Devotional Accountability:

Did you discover a deeper richness by looking at the “small words” most people don’t even notice? Were there any perspectives or insights that were especially meaningful for you? How is the process of developing this discipline of Bible reading going for you?

THE MAIN PRINCIPLE

Whenever an author writes, he/she chooses his words and ideas very carefully, placing them in an orderly flow that helps understanding. This is especially true when it comes to the word of God.

In any given passage, what is the role of paragraphs?

What is the role of individual sentences?

What is the role of words in a sentence?

Every passage has a main point that it wants to express and it uses sub-points or paragraphs to effectively communicate that one message.

Every paragraph has a point to make that works together with the other paragraphs to make the main message clear.

Every sentence exists to communicate of the central idea of the paragraph.

Every word is specifically chosen to communicate the idea of the sentence.

Understanding the flow of a passage is critical to understanding the message.

Outlining a passage:

Reveals the main points and sub points, grouping related thoughts.
Reveals the flow of a passage, showing the relationship between the various ideas.
Reveals the tension and the response to that tension.

Why should one beware of the punctuation and paragraph divisions in the Bible?

In the original manuscripts there was no punctuation, no paragraph breaks, no chapters or verses. Every marking of that nature was added by scholars over the years for our benefit. However, that also means the decisions are manmade decisions and therefore not always accurate. Putting punctuation in varying places can radically change the message.

Example 1: What is the message of the sign?

Road Sign: “Slow children playing”
Example 2: In the letter below, place punctuation where you feel it most appropriately belongs.

Have the group share their renditions of this letter.
http://grammar.about.com/od/punctuationandmechanics/a/punctmatters07.htm

Dear John

I want a man who knows what love is all about. You are generous, kind, thoughtful. People who are not like you admit to being useless and inferior. You have ruined me for other men. I yearn for you. I have no feelings whatsoever when we're apart. I can be forever happy--will you let me be yours?

Jane

Possible structuring:

Dear John,

I want a man who knows what love is all about. You are generous, kind, thoughtful. People who are not like you admit to being useless and inferior. You have ruined me for other men. I yearn for you. I have no feelings whatsoever when we're apart. I can be forever happy--will you let me be yours?

Jane

Dear John,

I want a man who knows what love is. All about you are generous, kind, thoughtful people, who are not like you. Admit to being useless and inferior. You have ruined me. For other men, I yearn. For you, I have no feelings whatsoever. When we're apart, I can be forever happy. Will you let me be?

Yours,
Jane

Where would you place punctuation in the following passage?

Do as a group exercise. Write their collective version out for them to see and discuss as a group.
Recommend using poster paper, whiteboard, or editable video projection.

It was he who gave some to be apostles some to be prophets some to be evangelists and some to be pastors and teachers to prepare God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.
Scholars need to make decisions on punctuation – see below.

Ephesians 4:11-13 (NIV)
11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Ephesians 4:11-13 (KJV)
11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; 12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: 13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

One punctuation mark makes a huge difference in the above passage. Where does this occur?
Verse 12: For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry

What is the theological difference that between these two passages that has shaped church history?
The King James scholars placed a comma in this phrase identifying “perfecting the saints” and “the work of ministry” as two separate things that the church leaders do. In others words, church leaders are responsible perfect the saints and church leaders are responsible to do the work of the ministry.

The NIV removes the comma implying that the role of church leaders is to equip the saints so that “they” do the work of the ministry.

Historically it has been viewed that the pastor or the priest does the work of the ministry. They are the “ministers”, not the average lay person. By placing the comma in this passage, we understand that every believer is called to ministry and we are equipped to do so by the leadership.

Context and the flow of the passage helps us determine which understanding is correct. Paul was talking about how every part of the body of Christ has a role to play, not just the leadership. It is through everyone playing a spiritual role that the entire church is strengthened and grows in maturity.

Ephesians 4:7 (NIV)
But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.

Ephesians 4:16 (NIV)
From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.
Colossians 1:15-23 (NIV)
He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created:
things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all
things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he
is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in
everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and
through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace
through his blood, shed on the cross.

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But
now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without
blemish and free from accusation— if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the
hope held out in the gospel.

What is the over-riding message of this passage? What message does Paul want to convey to the
reader? Try to convey the main idea in one sentence in the chart below.
Discuss as a group.

What is the main idea of each of the paragraphs? Write them in the chart below.
Discuss as a group.

What is the point of each sentence in communicating the main point of the paragraph?
Colossians 1:15-23 (NIV)

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation -- if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel.

Overall Message: Jesus is supreme over everything and has reconciled all things to God.

Paragraph Summary: Christ is over all creation and the church, reconciling them to himself.

Sentence points:
- Christ is over Creation
  - Christ is the image of God (God’s physical, representative ruler over creation)
  - Christ created all things for himself – physical and spiritual
  - Christ holds everything together

- Christ is over the church
  - Christ conquered death
  - Christ is the fullness of God and reconciled all things to God by his sacrifice

Paragraph Summary: This reconciliation can include you.

Sentence points:
- You were separated from God – his enemies.
- You have been reconciled by Christ’s death
- You are now without blemish, free from accusation
- IF you continue in your faith in him.

Obviously this passage falls within a much broader discussion and is only one key element of that message. To fully grasp the impact of this passage you would need to understand the logical and flow of the entire letter.

How does outlining the passage in this way bring greater clarity?

In this passage why do you think Paul talks about creation and the church as a lead-in to talking about us?
What is the personal impact this passage should have on us?
If Jesus is truly over all things, are we acknowledging his Lordship over us?
Are we living in such a way that reflects Jesus is in charge?
Are we living “for” Jesus or ourselves?

In your devotional times this week, spend time looking at passages to understand their flow. Perhaps spend one day outlining the structure, then spend the next day considering the implications for your life.
PASSAGE 1

James 4:13-17 (NIV)
Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil. Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.

Main message of the passage:

Sub-points that help make the main point:

Implications for you:
**PASSAGE 2**

**Outline Ideas**

Main message of the passage:

Sub-points that help make the main point:

**Psalms 1:1-6 (NIV)**

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers.

But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.

Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

Implications for you:
### PASSAGE 3

**Genesis 4:1-16**  
Cain and Abel

Narrative passages can sometimes be a little more challenging to determine the flow and the ultimate message. However, every story has a reason for being in the Bible with an essential truth we are to understand and apply.

A key to outlining a story is to look at the sequence of events and how they develop the story.

What is the tension that is raised and how do people respond to that tension?  
(every story has a tension)

What is the conclusion of the story and what message does it send?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outline Ideas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Main message of the passage:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-points that help make the main point:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Implications for you: