



# GUARDRAILS

## Alive to God in Scripture

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The Bible does not mean whatever we want it to mean. If we do not understand the author's original intent, we do not understand the meaning of the passage. This requires some study.

We may need to spend a several days or weeks studying and thinking through the context and specific meaning of a passage. This is important not to rush.

Guardrails prevent us from getting derailed in our interpretation of Scripture. These four "guardrails" will help us keep us on track: context, genre, congruence, and meaning.

### Context

The meaning of a passage has to make sense within its immediate context. Taking verses out of context leads to misunderstanding and error.

Example: Philippians 4:13

*"I can do all things through Him [Christ] who strengthens me."* (NASB)

The meaning of "all things" is clarified one verse earlier in this passage, where the apostle Paul states that he can live with either "humble means or prosperity . . . abundance or suffering" (v. 12). That is, the secret of being satisfied is Christ, both in want and excess.

The context tells us this is not a promise that we can achieve any goal we have in mind. Rather, Paul is asserting that his faith and pursuit of Christ is not circumstantial. It remains the same whether he has nothing or a lot,

### Genre

Example: Proverbs 22:6

*"Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it."* (NASB)



Many a parent distrusts God because they did 'everything right' raising a child, but their child turned out rebellious. God apparently has broken His promise.

The Bible is a library of sixty-six books written over 1,500 years by many authors. It contains several kinds of literature: law, history, wisdom, poetry, gospel, epistles, prophecy, and apocalyptic.

The genre of this passage is as the name implies, "Proverbs." The book of Proverbs is a collection of wisdom about values, moral behavior, the meaning of human life, and how to live.

The genre tells us that this passage is a proverb, not a promise.

### **Congruence**

Example: James 4:2

*"... You do not have because you do not ask." (NASB)*

Prosperity gospel preachers often encourage us to pray for personal success, including health and wealth. Supposedly, when we pray believing that we have already received what we are praying for, God has no choice but to make our prayers come to pass.

The principle of congruence means that an interpretation of a passage must be congruent with the rest of Scripture. The Bible does not contradict itself. While prayers for personal blessing aren't inherently wrong, the prosperity gospel overemphasizes that we can force God to grant our desires.

Curiously, they often ignore the second half of James's teaching on prayer: "You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures" (James 4:3). God does not answer selfish requests that do not honor His name.

Congruence requires that we interpret Scripture with the rest of Scripture.



## Meaning

The focus of this principle is on the meaning of words.

Example: Proverbs 29:18

*“Where there is no vision, the people perish.” (KJV)*

This verse is often used to promote the necessity of ‘thinking big,’ of having a magnanimous vision for our lives or organization. Apparently, the bigger the vision, the bigger the success.

The specific meaning of “vision” helps us to understand the meaning of this verse.

The Hebrew word, *chazon*, means “divine revelation communicated to a prophet.” In other words, without God’s perspective, we will not experience ultimate life.

The specific meaning of a word frequently determines the meaning of a passage.