Devotional Accountability:

Did any of the devotional passages instill in you a greater desire to know God’s Word? Were there any perspectives or insights that were especially meaningful to you?

THE PRIORITY OF CONTEXT

In real estate they have a slogan to emphasize the number one consideration when purchasing a property: “Location, Location, Location”.

When studying scripture the number one consideration needs to be Context, Context, Context.

What do you think we mean by the term “context”?

Context: The setting in which something occurs

Everything has a setting in which it is embedded, whether it is an event, a story, or a statement. How you understand something is very dependent on circumstances or conversation surrounding it. To try to understand something outside of the context in which it was developed may easily lead to wrong conclusions.

What is your reaction to the following statement?

“The whole community stood silently by and watched the murder.”

How might this be understood differently if it were printed in a newspaper versus a nature report?

Murder = a group of crows

Can you share a time when something you said or did was taken out of context? What was the result?
Look at the passages below and see what role context has to play.

Pathway to Healing

Job 22:21-23 (NIV)
Submit to God and be at peace with him; in this way prosperity will come to you. 22 Accept instruction from his mouth and lay up his words in your heart. 23 If you return to the Almighty, you will be restored: If you remove wickedness far from your tent…

This passage was presented in a sermon as steps we need to take to get right with God and allow healing (spiritual and physical) to come into our lives.

What do you think about this application? Does the advice appear to make sense?
Note: The words were spoken to someone who had become physically ill and had lost all his wealth and fortunes.

On the surface nothing seems inappropriate about these verses.

Who were these words spoken to?
The words were spoken to Job who had just lost his children, his crops, his livestock, his wealth, and now his health. (Job 1-2)

Who spoke these words?
The words were spoken by one of Job’s three friends (Eliphaz) who came to “console” him in his time of suffering and mourning. (Job 2:11-13)

What is their understanding as to why Job is suffering?
They believe Job is suffering because there must be some un-repentent sin in his life and God is judging him. (Job 22:4-5)

Why is Job suffering?
(Job 1:6-12) Job is suffering because Satan is testing his faithfulness to God. It had nothing to do with a sin issue, precisely the opposite. Satan was accusing Job of being faithful only because of how God blessed him. He reasoned that if God removed this blessing, Job would turn against him. It was because of the righteousness of Job that he was suffering, not his sin.

What then is the value of what Eliphaz is saying to Job? If Job followed Eliphaz’s advice, would he have been healed and restored?
Had Job followed Eliphaz’s advice nothing would have changed.

What was God’s response to Eliphaz for his words?
Read Job 42:7-9
Should this passage have been used as an instruction manual for healing?
Some of the principles drawn might have been valuable in a different setting, but this passage could not be used to argue those points. The context does not permit it. The words in this case would have been misleading, entirely ineffective, and as a result spiritually damaging.

Christmas Tree or No Christmas Tree?

Jeremiah 10:3-4 (NIV)
For the customs of the peoples are worthless; they cut a tree out of the forest, and a craftsman shapes it with his chisel. They adorn it with silver and gold; they fasten it with hammer and nails so it will not totter.

In light of this passage what do you think a Christian’s response to Christmas trees should be?

What is the broader context of this passage? Quickly scan the rest of the chapter to discern what the conversation is about.
Take special note of verses 10:5, 8, 14-15 (Supporting verses: Isaiah 40:19-20)

This passage is addressing Israelites who have adopted the pagan practices of the nations around them by making idols out of wood. They would secure it with nails so it wouldn’t topple over – apparently it’s inappropriate for your god to keep falling on his face. They would proceed to decorate the idol with gold and silver and then worship it instead of the true, living God, the Eternal King, and the Maker of all things.

The idea of Christmas trees did not even exist in Israel’s culture at this time.

Whether you agree with the idea of Christmas trees or not, you cannot use this passage as a supporting text. The context does not permit it.

I can do ALL things!

Philippians 4:13 (NIV)
I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

In light of this verse what is the believer able to accomplish in life?
How have you heard this verse used in the past?

What is the broader context of this passage?
Read Philippians 4:11-13
What was it that Paul was able to do in these verses and remain content?
Paul was able to be content in whatever situation God allowed him to experience. He could be in need, hungry, or in want, OR he could also be content having plenty and being well fed.

What is the point Paul is trying to make here?
We should be content regardless of the circumstances in which we find ourselves. The Philippians were experiencing disunity because people were arguing for what they perceived they needed. Paul is essentially saying, “You don’t need anything, except the ministry God calls you to. As long as you’re being faithful to that calling, you will be content.”

How does understanding the context change how this verse might be applied to your life?

2 Peter 3:16 (NIV)
He [Paul] writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

Whenever you are dealing with a verse of scripture, it is imperative that you understand what is happening around that specific passage. If you choose to be lazy and not get a sense of the context, you will become like those ignorant and unstable people who distort scripture.
Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. James 1:22 (NIV)

**DAY 1**

Choose **any verse in Proverbs** – go ahead, open your Bible and pick one.

If you need help, choose Pr. 22:6 or Pr. 21:9 as an example.

Are the verses in proverbs actual promises that you are to rely on or commands to be obeyed?

What is a proverb? Look it up in a dictionary.

How does viewing the verse you’ve chosen as a proverb differ from viewing it as a promise or a command?

How do you apply a proverb differently than a promise or a command?

Proverbs are wise sayings that are intended to cause you to think through what is the wise thing to do in any circumstance.

How can you work through applying the proverb you’ve chosen to your life?
Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. James 1:22 (NIV)

**DAY 2**

What is the broader context of this passage and how does that affect how you should read it?

**Philippians 2:12 (NIV)**

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,

What does this verse appear to be saying when isolated from the rest of the passage?

How could that radically distort one's theology and life?

How does vs. 13 set everything into proper perspective?

Context goes beyond simply paragraphs, chapters, or even an entire book – the ultimate context is the Bible as a whole.

How do the following verses help clarify Philippians 2:12?

- Philippians 3:9
- Ephesians 2:8-10
- Titus 3:5
- Romans 3:20

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DAY 3

What is the broader context of this passage and how does that affect how you should read it?

2 Corinthians 6:14 (NIV)
Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?

This passage is often used with regard to believers marrying unbelievers. But what is it actually referring to?

Read the verses 15-18 to get a broader context.

The passage is talking about believers still participating in the social feasts at pagan temples.

How does this context change the perception of the passage?

How can this passage be applied to your life?

Though this passage is not at all talking about the marriage of a believer to an unbeliever, can some of the principles still apply?
Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. James 1:22 (NIV)

DAY 4

What is the broader context of this passage and how does that affect how you should read it?

Matthew 27:46 (NIV)
About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"—which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Is Jesus really crying out in frustration at this point?

Does it make sense that if Jesus was calling out in the agony of suffering and abandonment that he would consciously choose to quote scripture?

Jesus is referring back to Psalm 22.

What is the theme of Psalm 22?

Note the recurring theme of God’s salvation (see Psalm 22:25-31 and especially the last phrase of the Psalm).

How does understanding this Psalm change how you view Jesus’ last words on the cross?

Whenever you see the Old Testament being quoted, you need to realize the author saw that context as being critical to the point he was trying to make. In these cases, go back and read the context of those Old testament verses to better understand the New.

This is very key in Jesus’ responses in Matthew 4 when he is being tempted by Satan.
Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. James 1:22 (NIV)

DAY 5

What is the broader context of this passage and how does that affect how you should read it?

Why did the psalmist write this song?

What were the circumstances behind it?

Read Psalm 51

Read 2 Samuel 11-12 to get the full background.

Does understanding the story bring a depth and richness to Psalm 51?

How does understanding David’s story help you relate Psalm 51 more powerfully to your life?