

[MJTM 15 (2013–2014)]

BOOK REVIEW

J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays. *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012. 512 pp. Hbk. ISBN 9780310492573.

J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays. *Living God's Word: Discovering Our Place in the Great Story of Scripture*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012. 320 pp. Hbk. ISBN 9780310292104.

Bible teachers will be delighted with the recent release of the third edition of *Grasping God's Word*. The earlier editions became hermeneutical standards for evangelical students at the senior high and college levels, having sold over 100,000 copies since the release of the second edition in 2005. With this revision the text brings even more value to the classroom.

The authors' basic approach has not changed. Students are encouraged to take seriously the original context of the text. What did the text mean to the first audience? The critical premise is that it cannot mean today what it could not have meant then. This is a time-honored principle of interpretation that has kept Christians from faltering in their application of the text. Duvall and Hays's strong insistence here is appreciated. Only when the original meaning is established and linkage to the experience of the first audience is discerned can Bible users discover the meaning and application for faith and life today.

In the present edition, although the basic approach is the same, significant adjustments have been made. The following is a brief summary:

1. References to culture have been updated as have the bibliography and the appendices in light of what has been published since the second edition.
2. There is been a “slight” shift in tone, the authors say. The earlier editions posited the Bible “as a deposit of static truth that must be mastered and applied.” Truth is propositional and does not change. The new tone posits the Bible “as God’s great story that is to be understood and lived out.”
3. The chapter on Bible translations has been moved to the front of the book since it is of great interest to students.
4. Minor changes have been made to several chapters especially with respect to identifying theological principles.
5. The steps of interpretation, or the journey from ancient to contemporary meaning, have been modified. In the earlier editions there was a four-step process for the New Testament, and a five-step process for the Old Testament. In the current edition there are five steps for all biblical genres.

The older edition is easily recognizable in the current release. But the changes are significant, increasing pedagogical effectiveness. An additional bonus is *textbookplus*, one of the publisher’s free resources for textbooks with instructor access to a manual, chapter quizzes, exams, presentation slides, lesson plans and sample syllabi, and for students, quizzes, a short guide to exegesis and a sample exegetical paper. This is a great improvement of a resource that has already proven useful for the classroom or for small-group Bible study. Finally, there is a matching *Workbook* available from the same publisher at \$19.99.

Duvall and Hays lead the student through the journey of sound biblical interpretation in a manner that is attractive and user-friendly. One area the reader might wish to take note of is the shift in tone from “truth” to “story.” The reader might ask the question: Is there a risk, in advancing a single over-arching theme, of reducing Scripture to one dimension, thereby failing to

notice some of the other theological themes in each book? This limitation can be seen more clearly in the second book *Living God's Word*.

The authors have found, through the success of *Grasping God's Word* that students of the Word generally failed to grasp the significance of each Bible book for the whole of Scripture. They could talk about each book, but not about the dominant theme of the Bible. They missed the great central point, the "story." The purpose of *Living God's Word* is to address this need. This new title reflects the authors' genius for simplicity and clarity of purpose and content. While *Grasping God's Word* concentrated on right analysis of each book, the intent of *Living God's Word* is to expose the broad purpose of Scripture and to show how each part relates to the whole. The authors do this remarkably well.

But again, the shift from truth to story is evident here. The Bible is indeed the story of innocence, fall, redemption, and the covenantal framework within which God administered grace. The book tells this story superbly. From that point of view I cannot recommend the book too highly for senior high and college students, either as a stand-alone or companion to *Grasping God's Word*. My one word of caution to the reader is to recognize that concentration on the metanarrative of the Bible inevitably involves overrunning narrower theological themes. In a survey of this nature one simply cannot say it all.

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