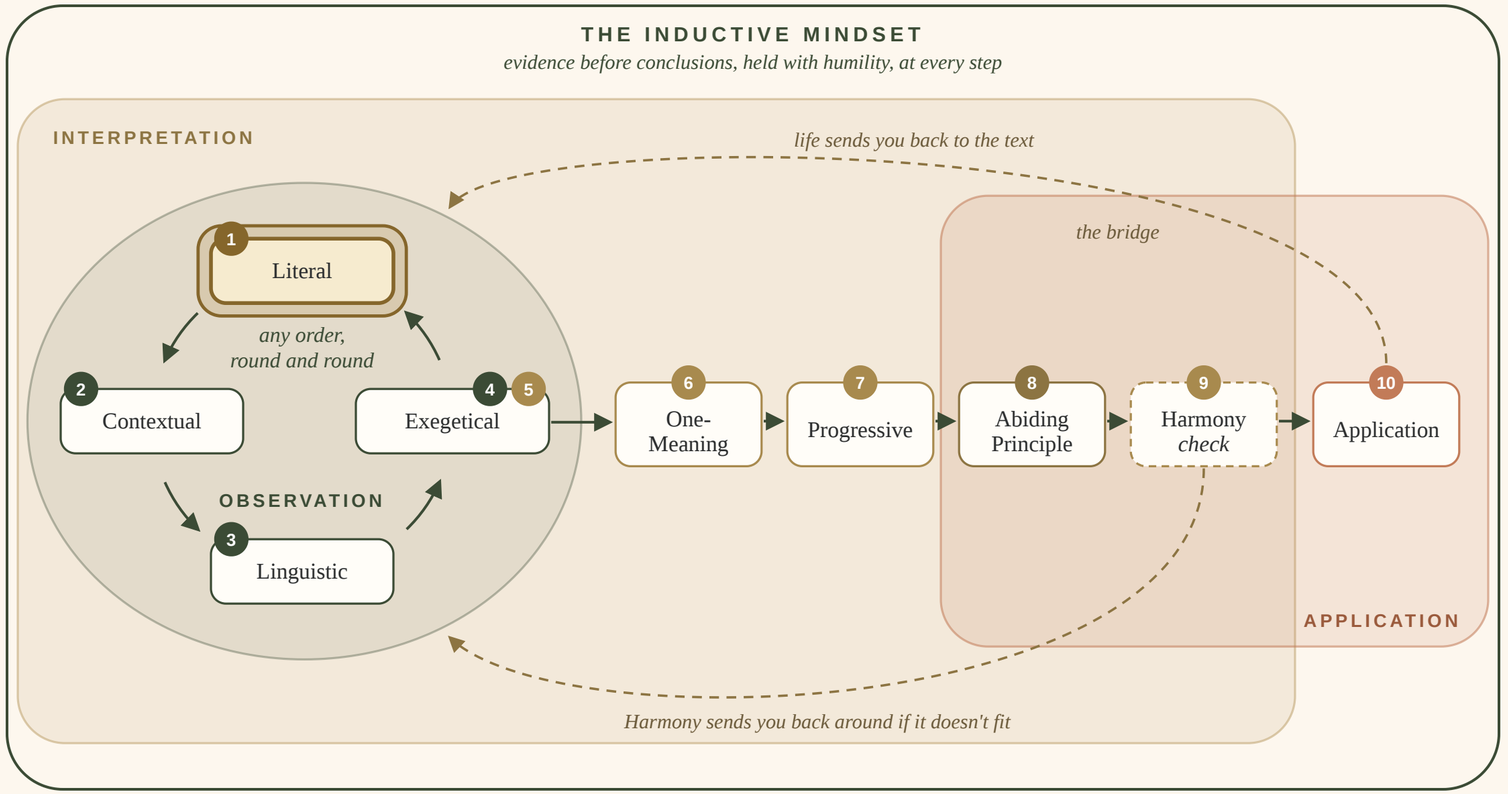
“What genre is this, and what does it actually say in that genre?”

The Literal guardrail’s question

SECTION 3 · WHERE WE ARE ON THE MAP

Inductive Bible Study

A time-tested method for handling "the word of truth" accurately (2 Timothy 2:15 · BSB)



The ten diagnostic questions in the process of biblical interpretation

We're at question 1, the Literal guardrail, in the Observation circle.

SECTION 3 · HOW DO YOU SPOT A FIGURE?

A figure is probably at work when...

It’s impossible

The risen Jesus holding “seven stars” in His right hand (Revelation 1:16, BSB).

It’s absurd word for word

“All the trees of the field will clap their hands” (Isaiah 55:12, BSB).

It would require sin

That’s how we know Jesus wasn’t ordering anyone to cut off a hand.

The text explains itself

Believers who “have fallen asleep in Him” are “the dead in Christ” (1 Thessalonians 4:14, 16, BSB).

Start by reading the words in their normal sense unless there’s a good reason not to.



SECTION 4 · CASE 1
2 SAMUEL 12:1–7

A Story Inside a Story

“You are that man!”

2 Samuel 12:7 · BSB

[1]Then the LORD sent Nathan to David, and when he arrived, he said, “There were two men in a certain city, one rich and the other poor. [2]The rich man had a great number of sheep and cattle,

[3]but the poor man had nothing except one small ewe lamb that he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food and drank from his cup; it slept in his arms and was like a daughter to him.

4 Now a traveler came to the rich man, who refrained from taking one of his own
sheep or cattle to prepare for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took
the poor man’s lamb and prepared it for his guest.”

5 David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan: “As surely as the
LORD lives, the man who did this deserves to die! 6 Because he has done this
thing and has shown no pity, he must pay for the lamb four times over.”



SECTION 5 · CASE 2
ISAIAH 55:10–12

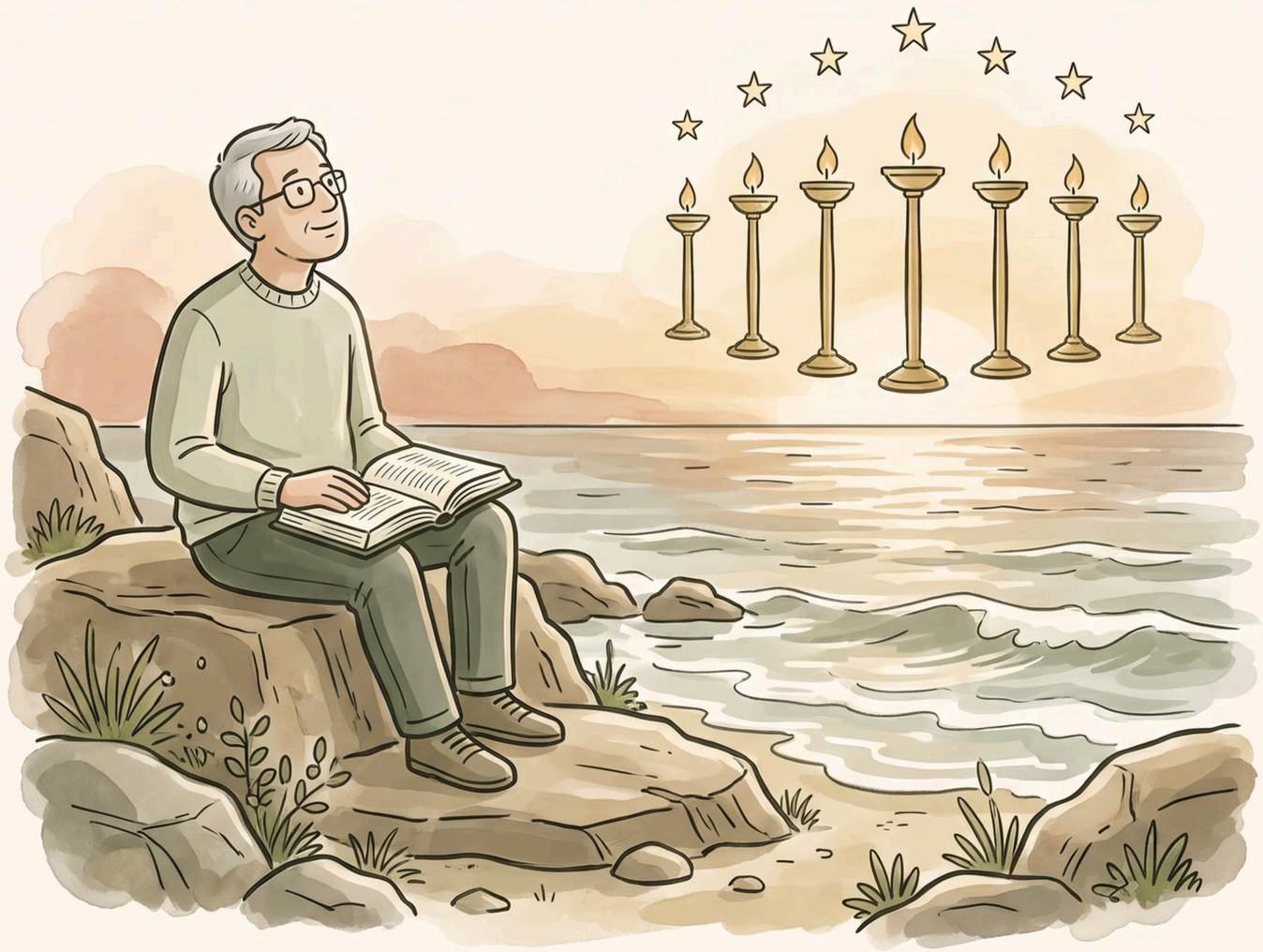
Rain, Snow and Singing Trees

“so My word that proceeds from My mouth will not return to Me empty, but it will accomplish what I please, and it will prosper where I send it.”

Isaiah 55:11 · BSB

10 For just as rain and snow fall from heaven and do not return without watering the
earth, making it bud and sprout, and providing seed to sow and food to eat, 11 so My
word that proceeds from My mouth will not return to Me empty, but it will accomplish
what I please, and it will prosper where I send it.

12 You will indeed go out with joy and be led forth in peace; the
mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of
the field will clap their hands.



SECTION 6 · CASE 3
REVELATION 1:12–20

The Risen Christ Among the Lampstands

“I was dead, and behold, now I am alive forever and ever!”

Revelation 1:18 · BSB
MSB: “forever and ever. Amen.”

12 Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned,
I saw seven golden lampstands, 13 and among the lampstands was One like the
Son of Man, dressed in a long robe, with a golden sash around His chest.

14 The hair of His head was white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes were
like a blazing fire. 15 His feet were like polished bronze refined in a furnace, and
His voice was like the roar of many waters.

16 He held in His right hand seven stars, and a sharp double-edged
sword came from His mouth. His face was like the sun shining at its
brightest.

17 When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. But He placed His right hand on me
and said, “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last, 18 the Living One. I was dead,
and behold, now I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of Death and of Hades.

19 Therefore write down the things you have seen, the things that are, and the things that
will happen after this. 20 This is the mystery of the seven stars you saw in My right hand
and of the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven
churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.



SECTION 7 · THE CENTRAL CASE
EPHESIANS 1:3–14

All Ten Questions

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms.”

Ephesians 1:3 · BSB

[3] Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms. [4] For He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless in His presence. In love

[5]He predestined us for adoption as His sons through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of His will, [6]to the praise of His glorious grace, which He has freely given us in the Beloved One. [7]In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace

[8] that He lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. [9] And He has made known
to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in
Christ [10] as a plan for the fullness of time, to bring all things in heaven and on earth
together in Christ.

[11] In Him we were also chosen as God’s own, having been predestined according to the plan of Him who works out everything by the counsel of His will, [12] in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, would be for the praise of His glory.

13 And in Him, having heard and believed the word of truth—the gospel of your
salvation—you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is the pledge of
our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession, to the
praise of His glory.

SECTION 7 · QUESTION 1: WHAT KIND?

Ephesians 1:3–14 at two levels

Look at	What we find
Family	Prose discourse; the subgenre is a **letter**: the writer's name, the readers, and a greeting, "Grace and peace to you" (v. 2, BSB).
Its own kind	A **doxology**, a burst of praise to God.
Its shape	One long sentence in Greek, with a refrain: "to the praise of His glorious grace" (v. 6), "for the praise of His glory" (v. 12), "to the praise of His glory" (v. 14).
Kind of speech	Pictures from family life, the slave market, official documents and business deals: adoption, redemption, sealed, pledge, inheritance.

SECTION 7 · QUESTIONS 2–10

From the page to this week

Question	What we find
2 · Contextual	Praise opens chapters 1 through 3, and praise closes them (Ephesians 3:20–21).
3 · Linguistic	Two refrains run side by side: *in Christ* and *the praise of His glory*.
4 · Exegetical	Praise God! In Christ, He has given you every spiritual blessing. *We* and *you* become *our*.
5 · Exegetical	Let go of the debate for a moment, and let the passage do what it was written to do.
6 · One-Meaning	In Christ, God has given His people every spiritual blessing, to the praise of His glorious grace.
7 · Progressive	The exodus, the inheritance, God's treasured possession (Exodus 19:5); now Gentiles are "fellow heirs" (Ephesians 3:6, BSB).
8 · Abiding principle	Everything God has given us in Christ is meant to lead us to praise Him, and to live as people who belong to Him and bear His name.
9 · Harmony	2 Corinthians 1:3; 1 Peter 1:3; Romans 8:17; 2 Corinthians 1:22.
10 · Application	Read Ephesians 1:3–14 aloud this week, slowly, as a prayer.



SECTION 8 · JOHN 14:26
1 CORINTHIANS 2:12

Every Kind, One Author

“We have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.”

1 Corinthians 2:12 · BSB

So What?

Read the Bible as the kinds of writing God gave it in. Name the family, then the subgenre, and look for the real point behind every figure. Literal asks *what kind*; Contextual asks *where*. Stay off the wooden cliff and the hidden-meaning cliff, and let each passage say what its Author meant.

ASK IT EVERY TIME YOU OPEN YOUR BIBLE

What genre is this, and what does it actually say in that genre?

Read the Bible as the kinds of writing God gave it in. Name the family, then the subgenre, and look for the real point behind every figure.

Meditate and Obey. Study and Apply. Hear and Do.