

The Jackson Pollock Approach to Reading the Bible

I am not a fan of most modern or abstract art, but there's something about the art of Jackson Pollock I find intriguing. Pollock was a key figure in what is called Abstract Expressionism. It doesn't look like Pollock did anything but randomly drip paint on a canvas—which is exactly what he did.

Go ahead and admit it: you look at this painting and it reminds you of something your kid drew on his bedroom wall when he was three. You may wish you still had that section of his bedroom wall, because this particular Pollock painting, called *Number 17a*, sold in 2015 for \$200 million.



I can't tell what the painting means or signifies. I'm not the only dense person in the room. A lot of people stare at Pollock's work and ask, "What does it mean?" Pollock answered the question with a question of his own: "What does it mean to you?"

Even if I don't see it, I want to know what the artist or author intended. "What were you thinking when you created it?" It doesn't matter what I think if I've missed the creator's intent.

Some people approach the Bible the same way Jackson Pollock approached art: "What does it mean to you?"

- *"When I read 'I can do all things through Christ,' that means for me that I can succeed and win this game."*
- *"Jesus said I could ask for anything in His name, and for me, that means I can pray for and receive that Lexus I've been eyeing."*
- *"The Bible never explicitly says homosexuality is wrong. I think those verses you're quoting mean something different. To me, they mean ..."*

Nope, nope, and nope. What matters is what the author intended. Language ultimately has no meaning if we define the words in whatever way suits us. That is as irresponsible as the young man on a date who says to a woman, "You say 'no,' but I think you mean 'yes.'"

We must practice good hermeneutics—how we interpret the text. For example:

Keep in mind the type of literature it is.

Narrative, prophecy, poetry, and teaching passages use different styles and structures. When we read Psalm 91 as poetry, we don't take verse 4—"He will cover you with his feathers; you will take refuge under his wings."—to mean God is a giant chicken.

Read a verse in light of the whole passage. My most popular post addresses how Philippians 4:13—"I am able to do all things through him who strengthens me."—is misquoted because it is removed from its context.

Read the passage for its obvious meaning. Too many assume there are hidden meanings in the Bible. Since the Bible is God's revelation of Himself, why would He keep it hidden?

Consider the language and historical background. Good study Bibles can help you understand the historical context, which helps us see why the writer said things the way he did. These tools help us understand the original Hebrew and Greek. The most-used example is the word "love." Our one English word can refer to four different Greek words, each with a different meaning.

One thing you won't find is the Jackson Pollock approach to interpretation. It doesn't matter what you think the passage means. What matters is what God says it means.

"Be diligent to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who doesn't need to be ashamed, correctly teaching the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).