

BGM BIBLE COLLEGE

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LECTURE NO 3

RESEARCH METHODS

Teaching Concerning the Choosing of a Topic for Writing

The First Principle: Prayer

Whenever ye choose any topic, or subject, or title, the first thing is **prayer**.

Prayer is very needful; and after prayer, there must be thought and meditation. Prayer ye must surely make, that the Lord may grant you understanding and the strength to think aright; for we all believe in the power of prayer.

Especially because the topics we seek are chiefly **theological**—pertaining unto God. We desire to guide people, that they may amend their lives. But if ye pray not, nor seek help from God, ye shall not be able rightly to understand that topic, nor to expound it well.

Prayer is a weapon which is in our hands, and we ought to use it faithfully.

The Second Principle: Thought and Meditation

After prayer, ye must give yourselves unto meditation:

“I have prayed unto God; now grant unto me wisdom and understanding, and strength also, that I may ponder this matter.”

Then ye consider:

Upon what subject ought I to write?

Thus cometh the second great matter:

The Third principle: Examine Thy Personal Interests

Before choosing a topic, examine thine **interests**.

What is thy inclination? What is the matter that draweth thy heart?

When thou understands thine own inclination, then choosing a topic becomes easy.

The Fourth principle: Reading According to One's Interest

According to thy interest, thou reads books of that kind.

Some read dramas, some novels. But ye who are theological students must read that which

Thus, if thy interest be in the foundational matters of faith, thou shalt write upon such things, and read books that deal with them. Thou shalt read one book, then another, then a third, then a fourth, until many things gather before thee, and thy understanding growth.

Thy interest may be specific; and according to that thou shalt write or speak. Although ye shall read the whole Bible, yet ye must perceive what subject within it chiefly draweth your heart.

The fifth principle: Determining Useful Subjects

Now how shall we better understand interest?

First, consider which subjects are **important and necessary**. What deem you to be the essential themes in the Bible? What subjects are necessary for the people unto whom ye desire to minister or to write?

For in Pakistan there are few books in Urdu, because few write in Urdu. Thus there are many subjects which remain untouched. And for many such themes no books have ever been written.”

THE DISCERNMENT OF A SUBJECT FOR WRITING

I. The Scarcity of Writings in Urdu

In these days thou finds many books in the English tongue, yet in Urdu the writings are few; for the writers of old took no delight in such matters, neither set they their hands to write thereon. Therefore no books are found, neither any written material concerning such themes; for the Urdu authors were few, and even the few had little interest therein. Hence they wrote nothing upon those matters.

II. The Need to Identify the Gap

Thou must therefore behold and discern where the gap lieth. For when a man desired to write a book, he saith within himself, “*Lo, many have written on this matter already; therefore if I add aught thereto, it must bring some increase or profit.*” Yet thou mayest also say, “*I should write upon a matter whereon no man hath yet written; where is the breach that I may fill it?*” Thus by thy writing thou fillest that void, and by thee many are helped.

Even so did I, when I wrote “*The Crucified Christ,*” for lo, upon Paul’s writings there are many books in English, yea the libraries are full. And in Urdu the books that exist are but translations of foreign authors; yet there was none written by a Pakistani writer. Behold, this was the gap

III. Considering the Importance of the Subject

Thou must behold which themes are weighty and needful, and where the gap whereby others may be aided lieth. But if books do abound, then must thou ask: *“How shall my writing be distinct? What things are lacking in the others that I may set forth in mine own?”*

Thus shalt thou discern which matters are important and necessary?

IV. Considering Thy Audience

Consider also thy hearers; for “hearers” signifies the readers of thy book—students, the common folk of the church, scholars, pastors, and teachers. There are, as it were, three shelves in a library: the upper shelf, the middle shelf, and the lower shelf.

The upper shelf holdeth difficult books read by scholars, teachers, and masters of Scripture; the common people cannot understand them. The middle shelf holdeth books somewhat difficult, yet easier than the first; these read pastors, youth leaders, women’s leaders, and many of the congregation also. And the lower shelf holdeth books written in very simple speech, that even the unlearned may understand without aid.

Thus must thou ask thyself, *“For which shelf do I write?”* I wrote my books chiefly for the middle shelf, that students, pastors, and teachers alike might profit. If I had written more simply, it had been for the common people.

Therefore thou also must consider: *For whom is this writing needful? For students? For pastors? For leaders? Or for the common flock who are lightly instructed?*

V. Writing for Examiners in Academic Work

When thou writes academically, thou must first remember thy examiner; for before thy writing helped others, it must first pass the test of him who examined thee.

Thus thou considers thy examiner first. And afterward, when the research is complete, it may be published for the good of many.

Then thou must ask: *“Is this for scholars? For the middle readers? Or for common folk?”* For after rewriting and simplifying, it may profit all.

VI. Seeking the Glory of God through Writing

Since thou writes concerning theology and the Holy Scriptures, thou must purpose that God’s glory be revealed thereby. For when the faith of many is strengthened, and the people say, *“I received much help by reading thy book,”* then is God glorified.

Thus must thou desire that thy writing may bring glory unto the Lord and profit unto His people.

VII. The Necessity of Accessible Material

Thou must also consider whether materials on that subject are easily available. For no man can write upon a matter without reading the works already written. If thou finds no books on the subject, how canst thou write? Therefore seek material diligently.

If thou reads widely, thou finds the angles others have not touched. If thou reads not, thou canst not discern the gaps.

VIII. Choosing a Subject That Brings Edification

Finally, thou must ask which subject shall bring the greatest blessing unto the people. Write upon that which shall profit and uplift many. Choose that which is accessible, useful, and spiritually fruitful, that by it others may be helped.

The Sin of Plagiarism

Behold, this is theft. If a writer doeth such things, it is a shame unto him. He knoweth not research; for this is called literary theft, or plagiarism. To lift another's labour and to translate it as thine own is a great evil in the world of writing. Thou mayest indeed take help from English books, but thou must give proper citation—declaring plainly whence the matter is taken, who wrote it, and from what page. This preserved thine integrity. But to translate secretly and claim it as thine own is a grievous sin.

THE ABUNDANCE OF MATERIAL AND HOW TO SEARCH IT

Where Material May Be Found

If thou knows English, behold, the libraries are full. And online also lieth abundant material. The matter is not the lack of material, but the lack of searching.

When No Written Material Exists — Qualitative Research

Yet there are certain subjects concerning which no books exist. Such matters require qualitative research. For example, if a church hath existed forty or fifty years, and none hath written its history, thou shalt not find written material. But thou shalt find people—those who were early members, pastors, elders, families who have been there from the beginning. These thou shalt interview, gathering from them the first-hand accounts. This is called qualitative research.

Such research is first-hand; and from these human sources thou gathers information that no book contained.

SEEKING HELP IN RESEARCH

Guidance Available From Teachers

The teachers also can guide thee, saying, “*Search here or there, and thou shalt find.*” Thus thou shalt not be left without help.

THE MATTER OF AUTHENTIC SOURCES

Two Main Sources: Books and Online Materials

Thou speaks truly. Many online search engines—J-STOR, EBSCO, and such—require paid subscriptions. Universities pay for these and grant access to their students.

But fear not if thou hast no subscription. For many articles once locked are now freely given, and may be downloaded. Only be careful to verify them.

How to Discern Authenticity

Behold the following:

- Wikipedia is not highly reliable. Be cautious.
- Ask: *Who wrote this article?*
- *What publisher issued it?*
- *From which journal or magazine doth it come?*
- Is it from a reputable academic source?
- Though old, is it now freely accessible? If so, thou mayest use it with proper reference.

Books, libraries, and physical resources remain among the strongest tools

Counsel Regarding the Use of Libraries

And many come not unto the libraries; therefore they perceive not the benefit thereof. They remain in their houses, knowing not that for research there are resources online, yet the library also must be visited. Ye ought to learn this practice.

There are catalogues, and there are listings by subject, by author, and by many other orders. And if a man understandeth the method, he findeth his book with swiftness.

Questions Concerning Urdu Research Articles

There is also a publication called *Al-Masheer*, printed by the Christian Study Centre in Rawalpindi. And thus far I know only these two as academic journals. After this there be magazines, whose name is *Sutn-e-Haqq*, and another from Gujranwala called *Pasban*, and others likewise. The Catholic Church also hath some publications, one named *Charwaha*. In such magazines also thou mayest find articles.

Explanation of Quantitative and Qualitative Research

The difference is this: In qualitative research, the human sample is small, yet the study is deep and analytical. But in quantitative research the data is great in number.

Thus, quantitative research is used where great numbers are required. But qualitative research required not a great sample; fifteen or twenty persons may suffice. Thou interviews them deeply. There are structured interviews, semi-structured interviews, open-ended questions, group discussions, and many types of formats.

In quantitative research, there are many yes-no questions, check marks, and closed-ended forms. In qualitative research, the study is deep. In theological research, qualitative methods are used more often; quantitative methods are rare.

