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EQUIPPING MEMBERS TO MAKE DISCIPLES THROUGH
ONE-ON-ONE BIBLE READING AT FIRST BAPTIST
CHURCH, MT. STERLING, KENTUCKY

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EQUIPPING MEMBERS TO MAKE DISCIPLES THROUGH
ONE-ON-ONE BIBLE READING AT FIRST BAPTIST
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I dedicate this Doctor of Ministry project to my wife, Laura Don.

“Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all.” Proverbs 31:29

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE.....	viii
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Context.....	1
Rationale	3
A lack of life-on-life discipleship.....	3
A lack of sound hermeneutics	4
A lack of theological clarity	5
A lack of lay evangelism.....	5
Purpose	6
Goals	6
Research Methodology	6
Definitions and Delimitations.....	8
Conclusion	8
2. THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS OF ONE-ON-ONE BIBLE READING	9

Chapter	Page
Introduction.....	9
Deuteronomy 6:6-8, 20-25.....	9
Deuteronomy 17:18-20.....	11
Nehemiah 8.....	12
Psalms 119:41-48.....	14
Luke 2:41-52.....	15
Luke 24:13-35.....	17
Matthew 28:18-20.....	19
Acts 2:42.....	20
Acts 8:26-40.....	22
Acts 17:10-15.....	24
Ephesians 4:11-16.....	25
Colossians 3:16.....	27
2 Timothy 3:16-18.....	29
Conclusion.....	31
3. PRACTICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL ISSUES RELATED TO ONE-ON-ONE BIBLE READING.....	32
Introduction.....	32
Few Today Read the Bible on a Regular Basis.....	32
The State of Regular Bible Reading Today.....	33
One-on-One and Regular Bible Reading.....	36
Few Today Engage in Discipling Relationships.....	36
The State of Discipling Relationships Today.....	37
One-on-One and Discipling Relationships.....	39
Churchgoers Today Struggle to Share the Gospel.....	39
The State of Evangelism Today.....	40
One-on-One and Evangelism.....	41

Few Today Are Able to Articulate Basic Doctrines	43
One-on-One and Bible Doctrine.....	45
America’s Upcoming Generations Embody a Post-Christian Worldview.	47
A Post-Christian Context.....	47
Millennials.....	47
Generation Z.....	48
One-on-One and a Post-Christian Context.....	49
Conclusion	54
4. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT	55
Curriculum Development	55
The “CAN*T” Method.....	55
Large Group Sessions.....	57
One-on-One Studies	57
Additional Materials.....	58
Expert Panel Review	58
One-on-One Bible Reading Course Implementation.....	59
Week 1.....	59
Week 2.....	60
Week 3.....	61
Week 4.....	62
Week 5.....	63
Week 6.....	64
ODS Results.....	64
Conclusion	65
5. EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT	66

Chapter	Page
Introduction.....	66
Evaluation of the Project’s Purpose.....	66
Evaluation of the Project’s Goals	67
Strengths of the Project.....	68
Weaknesses of the Project	70
What I Would Do Differently	72
Theological Reflection.....	74
Importance of Hermeneutics	74
Loving God with One’s Minds.....	74
Dual Authorship of Scripture	75
The Priesthood of the Believer.....	76
Personal Reflection.....	77
Teaching the Word	77
A Reawakened Passion	78
The Pastor as Trainer.....	79
Conclusion	79
Appendix	
1. ONE-ON-ONE DISCIPLESHIP SURVEY (ODS).....	81
2. CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC	86
3. LARGE GROUP SESSION OUTLINES	88
4. ONE-ON-ONE BIBLE STUDIES	105
5. NARRATIVE ANALYSES.....	117
6. COURSE WEB PAGE AND VIDEOS	164
BIBLIOGRAPHY	165

PREFACE

What an incredible joy and privilege it is to serve the First Baptist Church of Mount Sterling, Kentucky! My prayer is that this project has helped God's people gain a deeper appreciation for his Word and a greater passion for making disciples.

I would like to thank several people who have helped me along the way in this process. To Austin Lewis, thank you so much for your keen eye for grammatical errors, for serving as a sounding board for my ideas, and being a wonderful friend and co-laborer in the gospel. To my expert panel, Grant Cannoy, Steve Dunn, David Scott, and Ben Stubblefield, your insights were spot-on and helped make this project better. I am truly grateful for your camaraderie in ministry. To Dr. Plummer, you were a constant source of encouragement throughout this whole project. I have long admired your walk with the Lord, your heart for students, and your passion for helping ministers revive their Greek. Thank you for helping me grow as a student of the Greek New Testament! Finally, to my dear wife, Laura Don, and our three rambunctious kiddos, thank you for your love and patience with me on this journey. Laura Don, I truly could not have done this without you. I love you with all my heart. And kids, as we live, laugh, and gather around the Story Bible, may we always be amazed by the love of the Savior, who shines on every page!

Chris Wells

Mt. Sterling, Kentucky

August 2021

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

For many years, the mission of First Baptist Church has been to “love Christ and others, learn from Christ, live for Christ, and lead others to Christ.” By highlighting these core objectives, the believers at First Baptist Church remind themselves of the importance of whole-hearted devotion to Jesus. What if there was a simple ministry tool that could help First Baptist Church achieve all four of these goals? By equipping members to read the Bible one-on-one, this project sought to help FBC achieve its mission and grow in health and vibrancy.

Context

The ministry context for this Doctor of Ministry project was First Baptist Church (FBC) in Mt. Sterling, Kentucky. FBC, established in 1870, is a traditional Southern Baptist church that serves the greater Montgomery County area. Four aspects of the ministry context at FBC were pertinent to this project.

First, while First Baptist Church had a strong commitment to the preaching of God’s Word, it lacked in the area of life-on-life discipleship. For many at FBC, discipleship was thought of solely in terms of programming. Over the years, the church has offered many program options for attendees: Sunday School classes, Small Groups, a Wednesday Bible study, not to mention, children’s and student ministry programming. Because of this, the idea of one believer mentoring and discipling another believer outside the four walls of the church was a novel concept for many at First Baptist. The unspoken assumption was that discipleship occurs on “church” time—on Sunday mornings or Wednesday nights. While a select few practiced life-on-life discipleship in the church, it was a widely neglected practice.

Second, and related to this, was the lack of training in the area of sound hermeneutics. Many in the congregation did not feel equipped to interpret the Bible for themselves. Even with a variety of Sunday School classes and a weekly diet of biblical preaching, the majority of the members at FBC still did not feel confident enough to study the Bible without the aid of devotional material, to engage nonbelievers with the gospel, or to defend the faith.

Third, there was a lack of theological clarity on many key issues in the Christian life. The average member at FBC had difficulty articulating many key doctrines such as justification, sanctification, election, and Christian perseverance. This lack of doctrinal clarity was compounded by the transfer growth many churches in Mt. Sterling experience. It was not uncommon for church attendees to “church hop,” without regard to the significant doctrinal differences that exist among the various denominations represented in Mt. Sterling. For example, the average church member at FBC was not able to articulate the doctrinal differences between Baptist, Pentecostal, and Christian Church traditions—all of which play a significant role in Montgomery County’s religious makeup.

Finally, First Baptist Church lacked in the area of lay evangelism. There was a great need for the church to reach the lost and “de-churched” of Mt. Sterling. Mt. Sterling is a small city of about 7,200 people located in Montgomery County, Kentucky in the heart of the Bible belt. In Mt. Sterling, 25.9 percent identify as Evangelical Protestant, 7.5 percent as Mainline Protestant, and 1.1 percent as Catholic, and .5 percent as Black Protestant.¹ However, 65 percent of people in Mt. Sterling claim no religion.² These religious “nones,” who do not affiliate with any church tradition, remain a key mission field for First Baptist Church.

¹ City-Data.com, “Mount Sterling, Kentucky Profile,” accessed June 29, 2020, <http://www.city-data.com/city/Mount-Sterling-Kentucky.html>.

² City-Data.com, “Mount Sterling, Kentucky Profile.”

Most recently, First Baptist Church relied on an attractional church model to foster church growth. Great emphasis was placed on creating a contemporary worship service and reaching the lost through events. However, this strategy did not result in increased church attendance. During this time, the church did have a monthly door-to-door evangelism program. However, due to low participation and frequent cancellations, this ministry did not see much fruit. Since 2019, there has not been an intentional evangelism strategy at First Baptist Church due to pastoral transition and the onset of COVID-19.

Rationale

The four aspects mentioned in the previous section revealed the urgent need for this project at FBC. If the members of First Baptist Church were to grow in their confidence to study God's Word on their own and evangelize their neighbors, they needed specific training on how to *read* the Bible. It was clear that each aspect of the ministry context at FBC would be strengthened by a project devoted to equipping members to read the Bible one-on-one.

A Lack of Life-on-Life Discipleship

A lack of life-on-life discipleship in a congregation is troubling. As Mark Dever notes, "A healthy church is characterized by a serious concern for spiritual growth on the part of its members. In a healthy church, people want to get better at following Jesus"³ One common way believers achieve this is through life-on-life discipling relationships. In a healthy congregation, discipling relationships develop organically. In less healthy churches, members may need a catalyst to help them see the potential discipling relationships which already surround them. Because FBC lacked a culture of

³ Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 198.

life-on-life discipleship, the pastoral leadership needed to not only model this behavior but also create avenues for members to easily discover and assimilate into discipling relationships.

A Lack of Sound Hermeneutics

A lack of sound hermeneutics is a serious problem in a congregation. Without sound hermeneutics, congregants are unable to read the Bible properly for themselves. As Graeme Goldsworthy rightly points out, “. . . it is not too much to say that no Christian knowledge is arrived at apart from the application of the principles of interpretation.”⁴ Without a strong foundation of gospel-centered hermeneutics, problem passages discourage the believer and make the Bible seem inaccessible. Instead of being the life-changing book that it is, the Bible becomes a sacred relic that church members carry around but have little use for in everyday life.

Without sound hermeneutics, congregants may become dependent on a solitary minister for their doctrine and theology. While it is true that the Lord has given “evangelists, shepherds, and teachers” to equip his church (Eph 4:11), this does not negate the individual believer’s responsibility to be like the Bereans and “[examine] the Scriptures daily to see if these things [are] so” (Acts 17:11). False teaching can easily creep into congregations that lack sound principles of interpretation.

Even in situations where congregations do not fall into gross error, there still remains the ongoing threat of man-centered and/or inappropriate applications of the biblical text. Robert Plummer is right to point out:

To engage in interpretation assumes that there is, in fact, a proper and improper meaning of a text and that care must be taken not to misrepresent the meaning. When dealing with the Scriptures, to properly interpret a text is to faithfully convey the inspired human author’s meaning of the text, while not neglecting divine intent.⁵

⁴ Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 296.

⁵ Robert L. Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*, 2nd ed., 40 Questions Series (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2021), 89.

A church that exhibits a lack of sound hermeneutics is a church that is in desperate need of training and equipping. Because of this, FBC needed to create a vehicle for training its members in sound biblical interpretation principles. It was apparent that a project devoted to equipping members to read the Bible one-on-one could help achieve this.

A Lack of Theological Clarity

A congregation that fails to read the Bible for themselves will also exhibit theological confusion on many levels. It was determined that a project that not only equipped members to read the Bible but also highlighted key doctrines of the Christian faith as they arise from a given book of the Bible would help members take their first steps toward theological clarity. It became apparent that a project devoted to equipping members to understand a particular book of the Bible—like Mark, for example—would naturally address many key doctrines, such as the deity of Christ, his sovereignty over all of life, and the very gospel itself.

A Lack of Lay Evangelism

Finally, for any church to thrive and multiply, there must be a vibrant movement of lay evangelism in the church. In a healthy church, ministers are not the only members actively seeking to evangelize the lost. The Great Commission was given to the Church as a whole, not simply paid gospel ministers. It is worth noting that in Acts the Word spread not only as a result of the apostles' preaching but also as everyday believers "went about preaching the word" (Acts 8:4).

What was needed at FBC was a "discipling of the laity for ministry in the world."⁶ Given the average age of church attendees at FBC and the continued deaths of congregation members, the need for lay evangelists was all too apparent. If FBC was to

⁶ Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 277.

continue as a church, it needed to equip its members to evangelize and not rely solely on the paid staff of the church or special events to reach the lost. FBC members needed an easy-to-implement evangelism strategy that also allowed nonbelievers the space to wrestle with their doubts and questions about the Bible.

For all these reasons, it was clear that First Baptist Church needed a discipleship course to help catalyze its members to love God's Word and aid them in reaching their lost friends and family for Christ. In short, FBC needed to learn how to read the Bible one-on-one.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to equip members of First Baptist Church in Mt. Sterling, Kentucky to make disciples through one-on-one Bible reading.

Goals

In order to encourage life-on-life discipleship, increase sound hermeneutics, and foster lay evangelism at First Baptist Church, this ministry project focused on the following goals:

1. The first goal was to develop a six-session one-on-one Bible reading curriculum for use in a large group setting.
2. The second goal was to survey course participants to measure their knowledge of Bible interpretation principles and their confidence and motivation to engage in one-on-one discipleship.
3. The third goal was to equip members to read the Bible one-on-one on their own.

Research Methodology

The first goal was to develop a six-session curriculum designed to equip FBC members to read the Bible one-on-one. The course consisted of large group teaching sessions followed by one-on-one Bible studies that participants completed before the next week's large group gathering. The large group sessions focused on the

biblical/theological underpinnings for one-on-one Bible reading, basic principles of hermeneutics, and practical advice for successful one-on-one Bible reading partnerships. The six Bible studies that were completed as homework for the course covered the gospel of Mark and were specifically tailored for one-on-one Bible reading. To prepare these studies, the various pericopes in Mark were exegeted utilizing Jonathan Pennington's 10-step narrative analysis model in *Reading the Gospels Wisely*.⁷ In addition to this, translations of the pericopes were prepared from the original Greek, with all verbal forms parsed. This goal was measured by an expert panel who utilized a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum.⁸ This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90% of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level. If the 90% benchmark was not initially met, the material was to be revised until it met the standard.

The second goal was to survey course participants to measure their knowledge of Bible interpretation principles and their confidence and motivation to engage in one-on-one discipleship. This goal was measured by administering the One-on-One Discipleship Survey (ODS) to participants (see appendix 1). This goal was considered successfully met when 100% of participating members completed this survey before beginning the course.

The third goal was to equip members to read the Bible one-on-one on their own by teaching the curriculum over a period of six weeks. This goal was measured by administering the ODS for a second time, which indicated any changes in the participant's level of knowledge of Bible interpretation principles and their confidence and motivation to engage in one-on-one discipleship. This goal was considered successfully met when a t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically

⁷ Jonathan T. Pennington, *Reading the Gospels Wisely: A Narrative and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 214–15.

⁸ All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use.

significant difference in the pre- and post-survey scores.

Definitions and Delimitations

The following definition was used in this ministry project:

One-on-one/One-to-one Bible Reading. David Helm defines one-on-one Bible reading as, “something a Christian does with another person, on a regular basis, for a mutually agreed upon length of time, with the intention of reading through and discussing a book or part of the Bible.”⁹ In other words, reading the Bible on-on-one is simply making an *intentional* commitment to read the Bible with another person. Because the phrase “one-to-one” is more prevalent in British idiom, this project adopted the term “one-on-one Bible reading” to refer to this Bible-reading method for clarity’s sake. When “one-to-one Bible reading” or “reading one-to-one” appear in quoted literature, these terms are synonymous with “one-on-one Bible reading.”

There were two limitations and delimitations for this project. First, participants were only allowed to select Bible reading partners of the same sex, unless the participants were members of the same family. In these specific cases, men and women were allowed to complete the one-on-one assignments together. Second, the course was limited in its length; it was only run for six weeks. This meant the amount of material that needed to be covered in the large group sessions and the Mark one-on-one Bible studies was condensed.

Conclusion

A congregation equipped to read the Bible one-on-one is a congregation equipped to disciple and evangelize. The following chapters will highlight the biblical and theological underpinning for one-on-one Bible reading and the particular benefits of one-on-one Bible reading in twenty-first century America.

⁹ David R. Helm, *One to One Bible Reading: A Simple Guide for Every Christian* (Kingsford, Australia: Matthias Media, 2011), 11.

CHAPTER 2
THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS OF
ONE-ON-ONE BIBLE READING

Introduction

This chapter discusses the biblical and theological basis for developing and implementing a one-on-one Bible reading project in the context of local church ministry. In this chapter, I argue that God expects his people to understand, meditate upon, and discuss his words in the context of community.¹ A survey of selected Old and New Testament passages will show this to be a recurring emphasis in Scripture.

Deuteronomy 6:6-8, 20-25

In Deuteronomy 6:7-8, 20-25, the people of God stand on the cusp of the Promised Land. Before they enter, Moses relates to them the commands and statutes necessary for life in the Land. As he does this, it becomes clear that God expects his people to understand, meditate upon, and discuss his words in the context of community.

First, Moses commands the people to make sure the words of God are “on [the peoples’] heart” (v. 6). As Duane Christensen points out, this goes beyond mere head knowledge, connoting an “[internalization of] the law, exactly as Jeremiah saw clearly when he spoke of a new covenant ... [in] Jer 31:31-33.”² Before one can begin to relate the word of God to others, a certain amount of personal understanding and meditation is necessary.

¹ Admittedly, many of the passages surveyed in this chapter envision the community of God *at large* discussing his words. However, these passages should not be overlooked in a project of this nature, for the act of reading the Bible one-on-one is merely reading God’s words within the smallest community possible, namely that of two individuals.

² Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1-21:9*, 2nd ed., Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 6a (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 143.

Second, soon after giving the *Shema* (vv. 4-5), Moses tells the gathered community they are to teach (נִלְמַד) (v. 7) the words of the Lord to their children. This word carries with it the connotation of “whetting” or “sharpening.”³ The words of God are not meant to stay with one’s self but are to be passed on to the next generation for the purpose of personal and spiritual formation.

Third, not only are parents expected to teach their children the words of God, they are also to “talk of them” (v. 7), or discuss them, in the various life circumstances in which they find themselves. As Peter Craigie notes, “the commandments were to be the subject of conversation both inside and outside the home, from the beginning of the day to the end of the day.”⁴ Mere transmission is not enough, God’s words are to be discussed in the context of everyday life as a family.

Fourth, the binding of the words of God on the peoples’ hands, their wearing of them as frontlets, and the writing of Scripture on the peoples’ doorposts (vv. 7-8) indicate that the Lord desires for his people to constantly meditating on his words. Scholars debate whether these commands are to be taken literally or figuratively.⁵ Regardless of the way one interprets these commands, it is clear the Lord desires his word to constantly be on the mind of “the individual (v. 8), his home, and his community (v. 9).”⁶

Finally, Moses anticipates that children will naturally discuss the words of the Lord with their parents, asking them about “the testimonies and the statutes and the rules” of God (v. 20). When this happens, parents are to help their children understand the great salvation the Lord has worked in history. Parents were to not only relate “the revelation

³ Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 1041–42.

⁴ Peter Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 170.

⁵ Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 171.

⁶ Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 171.

of God in history” (vv. 21-23) but also the “revelation of the word of God” (v. 24) to the next generation.⁷

For all these reasons, it is clear that the Lord expects his people to understand, meditate upon, and discuss his words in the context of community, and here one sees this is especially so in the context of the family.

Deuteronomy 17:18-20

Later, in Deuteronomy 17, the expectation continues as the Lord regulates the future monarchy in Israel. While vv. 14-17 pertain to the king’s material possessions and marriages, vv. 18-20 deal with the king’s relationship to the law. Several features of this text show that even the king was called upon to understand, meditate upon, and discuss God’s words in the context of community.

First, the king is called upon to copy down a hand-written version of the law of God word-for-word in the presence of the Levitical priests. Here we see the king internalizing the words of God in the context of community. Additionally, this passage implies the discussion of God’s word, as the function of the priests in observing this process is to oversee or “approve” the king’s version, as the ESV puts it.

Second, that the king is to understand and meditate on God’s words is evidenced in the phrase “he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to the fear the LORD” (v. 19). Christensen notes that this reading was essentially an “oral recitation.”⁸ This constant repetition engrained the law into the Lord’s Anointed.

Third, when the Lord explains why the king ought to do this, he reminds the king of his place in the broader community of God. He is to do this “that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers” (v. 20a). As Christensen notes, “nowhere else [in the

⁷ Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 175.

⁸ Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 21:10-34:12*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 6b, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 387.

ancient Near East] is the king placed in subjection to the law as it was formulated for the people as a whole, rather than one applicable to himself alone.”⁹ This theme echoes throughout Scripture: God’s leaders stand alongside the community of God, even as they lead them.

Finally, this passage also implies an expectation the king will discuss this law with his children when it states, “so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel” (v. 20c).

For these reasons, it is clear that God intends his people—especially his leaders—to understand, meditate upon, and discuss his words in the context of community.

Nehemiah 8

God’s expectation that his people understand, meditate upon, and discuss his words in the context of community is found in the later historical books, as well. In Nehemiah, the people of God have returned to Jerusalem out of exile and are in the process of rebuilding the city. In Chapter 8, they gather to hear the God’s law read to them, most likely during the New Year’s festival.¹⁰ What occurs supports the thesis that God expects that his people understand, meditate upon, and discuss his words in the context of community.

First, the laity of Israel is gathered in community, not just the priests. Not only does the text mention that the people gathered, but it also says that they gathered “as one man” (v. 1), emphasizing their unity and common focus. Rather than being orchestrated by the teachers of the law, it is striking that the people themselves ask Ezra to read the law (v. 1). “All those who could understand” (v. 3) gather to hear. Finally, the men that

⁹ Christensen, *Deuteronomy 21:10-34:12*, 386.

¹⁰ F. Charles Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 216.

stand next to Ezra in v. 4 as he reads the law are also significant. H. G. M. Williamson notes that these are most likely lay leaders for the following reasons: (1) priests are normally identified as such and (2) there is no specific description of what these men did apart from standing next to Ezra.¹¹ If these men were, in fact, lay leaders, then this strengthens the thesis that God expects all his people to understand his word. As Williamson comments, “Ezra was boldly proclaiming that the Torah was for all people, not just for a few privileged by either birth or particular ability.”¹² The words of God were for the entire people of God.

Second, the text emphasizes the attention and reverence of the people. The text not only comments that everyone “who could understand” attended the public reading, but also that “the ears of the people were attentive to the Book of the Law” (v. 3). In v. 4, the people stand as the book, or scroll, is opened in a posture of reverence. The fact that these details are mentioned highlights the importance the author placed on understanding and meditating upon God’s words. These words have vital import for the peoples’ lives.

Third, in addition to Ezra’s teaching, the priests also begin to instruct the people, perhaps even engaging in back-and-forth discussion, in order to clarify the meaning of God’s words. Thirteen Levitical priests assist Ezra in helping the people understand God’s words (v. 8). The text mentions that they re-read what Ezra had read (either “clearly” or “paragraph by paragraph”¹³) and “gave the sense” of it to the people (v. 8). Williamson notes that likely, “after each section of the Law had been read . . . , the Levites moved from group to group among the people making sure that all had understood what they had heard.”¹⁴

¹¹ H. G. M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 16 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 288–89.

¹² Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 16:289.

¹³ For a helpful discussion on these two possibilities, see Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 279.

¹⁴ Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 290.

Finally, the text explicitly mentions the result of this activity, namely, understanding. In vv. 8-9, the people “understood the reading” and weep, presumably for their own shortcomings in keeping the law.¹⁵ In vv. 11-12, after the people are comforted by the priests, the people enjoy the festivities and rejoice. The reason for this rejoicing is mentioned in v. 12: “because they had understood the words that were declared to them.” Clearly, then, the Lord expects his people to understand his word and think about its implications for their lives.

All these features in Nehemiah 8 support the conclusion that the Lord expects his people to understand, meditate upon, and discuss his words in the context of community.

Psalm 119:41-48

Not only do the historical books emphasize the fact that God expects his people to understand, meditate upon, and discuss his words in the context of community, the Psalter does, as well. Psalm 119:41-48 is one example of this, emphasizing the discussion of God’s words among the nations. Several features of this passage support this chapter’s thesis.

First, the psalmist models how God’s people are to pursue God’s words. All throughout this section of Psalm 119, he resolves to trust in (v. 42), place his hope in (v. 43), keep (v. 44), seek (v. 45), delight in (v. 47), lift up his hands towards (v. 48), and meditate on God’s words. As such, he shows the people how they are to live in relation to the word of God. God’s words are to be pursued intently.

Second, understanding and meditation are also prominent themes in the passage. This is seen implicitly and explicitly in the passage. It seen implicitly in how the Psalmist entreats the Lord not to take the “word of truth” from his speech (v. 43). Clearly, the Psalmist speaks of God’s Word often. Also, the psalmist has “sought [God’s]

¹⁵ Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 291.

precepts” (v. 45), emphasizing effort and desire on the part of the psalmist. He has evidently thought about these things a great deal. Meditation is mentioned explicitly, however, in the last verse of the strophe (v. 48), where it occurs within the context of corporate worship. Unexpectedly, the psalmist lifts up his hands toward God’s words—instead of the Lord himself—in “a gesture of homage and praise to a deity or the place or symbol of its presence.”¹⁶ These words, of which the psalmist feels heartfelt devotion, are the subject of promised meditation: “I will meditate on your statutes” (v. 48).

Third, the fact that this Psalm was not intended for merely personal use but was intended to be sung in corporate worship also supports the communal aspect of this chapter’s thesis.

Finally, interestingly, when the discussion of God’s word is mentioned in the passage, it is linked to proclamation to the nations. As Leslie Allen puts it, there is a clear theme of “testimony among men to God’s enabling” throughout this section.¹⁷ While God’s words are to be discussed and meditated upon in Israel, the Psalmist says in v. 46 that he desires to “speak of your testimonies before kings” (v. 46). This desire is no stranger to the psalter, appearing in other Psalms—most notably Psalms. 2, 72, 102, and 138.¹⁸ God’s words are too lovely and too delightful (v. 47) to stay with just Israel, they are to be heralded among the nations of the earth.

As one can see from this representative Psalm, God expects his people to understand, meditate upon, and discuss his words in the context of community.

Luke 2:41-52

In Luke’s Gospel, it also clear that God expects his people to understand,

¹⁶ Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 3: A Commentary on Psalms 101-150*, ed. Klaus Baltzer, trans. Linda M. Maloney, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 270.

¹⁷ Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101-150*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 21 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 143.

¹⁸ Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 270.

meditate upon, and discuss his words in the context of community. This is seen in Jesus' encounter with the teachers of the law in the temple as a young boy.

First, when Jesus is finally located by his mother and father, he is found discussing God's words. After the harrowing search of v. 45, his parents find Jesus in the temple. There Mary and Joseph find their young son, the model Israelite, discussing God's word with the teachers in the temple (v. 46). Discussion in Herod's temple was a common occurrence in the first century, as Darrell Bock points out: "The custom in Judaism was that pupils entered into question-and-answer dialogue with their mentors."¹⁹ Not only did Jesus discuss God's Word, onlookers "were amazed at his understanding and his answers" (v. 47). It is important to note that at this point in Jesus' development, it is unlikely that he was teaching the teachers of the law.²⁰ Rather, he was growing in his understanding through back-and-forth discussion over the Word of God. Howard Marshall notes that unlike the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* 19.2, "Jesus appears as a pupil who astonishes his teachers by the understanding of the law apparent in his questions and answers to their counter-questions."²¹

Second, not only did Jesus show aptitude in his curiosity about God's word, but he also sought out this discussion within the community of God. It is significant that Jesus picks the temple, the gathering point of the people of God as the place where he would have this discussion. As the narrative concludes, Jesus replies almost nonchalantly that it was inevitable he be in the house of his Father (v. 49). It is as if Luke is showing his readers the most natural place for the future Messiah is in the temple discussing God's words. In doing so, Christ models for his followers the discussion of Scripture in the context of community.

¹⁹ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 3a (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 267.

²⁰ I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Exeter, England: Paternoster Press, 1978), 128.

²¹ Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 128.

Finally, it is significant that following on the heels of this account is a summary statement about the maturation of Jesus. As the passage closes, Luke notes that “Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man” (52). How did Jesus increase in wisdom? The context seems to imply that at least one way was through the discussion of God’s word in the midst of community.

Luke 24:13-35

Another example in Luke’s Gospel of the people of God understanding, meditating upon, and discussing the words of God in the context of community can be found in in Luke 24:13-35.

After the resurrection of Christ, two disciples (one named Cleopas, see v. 18) are traveling to Emmaus from Jerusalem. On the way, they discuss all the events that have taken place over the past few days (vv. 14-15). While they are traveling, Jesus appears to them, but they do not recognize him. The Lord then asks about the topic of their conversation. What follows is a discussion of God’s words in the context of community. Several features of the text indicate this.

First, the entire incident is framed in terms of a conversation. This is evident from the use of the word συζητέω in vs. 15. This verb occurs only 10 times in the NT and in this context means “to carry on a discussion.”²² This entails back-and-forth conversation, but perhaps even “emotional dialogue.”²³ It is also used in Luke’s Gospel in 22:23, as the disciples, alarmed by Jesus’ announcement of betrayal, discuss among themselves who this could be.

Second, the disciples speak in terms of scriptural categories. In v. 21, they mention that they “had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.” This language did

²² Walter Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 954.

²³ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, vol. 3b, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 1909.

not arise in a vacuum; the theme of redemption runs through the entire Bible, especially Isaiah 41-44.²⁴ The disciples likely had political as well as spiritual liberation in view.²⁵

Third, Jesus' response is due to the disciples' misunderstanding of Scripture. Jesus responds to them by invoking the writings of the prophets in v. 25. This discussion of Scripture is meant to lead them to see that the Messiah was, in fact, meant to suffer (v. 26). OT believers were meant to discuss the prophetic writings and come to the conclusion that the Messiah would be a suffering Messiah. These disciples have failed to understand and have missed the Messiah, as a result. The book of Acts reveals several of the passages Jesus likely envisioned here, such as Psalm 2:7, 16:8-11, 110:1, and Isaiah 53:8, among others.²⁶

Fourth, while Jesus rebukes them for their misunderstanding, he does not leave helpless; he gives them the hermeneutical key for understanding the Scriptures. As they walk, Jesus systematically walks through the Scriptures and "interpret[s] to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (v. 27).

Finally, the disciples' concluding words point to this being a discussion of God's words in community. After they invite Jesus over for a meal and break bread (a foreshadowing of communion, perhaps?),²⁷ Jesus reveals himself to them and disappears. When the disciples reflect on all that happened, their thoughts go back to how their "hearts burned within us while he talked to us on the road (v. 32).

For all these reasons, it is plain in Luke the Lord desires that his Scriptures be understood, meditated upon, and discussed among his people.

²⁴ John Nolland, *Luke 18:35-24:53*, vol. 35c, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 1203.

²⁵ William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), 1062.

²⁶ Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 3b:1916.

²⁷ Nolland, *Luke 18:35-24:53*, 35c:1207.

Matthew 28:18-20

That God expects his people to understand, meditate upon, and discuss his words in the context of community is also implied in Jesus' Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20.

First, Jesus commissions his followers to “make disciples of all nations” (v. 19), which would have certainly included back-and-forth discussion as a crucial component. This is because the Eleven would have naturally looked to the way Jesus disciplined them as they sought to carry out this command. Discipleship in its first-century context implied much more than a mere transfer of knowledge. In the Greco-Roman world:

the term was applied more narrowly to a person who spent time with someone with a partic.[sic] expertise in order to acquire the latter's practical and theoretical knowledge. Thus, the μαθητής might be an apprentice in a trade, a student of medicine, or a member of a philosophical school.²⁸

Similarly, in rabbinic Judaism, a disciple, “bound himself personally to his master and looked for objective teaching, with the aim of becoming a rabbi himself.”²⁹ Jesus, for the most part, followed this rabbinic process of discipleship with a few notable nuances.³⁰ One clear feature of Jesus' discipleship process was discussion. Back-and-forth discussion, as modeled by Jesus in passages like Matthew 15:15, Matthew 17:10, Matthew 17:25-27, Matthew 18:21-22, Mark 9:11, Mark 13:4, Luke 9:20, John 13:36—to name a few—was part and parcel of the Savior's process of disciple-making. Because of this, μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη implies the discussion of God's words. This discipleship process, however, is no longer confined to merely ethnic Israel, but “is now extended to *all peoples*.”³¹ Much ink has been spilled over the meaning of πάντα τὰ ἔθνη. While

²⁸ Moisés Silva, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, Second edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 220.

²⁹ Silva, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 225.

³⁰ Silva, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 225–26.

³¹ William Foxwell Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew*, First edition, vol. 26, *The Anchor Bible* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971), 362.

Walker and others hold that this refers to the Gentiles, excluding Israel, D. A. Carson is right to assert “they refer to all people, including Israel.”³² Embedded in the Great Commission is a vision of people from every corner of the earth discussing God’s words.

Second, Jesus commissions his followers to “teach them to observe all that I have commanded you” (v. 20). It is long been noted that, “The commission itself is given by means of one main imperative verb, *μαθητεύσατε*, . . . together with three syntactically subordinate particles that take on an imperatival force.”³³ One of these participles is *διδάσκοντες*, and it is a significant command. Albright and Mann point out that, “Elsewhere in this gospel Jesus commands the inner circle *to heal* (x 1, 8) and *to proclaim* (x 7). Now that Jesus’ ministry is over, the command *to teach* is given.”³⁴ This new emphasis on teaching implies that his disciples were to help future followers understand and meditate upon the Savior’s words. In fact, Carson defines disciples in this passage as “those who hear, understand, and obey Jesus’ teaching,” basing his definition off Jesus’ teaching on who constitutes his true family (Matt 12:46-50).³⁵ Part of what it means to be a disciple is to seek to understand, meditate upon, and discuss God’s words in the context of community.

Acts 2:42

The theme continues in the Book of Acts. In Acts 2:42, Luke highlights several activities of the early prototypical church that were central to its life and practice. A brief survey of this verse reveals that God expects his people to understand, meditate upon, and discuss his words in the context of community.

³² D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 596.

³³ Donald Alfred Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, vol. 33B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1995), 886.

³⁴ Albright and Mann, *Matthew*, 26:363.

³⁵ Carson, “Matthew,” 596.

First, there is an emphasis on the community of God in this passage. (1) The previous verse (v. 41) mentions that 3,000 new converts were added to the Christian fold. This section (vv. 42-47) then examines what life looked like for these new Christians. Among other things, the church was committed to τῆ κοινωνία (fellowship). This word evokes “close association involving mutual interests and sharing”³⁶ and is only possible in community. (2) The passage also refers to the breaking of bread, which could be a reference to the Lord’s Supper or a reference to table fellowship.³⁷ (3) Verses 44-45 mention the sharing of possessions that marked the early church, a mark of communal intimacy. (4) The early church attended temple worship services ἑνωμαδόν (“with one mind”³⁸) and, (5) finally, the church met in homes to break bread (v. 46).

Second, devotion to God’s words is also evident in the passage. The first item in Luke’s list of activities is a devotion to “the apostles’ teaching” (v. 42). This would have included not only Jesus’ parables, teachings, and sermons but also the ways in which the Old Testament pointed forward to Christ (see Luke 24:13-35). This is especially evident in the words and the preaching of Peter found in the book of Acts.³⁹ Since the prototypical church was “devoted” (προσκαρτεροῦντες) to the apostles’ teaching, it is reasonable to infer that this entailed understanding, meditating upon, and discussing these words, especially since the activities of the church culminate in corporate praise in v. 47. Finally, the emphasis on attending temple services by the early church shows its devotion not only to the words of Jesus and his New Testament apostles but also to the Old Testament words of Yahweh.

³⁶ Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 552.

³⁷ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 150.

³⁸ Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 706.

³⁹ Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts: Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, vol. 5, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 178.

From the earliest days of the Church, God has expected his people to understand, meditate upon, and discuss his words in the context of community.

Acts 8:26-40

Another passage in Acts, Acts 8:26-40, also reveals that the Lord expects his people to understand, meditate upon, and discuss his words in the context of community. Several reasons indicate this.

First, it is the Lord who directs the entire sequence of events that lead to the discussion of his words (vv. 26-29). Notice, it is an angel of *the Lord* that directs Philip to the Gaza road in v. 26. Eckhard Schnabel notes this “divine intervention . . . is not uncommon in Acts,” citing passages such as Acts 5:19, 10:3, 7, 22, 11:13; 12:7-11, 23, among others.⁴⁰ While scholars debate the exact identity of the angel of the Lord,⁴¹ the messenger’s origin is clear. Philip is told to go to a lesser-traveled, desert road in order to fulfill some sort of assignment for him.⁴² After this, it is the Lord who directs Philip yet again. The Holy Spirit instructs Philip to join the man in his travels (v. 29). The reason for this direction will soon become clear: The Lord is reaching the nations, and he intends to reach another people group, in this instance, through a discussion of his words.

Second, the understanding of Scripture is a prominent theme in the passage. Philip asks the Ethiopian eunuch if he *understands* the Scripture he is reading (v. 30). After hearing Isaiah 53:6-7 being read, Philip engages the man over his ability to comprehend the meaning of the passage.

Third, discussion is emphasized. The eunuch engages Philip in a discussion about the meaning of the passage upon which he has been meditating (v. 31-34). Schnabel notes, “the imperfect tense of . . . ἀνεγίνωσκεν . . . suggests that he was involved

⁴⁰ Schnabel, *Acts*, 5:424.

⁴¹ Simon J. Kistemaker, *Acts*, New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England: Baker Books, 1991), 310.

⁴² Kistemaker, *Acts*, 311.

in reading over an extended period of time.”⁴³ The eunuch has been poring over these verses as he travels back from worshipping in Jerusalem. Now that he has been engaged by Philip, he asks for guidance.

Fourth, the discussion revolves around God’s words. Philip shares the good news of Jesus with man, utilizing the very Isaiah passage the eunuch had been reading (v. 35). The discussion that unfolds centers on the passage at hand and Christ’s fulfillment of it. While Luke does not elaborate on the exact details of this discussion, they probably centered on “Jesus’ suffering as the humble acceptance of God’s will and his death as . . . sacrificial.”⁴⁴

Finally, there is even an emphasis on community in the passage. The eunuch, upon his conversion, desires to be baptized, and the foundation of a new church community is laid (vv. 36-40). It is fitting that Philip, as a Hellenized Jew, be the one to pioneer this work in this section of Acts.⁴⁵ In Acts 8:26-40, Acts 1:8 is being fulfilled before the reader’s eyes, as the gospel goes to the very ends of the earth. In fact, Ben Witherington points out that “in the mythological geography of the ancient Greek historians . . . Ethiopia was quite frequently identified with the ends of the earth,”⁴⁶ citing such examples as Herodotus, *Hist.* 3.25.114 and Philostratus, *Vita Apoll.* 6.1, among others. The Lord has used a discussion about his words to expand the church to not only a new people group but also new classes of people, namely, those previously marginalized.⁴⁷ The Ethiopian man is most definitely not a Jew, and, as a eunuch, he would have been seen as a “semi-proselyte,” one prohibited from worship in the temple.⁴⁸

⁴³ Schnabel, *Acts*, 5:425.

⁴⁴ Schnabel, *Acts*, 5:428.

⁴⁵ Kistemaker, *Acts*, 310.

⁴⁶ Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 290.

⁴⁷ Bock, *Acts*, 339.

⁴⁸ Kistemaker, *Acts*, 312.

The Ethiopian's baptism is more than simply an individual religious rite, it shows the expansion of the church community into areas it had never been. As the passage closes, the reader is left in awe at the gospel's expansion, as Philip continues his pioneering work from Azotus to Caesarea (v. 40). The Lord expects his people to understand, meditate upon, and discuss his words in the context of community.

Acts 17:10-15

The theme is also seen later in the book of Acts. After Paul and Silas flee persecution in Thessalonica, they make way to Berea. Upon arriving, they preach the word in the local Jewish synagogue. The response of the Berean Jews to their message shows that God expects his people to understand, meditate upon, and discuss his words in the context of community.

First, the Berean Jews are commended for the way they understand and embrace Paul and Silas's message. The word that Luke uses to describe the Berean Jews is *εὐγενής*, which has the sense of "having the type of attitude ordinarily associated with well-bred persons, noble-minded, open-minded."⁴⁹ In Luke's mind, what makes these Berean Jews commendable is not their high status by birth, though some Gentiles of high status will come to faith in Berea (v. 12). Instead, Luke commends them for the way they have accepted the message; they "received the word with all eagerness" (v. 11). This is in contrast to Thessalonians' response to the word, in which the majority met Paul and Silas's message with unbelief (v. 4).⁵⁰ In this verse, *δέχομαι* certainly implies that the Bereans understood God's word, as spoken through Paul and Silas. Normally, reception is preceded by understanding. And while the text doesn't mention it specifically, surely this glad reception included meditation and a poring over of the message's implications.

⁴⁹ Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 404.

⁵⁰ Kistemaker, *Acts*, 621.

Second, the Berean Jews are not only commended for their eagerness in receiving the word, but they are also commended for the way they studied God's words to see if Paul and Silas's message passed muster (v. 11). In v. 11, ἀνακρίνω commonly translated "examine" could also be translated "question."⁵¹ It even implies legal overtones.⁵² Surely, this questioning of the Scripture involved discussion among God's people and "comparing notes," so to speak. That this is commended as noble further supports the thesis that God expects his people to understand, meditate upon, and discuss his words in the context of community.

Finally, this examination of Scripture which led to belief happens in the context of community. Notice the place of discussion is the synagogue, the gathering point and center of study for the Jewish worshipping community. Also, notice that the Berean Jews are referred to collectively every time they are mentioned (v. 11, 12). One cannot read Acts 17:10-15 and not draw the conclusion that God commends understanding, meditating upon, and discussing his words in the context of community.

Ephesians 4:11-16

God's expectation that his people understand, meditate upon, and discuss his words in the context of community continues in the NT epistles. This theme is seen in many letters, but especially Ephesians 4:11-16 for four reasons.

First, it is significant that God chooses leaders, whose primary focus is *to teach* his words, as the ones who will equip the church for ministry. Andrew Lincoln points out that the leaders the Lord gives to the church are specifically those "who proclaim the word."⁵³ The apostles were given insight into the mystery of Christ (Eph 3:4-5) and

⁵¹ Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 66.

⁵² Bock, *Acts*, 2007, 556.

⁵³ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, vol. 42, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 249.

appointed as teachers (1 Tim 2:7). The prophets were God’s chosen messengers for direct revelation in church congregations (1 Cor 14). The evangelists were likely those who led out in frontier missions and church-planting endeavors through proclamation.⁵⁴ Finally, the key qualification for shepherds and teachers in the NT is the ability to *teach* (1 Tim 3:2). Therefore, it is clear that the way the church is “equipped” for ministry is through teaching God’s words. Interestingly, *καταρτισμός* is a *hapax legomenon*, only appearing in the NT in Ephesians 4:11. It has medical overtones and is an interesting choice in this passage about building up the body of Christ; these teaching officers help perfect, or prepare, the body for the work that God has for it.⁵⁵ The church is equipped as faithful leaders teach God’s words to God’s people.

Second, this ministry occurs in the context of the community of God’s people. It is for “the building up of the body of Christ.” The body of Christ is one of Paul’s favorite metaphors for the church. It appears 28 times in the Pauline epistles, where it refers to the people of God as an organic whole. The ministry that the apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers undertake is not a self-serving ministry, it is a ministry that serves and edifies the people of God. It occurs in the context of community.

Third, this “building up of the body” involves the Church growing in its knowledge of God’s words so that false doctrine may be avoided. Verses 13-15 speaks of the duration of this ministry. It is to continue until the church attains “to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” In other words, this work will be on-going and never fully completed in this lifetime. God’s people will always be growing in the knowledge of his words. Implied in these verses is the call to understand and meditate upon God’s words. If God’s people do this, verse 14 makes plain they will not “be children, tossed to

⁵⁴ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 42:250.

⁵⁵ Silva, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 409.

and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.” A clear comprehension of God’s words is central to the building up of the body.

Fourth, discussing God’s words is emphasized in final verse of the section. This ministry involves every member speaking “the truth” to one another in love (v. 16). Based on the context of verse 14, “the truth” referred to in this verse is not truth in the abstract sense, but the truth, that is, God’s truth. In other words, the Colossians are to internalize sound doctrine (as opposed to “every wind of doctrine” in v. 14) and share it with others. As they do this, the body grows (v. 16). As the people of God hear the words of God from the lips of the teachers of God, they then are to share that truth to each other and so build each other up. For these reasons, it is clear in Ephesians that God expects his people to understand, meditate upon, and discuss his words in the context of community.

Colossians 3:16

The theme continues in Colossians 3:16. First, in this passage, Paul places the teaching of Christ at the very center of the activity of the Christian church. While the phrase *ὁ λόγος τοῦ Χριστοῦ* could certainly refer to the gospel itself, it seems unwise to limit it to simply this. James Dunn points out that while this the only time the exact phrase *ὁ λόγος τοῦ Χριστοῦ* is used in the NT, its equivalent form *ὁ λόγος τοῦ κυρίου* occurs in several other places in the NT (10 to be exact).⁵⁶ A survey of these verses shows that the phrase can easily refer to both the good news, as well as the teaching of Jesus. Dunn is right to argue for a likely double meaning here.⁵⁷ F. F. Bruce also concurs but gives the teaching of Christ the higher emphasis in the passage.⁵⁸ If this is, in fact, the

⁵⁶ James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Exeter, England: Paternoster, 1996), 236.

⁵⁷ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 236.

⁵⁸ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 157.

case, then the teaching of Christ—the word that God spoke through Christ and not just the gospel—is central to the activity of the NT church.

Second, Paul encourages the discussion of the word of Christ among God’s people. Notice three features of this text. (1) As the word of Christ dwells richly within them, the Colossians are to teach and admonish one another. How is this “teaching and admonishing” actually carried out? Is it exclusively through the singing, as the next phrase might suggest? Likely not. Bruce is correct to note “the phrase ‘in all wisdom’ is attached to ‘teach and instruct’ (not to ‘dwell richly’) and the words ‘in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs’ modify the verb ‘singing’ (and not ‘teach and instruct’).”⁵⁹ This would mean that while singing is one way the congregation teaches and admonishes, it is not the only way. (2) Additionally, this teaching doesn’t seem to be given to only pastors. While certainly formal teaching in Christian public worship is in view here, it also would have included the informal and personal application, or discussion, of God’s word. This is entailed by the word *νουθετέω*, which means “to counsel about avoidance or cessation of an improper course of conduct.”⁶⁰ The second person plural and *ἑαυτούς* in v. 16 further reinforces the idea that the congregation has a role to play. Dunn notes, “Indeed, it is a striking feature of the Pauline corpus how much Paul insisted that the members of the churches to which he wrote should recognize their mutual responsibility to instruct and admonish . . . each other.”⁶¹ (3) Finally, if “in all wisdom” is attached “to teaching and admonishing” this would mean that the congregation is to take care in the way they instruct one another. They are to carry out this charge to teach and admonish with clarity, precision, and thoughtfulness.

Third, the exhortation to sing to another and to God in v. 16 serves as a way to

⁵⁹ Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 158.

⁶⁰ Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 679.

⁶¹ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 237.

for the Colossian believers to drive the truths of Christ's words deep into their hearts and minds. As they sang and encouraged one another, undoubtedly, they meditated on the words spoken and came to a clearer understanding of God's truth. This function of Christian worship is still very much applicable today.⁶²

Thus, Colossians 3:16 is an epistolary example of how God expects his people to understand, meditate upon, and discuss his words in the context of community.

2 Timothy 3:16-18

A final passage in the Epistles that implies that God expects his people to understand, meditate upon, and discuss his words in the context of community is 2 Timothy 3:16-18. Three major reasons indicate this.

First, at least two of the uses of Scripture in the passage imply discussion in the context of community. After teaching Timothy about the inspiration of the Scriptures, he begins to lay out the uses of Scripture. Verse 16 notes that Scripture is useful for (1) teaching (*διδασκαλίαν*), (2) reproof (*ἐλεγμὸν*), (3) correction (*ἐπανόρθωσιν*), and (4) training in righteousness (*παιδείαν τὴν ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ*).

(1) *Διδασκαλίαν* in this passage refers to “the act of teaching, teaching, instruction.”⁶³ That the act of teaching can include discussion is seen in several passages in the NT (Mark 9:31, Mark 12:35-37, Luke 13:22-30, and John 6:25-59, for example) in which the verbal form of *διδασκαλία*, *διδάσκω*, is used. In several of these passages, questions are either raised by Jesus' listeners, or about to be raised by the disciples, or invited to be raised by Jesus. This does not count the numerous times Jesus is teaching and is interrupted by the religious leaders and a discussion ensues. While many instances of teaching in NT are monologues (such as Matt 5:2), not all are. Some instances include

⁶² D. A. Carson, ed., “Worship Under the Word,” in *Worship by the Book* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 45.

⁶³ Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 240.

discussion.

(2) That ἐλεγμὸν may sometimes include discussion is seen in the word's use in the LXX. Friedrich Büchsel notes that in the NT, "It means 'to show someone his sin and to summon him to repentance.' This may be a private matter between two people, as in Mt. 18:15; Eph. 5:11."⁶⁴ However, Büchsel also points out that the word is used in the LXX in Proverbs 18:17, "ἤκπ ("to test," "to examine") is excellently rendered by ἐλέγχειν."⁶⁵ This is simply to say that not every use of ἐλεγμὸν is a pointed rebuke with no questions asked.

While less of connection to discussion can be made for (3) ἐπανόρθωσιν and (4) παιδείαν τὴν ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ, it is not unreasonable to see both of these activities as including discussion. In most cases, when a person wants to correct a friend, he or she enters into a discussion with the friend in a back-and-forth fashion about the rightness, or wrongness, of that particular person's actions. One only has to think of Matthew 18 and Jesus' instructions on conflict that appear there to see a scriptural example of this. Finally, the phrase "training in righteousness" is so broad that it could easily include discussing God's words as a means toward that end.

Second, the goal of the man of God being complete and equipped also implies previous understanding and meditation upon Scripture. Ἄρτιος in v. 17 means "being well fitted for some function, complete, capable, proficient = able to meet all demands."⁶⁶ How does the man of God arrive at this state of completeness? How does he acquire this level of proficiency? He does this through understanding the very Scriptures that are doing the teaching, reproofing, correcting, and training in righteousness. Without

⁶⁴ Friedrich Büchsel, "Ἐλέγχω, Ἐλεγχίς, Ἐλεγχος, Ἐλεγμός," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 474.

⁶⁵ Büchsel, "Ἐλέγχω, Ἐλεγχίς, Ἐλεγχος, Ἐλεγμός," 473.

⁶⁶ Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 136.

understanding, a rebuke is incomprehensible. Without meditation on the truthfulness of Scripture and the wrongness of one's own actions, correction never takes place. Thus, understanding and meditation, while not mentioned explicitly, are implied in this passage.

Finally, while this individual passage does not speak a great deal about discussing God's words in community (though one could argue that "the man of God" represents every Christian), it is worth noting that this letter, while addressed to Timothy, was also written to the church at Ephesus at large. This indicated by the final verse of the letter, v. 22, where the second person plural ὑμῶν is utilized.⁶⁷ These uses of Scripture are not only to be known and understood by Timothy but also by the Church.

Conclusion

From this survey of Scripture, it is evident that while the Lord expects many things of his people, one thing is certain: The Lord expects his people to understand, meditate upon, and discuss his words in the context of community.

⁶⁷ George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 478.

CHAPTER 3
PRACTICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL ISSUES
RELATED TO ONE-ON-ONE BIBLE READING

Introduction

In a world that is changing rapidly, believers must be strategic in the way they seek to make disciples. As Ed Stetzer notes,

God calls us to make disciples of all nations. As long as we are satisfied or apathetic in reaching every generation and every people group, we are showing disobedience to the Great Commission, especially when those generations and people groups live within our own cities.¹

In light of this, believers should evaluate various methodologies for reaching the lost and discipling believers. In this chapter, it will be argued that one-on-one Bible reading is a timely way to help believers accomplish the Great Commission in the 21st century American context. It will be shown that training church members in the practice of one-on-one Bible reading is particularly effective for this cultural moment and is vital for the following reasons: (1) few today read the Bible on a regular basis, (2) few today engage in discipling relationships, (3) churchgoers today struggle to share the gospel, (4) few today are able to articulate the basic doctrines of the Christian faith, and (5) American's next generations embody a post-Christian worldview.

Few Today Read the Bible on a Regular Basis

First, one-on-one Bible reading is a timely method for making disciples in America, because few churchgoers, and few Americans at large, are engaging with the Bible consistently. Therefore, one-on-one Bible reading is strategic in that it forces the

¹ Ed Stetzer, "SBC Decline and Demographic Change," in *The Great Commission Resurgence: Fulfilling God's Mandate in Our Time*, ed. Charles E. Lawless and Adam W. Greenway (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 26.

believer, or nonbeliever, to engage with the very words of Scripture, presenting biblical truths they may have ever encountered before.

The State of Regular Bible Reading Today

Few people in America today are engaged in any kind of regular Bible reading outside of religious services and events. As a part of their *Bible in America* report, Barna compiled data from annual phone and online surveys taken from 2011 to 2016 on America's Bible reading habits.² The results are alarming. They discovered that one out of every four Americans reported they *never* read the Bible outside of church-sponsored events or services.³ 10 percent reported they read the Bible less than once a year.⁴ Another 10 percent reported they read the Bible twice or less in a year, while another 8 percent reported reading the Bible only on three or four occasions in a year.⁵ This means that 53 percent of the American population *rarely* reads the Bible.

As one might expect, given the changing attitude toward Christianity in American culture, Teens (Generation Z) and Millennials are more likely to never read the Bible than their "Gen-X," "Boomer," and "Elder" peers.⁶

Regionally, those that never read the Bible outside of church were distributed more evenly than one might assume. 34 percent of non-Bible readers were from the Northeast, 29 percent were from the West, 24 percent were from the Midwest, and 17 percent were from the South. Clearly, not reading the Bible is a nationwide trend.⁷

This is not the only research group to paint such a grim picture. Pew Forum's

² *The Bible in America: The Changing Landscape of Bible Perceptions and Engagement* (Ventura, CA: Barna Group, 2016), 167.

³ *The Bible in America*, 144.

⁴ *The Bible in America*, 144.

⁵ *The Bible in America*, 144.

⁶ *The Bible in America*, 144.

⁷ *The Bible in America*, 145.

massive 2014 *Religious Landscape Study* reported similar findings. The study, which surveyed more than 35,000 Americans, asked respondents several questions about their practices concerning the reading of scripture.⁸ Of the 35,000 Americans surveyed, 35% reported reading some form of scripture at least once a week, 10% reported reading scripture once or twice a month, 8% reported reading it several times a year, and 1% did not know.⁹ However, the largest segment (45%), reported seldom, or never, reading scripture regularly.¹⁰

Generationally, of those that seldom, if ever, read scripture regularly, 26% were age 18-29, 34% were age 30-49, 25% were age 50-64, and 16% were age 65 and older.¹¹ It is evident from these statistics that there is a great need for believers to re-introduce Americans to regular Bible-reading.

While Protestant churchgoers fare better than Americans at large, the statistics are still worrisome in terms of regular Bible reading. As a part of LifeWay Research's 2019 National *Discipleship Pathway Assessment*, researchers surveyed 2,500 Protestant churchgoers on their engagement with the Bible outside of worship services. Researchers discovered that while 32% of Protestant churchgoers report reading the Bible every day, 11% only read it a few times a month, 5% only read it only once a month, and 12% rarely, or never, read the Bible outside a church service.¹²

Generationally, researchers found that the 50-64 age bracket was the group

⁸ Note that "scripture" here does not necessarily refer to the Bible, but any religious group's holy writings.

⁹ "Religious Landscape Study: Frequency of Reading Scripture," Pew Research Center, accessed February 27, 2020, <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/frequency-of-reading-scripture/>.

¹⁰ Pew Research Center, "Religious Landscape Study: Frequency of Reading Scripture."

¹¹ Pew Research Center, "Religious Landscape Study: Frequency of Reading Scripture."

¹² "Discipleship Pathway Assessment: Engaging the Bible," LifeWay Research, 4, accessed February 27, 2020, <http://lifewayresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Discipleship-Pathway-2019-Engaging-the-Bible-Release.pdf>.

most likely to read their Bibles every day.¹³ Regionally, the study also concluded that “those in the West (37%) [were] more likely to select ‘Every Day’ than those in the Midwest (31%) and South (31%).¹⁴ Finally, the LifeWay study noted that those who had a strong commitment to church attendance had a greater likelihood of reading the Bible every day.¹⁵

As one can see, even among Protestant churchgoers, there is much work to be done in terms of equipping believers to read the Bible regularly. Pew Research in its *Religious Landscape Study* indicates that compared to other religions, evangelical Protestants are falling behind. While 63% of evangelical Protestants and 61% of Black Protestants read the Bible once a week, 88% of Jehovah Witness’s and 77% of Mormons report reading their sacred writings at least once a week—a noticeable difference.¹⁶

No doubt, these findings are troubling to committed believers. However, it is important to note that while few Americans, at large, and churchgoers, in particular, are reading the Bible, many today *are* open to reading it more often. In the same 2011-2016 *Bible in America* report, Barna found that while few Americans are reading the Bible regularly, 62% of Americans wish they read the Bible more often than they do currently.¹⁷ This same report also discovered that the majority of Americans (56%) are considered “engaged” or “friendly” in their attitude toward the Bible, 27% are considered “Bible-neutral,” and only 18% are “skeptical” in their outlook toward the Bible.¹⁸ Churchgoers seem to express the same sentiment. When LifeWay Research asked churchgoing respondents if they “miss . . . time with God” after going a long period of

¹³ LifeWay Research, “Discipleship Pathway Assessment: Engaging the Bible,” 10.

¹⁴ LifeWay Research, “Discipleship Pathway Assessment: Engaging the Bible,” 10.

¹⁵ LifeWay Research, “Discipleship Pathway Assessment: Engaging the Bible,” 10.

¹⁶ Pew Research Center, “Religious Landscape Study: Frequency of Reading Scripture.”

¹⁷ *The Bible in America*, 146.

¹⁸ *The Bible in America*, 152.

time without reading the Bible, 58% of churchgoers either strongly agreed or somewhat agreed.¹⁹

One-on-One and Regular Bible Reading

One-on-one Bible reading is one method of making disciples that can meet this latent hunger for the Word of God in the church and the world today. One-on-one Bible reading, with its emphasis on systematically reading through books of the Bible in community, not only exposes people to sections of Scripture they may have never encountered before, but also equips believers and nonbelievers alike to be better students of Scripture. If a church commits to training its members in reading the Bible in this fashion and its members follow through, a significant number of Christians will be reading the Bible outside the “official meetings” of the church, at least, on a weekly, or biweekly, basis.

One can only imagine the impact this would have on a local church. The effect of regular church attendance on daily Bible reading has already been noted; one can easily hypothesize that if church members met with other believers or nonbelievers on a regular basis to read the Bible, it would likewise produce an increase in the number of daily Bible readers in a congregation. At the very least, training the church to read one-on-one would regularly expose God’s people and unbelievers to the text of Scripture at a much higher rate than is occurring today.

Few Today Engage in Discipling Relationships

Another reason one-on-one Bible reading is a timely method for disciple-making is due to the fact that few churchgoers in the 21st century are engaging in personal discipling relationships. One-on-one Bible reading, by its very nature, helps foster these kinds of relationships.

¹⁹ LifeWay Research, “Discipleship Pathway Assessment: Engaging the Bible,” 6.

The State of Discipling Relationships Today

The sad truth is there is much room for improvement in American churches when it comes to discipling relationships. In a research study conducted by Barna, church leaders were asked the question, “Overall, how well would you say today’s churches are doing at discipling new and young believers?” 60% responded “not too well,” 17% responded “not well at all,” 20% responded “somewhat well,” and 3% were unsure.²⁰ Only 1% of church leaders responded, “very well.”²¹

Additionally, while church leaders acknowledge the importance of discipling relationships, there seems to be a disconnect between church leaders and their laity in actual practice. On the one hand, church leaders and pastors understand the importance of such relationships. 83% of church leaders believe that meeting with a seasoned Christian to discuss spiritual issues would make a difference in churchgoers’ discipleship.²² 76% also believe that meeting with a seasoned Christian to study the Bible, in particular, would make a significant difference in churchgoers’ spiritual lives.²³ Moreover, the vast majority of church leaders put this conviction into practice themselves. Barna discovered that 94% of church leaders are actively discipling other people, and 62% are being “personally discipled by someone else.”²⁴

On the other hand, everyday churchgoers do not seem to be engaging in personal discipling relationships like their church leader counterparts. Of those surveyed by Barna, only 25% of practicing Christians and 9% of non-practicing Christians stated they are involved in the discipleship of others.²⁵ Additionally, only 29% of practicing

²⁰ *The State of Discipleship: A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with The Navigators* (Ventura, CA: Barna Group, 2015), 100.

²¹ *The State of Discipleship*, 100.

²² *The State of Discipleship*, 115.

²³ *The State of Discipleship*, 115.

²⁴ *The State of Discipleship*, 109.

²⁵ *The State of Discipleship*, 109.

Christians and 12% of non-practicing Christians said they, themselves, were being personally disciplined by another more mature Christian.²⁶

Not only do churchgoers lack personal discipling relationships, but there also seems to be confusion among Christians today about the role believers play in one another's spiritual development. In a 2019 study by LifeWay Research, an interesting contradiction occurred. When 2500 Protestant churchgoers were presented with the statement, "I need other believers to help me to grow in my walk with God," 75% either strongly agreed or somewhat agreed with this statement, 14% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 11% with disagreed or somewhat disagreed.²⁷ However, when asked to assess the statement, "I can walk with God *without* other believers (emphasis added)," 65% either strongly agreed or somewhat agreed, 15% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 20% strongly disagreed or somewhat disagreed.²⁸ In light of this confusion about the role of other believers in one's spiritual development, it is not surprising that there is a lack of discipling relationships in the church, nor is it shocking that 38% of Protestant churchgoers "do not attend a class or small group in a typical month."²⁹

However, there is hope in the midst of this confusion. When asked if "there [is] any particular reason why you are not being disciplined by another person currently?" 29% of Christians stated they simply "hadn't thought about it."³⁰ Additionally, when asked if "there [is] any particular reason why you are not discipling another person currently?" 30% responded that they did not feel prepared for the task, while 23% "just haven't

²⁶ *The State of Discipleship*, 109.

²⁷ "Need for Other Christians: National Survey of Protestant Churchgoers," LifeWay Research, 4, accessed February 27, 2020, <http://lifewayresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Need-for-Other-Believers.pdf>.

²⁸ LifeWay Research, "Need for Other Christians: National Survey of Protestant Churchgoers," 5.

²⁹ "Discipleship Pathway Assessment: Building Relationships," LifeWay Research, 7, accessed February 27, 2020, <http://lifewayresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Discipleship-Pathway-2019-Building-Relationships-Release.pdf>.

³⁰ *The State of Discipleship*, 120.

thought about it.”³¹

One-on-One and Discipling Relationships

If pastors and churches had a clear and easy strategy for members to engage in personal discipling relationships, perhaps these statistics would tell a different story. One-on-one Bible reading, by its very nature, provides believers with a simple and straightforward pathway for discipling relationships. All that one-on-one Bible reading requires is a Bible and two believers committed to gathering together to intentionally discuss a given section of Scripture. It does not require any advanced training for laypeople beyond basic training in hermeneutics. It is also easily reproducible and highly relational. It is appropriate for believers at similar levels of spiritual growth, as well as those at different levels of Christian maturity. It is appropriate for married couples and parents and children. Even middle and high school students can engage in this type of discipling ministry with their peers. As authors Tony Payne and Colin Marshall note:

Imagine if all Christians, as a normal part of their discipleship, were caught up in a web of regular Bible reading—not only digging into the word privately, but reading it with their children before bed . . . with a non-Christian colleague at work once a week over lunch, with a new Christian for follow-up . . . It would be a chaotic web of personal relationships, prayer, and Bible reading—more of a movement than a program—but at another level, it would be profoundly simple and within reach of all.³²

One-on-one Bible reading is one timely method by which pastors and church leaders can counteract the apparent lack of discipling relationships in the Protestant church today and help foster disciple-making.

Churchgoers Today Struggle to Share the Gospel

A third reason one-on-one Bible reading is timely is due to the fact that churchgoers today struggle to share the gospel. One-on-one Bible reading is strategic in

³¹ *The State of Discipleship*, 120.

³² Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine: The Ministry Mind-Shift That Changes Everything* (Kingsford, Australia: Matthias Media, 2009), 57.

that it allows believers to engage nonbelievers with the truths of Scripture in an organic and relational way.

The State of Evangelism Today

In 2019, LifeWay Research surveyed 2500 Protestant churchgoers about their practices regarding evangelism. When asked how many times they shared the gospel with someone outside a worship service in the past six months, 55% of Protestant churchgoers answered zero, 24% percent said they had shared the gospel either one or two times, and 9% said they had shared either three or four times in the past six months.³³ The remaining 12% answered in various quantities over five.³⁴ In a separate question, 45% of respondents stated that they had not even invited another person to a worship service or church event in the past six months.³⁵

Interestingly, those with more education were less likely to share the gospel. Respondents with graduate degrees were the group most likely to have not shared the gospel even once in the past six months (64%).³⁶ Regionally, people from the Midwest were the least likely group to share the gospel,³⁷ and those 65 years of age and older were the least likely age bracket to have shared in the past six months (62%).³⁸ This last statistic, however, may soon be in flux. According to a study by Barna—which, admittedly, was broader than simply Protestant churches—found that 47% of practicing Christian millennials either agree or strongly agree with the statement that, “It is wrong to share one’s personal beliefs with someone of a different faith in hopes that they will one

³³ “Discipleship Pathway Assessment: Sharing Christ,” LifeWay Research, 5, accessed February 27, 2020, <http://lifewayresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Discipleship-Pathway-2019-Sharing-Christ-Release.pdf>.

³⁴ LifeWay Research, “Discipleship Pathway Assessment: Sharing Christ,” 5.

³⁵ LifeWay Research, “Discipleship Pathway Assessment: Sharing Christ,” 7.

³⁶ LifeWay Research, “Discipleship Pathway Assessment: Sharing Christ,” 12.

³⁷ LifeWay Research, “Discipleship Pathway Assessment: Sharing Christ,” 12.

³⁸ LifeWay Research, “Discipleship Pathway Assessment: Sharing Christ,” 12.

day share the same faith.”³⁹ Clearly, churchgoers of all stripes struggle to share the gospel.

One-on-One and Evangelism

While many Protestant churchgoers struggle to share the gospel on a consistent basis, it does seem as though the majority desire to grow in this area. When asked if they prayed for opportunities to evangelize, 23% of Protestant churchgoers say they pray every day for opportunities to share, 21% pray every week, 12% pray once a week, 6% pray once a month, and 27% pray rarely, or never, for opportunities to evangelize.⁴⁰ This means over half of Protestant churchgoers (56%) are actively praying for opportunities to share the gospel on a weekly basis or more.

This willingness is even more present in the committed. LifeWay Research also noted the role church attendance plays in one’s willingness to evangelize. Their 2019 study indicated, “Those who attend a worship service four times a month or more (53%) [were] less likely to select ‘Rarely/Never’ [concerning sharing the gospel] than those who attend less than 4 times a month (60%).”⁴¹

Not only this, most practicing Christians understand, at least at an intellectual level, that sharing one’s faith is integral to the Christian life. The same study which found that almost half of millennials expressed disapproval when it comes to evangelism also noted that the vast majority of practicing Christians (95-96%)—including millennials—strongly agree or, at least, somewhat agree with the statement, “Part of my faith means being a witness for Jesus.”⁴² Additionally, the vast majority (94%-97%) of practicing Christians across the age spectrum strongly agree, or, at least, somewhat agree that, “The

³⁹ “Almost Half of Practicing Christian Millennials Say Evangelism Is Wrong,” Barna, accessed February 27, 2020, <https://www.barna.com/research/millennials-oppose-evangelism/>.

⁴⁰ LifeWay Research, “Discipleship Pathway Assessment: Sharing Christ,” 4.

⁴¹ LifeWay Research, “Discipleship Pathway Assessment: Sharing Christ,” 12.

⁴² Barna, “Almost Half of Practicing Christian Millennials Say Evangelism Is Wrong.”

best thing that could ever happen to a person is for them to come to know Jesus.”⁴³

One-on-one Bible reading is well-suited to meet believers in this struggle to evangelize. This is due to several factors.

First, one-on-one Bible reading is relational. Unlike some forms of evangelism that encourage the sharing of the gospel in one sitting, one-on-one Bible reading allows room for the sharing of the gospel to take place over many weeks. In one-on-one Bible reading, the believer is not beginning from a predetermined gospel presentation but rather the Bible book itself. The gospel is shared organically by the believer as questions naturally arise from the text. Those that find pre-scripted evangelistic tools awkward and jarring in conversation may find one-on-one Bible reading to be more a relaxed method of sharing Christ that does not sacrifice biblical content.

Second, one-on-one Bible reading requires little preparation. If the participants are working off predetermined Bible study questions or an easy-to-remember Bible study framework, the preparation time for believers can be minimal.⁴⁴ Nothing has to be memorized beforehand, and answers to Bible reading questions are simply found and discussed in the text in front of them.

Finally, one-on-one Bible reading has the distinct advantage of allowing the gospel to be presented in its original literary context. As alluded to earlier, with one-on-one Bible reading, the good news of Jesus is not typically shared through prescribed topical verses like evangelism methods that begin with an outline. Instead, aspects of the good news are explored as they arise in the text. For example, instead of a believer beginning with a popular outline such as “Two Ways to Live” or F.A.I.T.H. when sharing the gospel, he or she might find themselves naturally discussing what John meant by his words in John 3:16-21 or what Paul intended by “justification by faith” in Romans 3:21-

⁴³ Barna, “Almost Half of Practicing Christian Millennials Say Evangelism Is Wrong.”

⁴⁴ Helm, *One to One Bible Reading*, 33–34.

26. The believer then can share the gospel by utilizing the very text in front of them in its literary contexts. Thus, one-on-one Bible reading allows the biblical writers to present their take on the gospel in their own unique literary context. As John 20:31 states, “these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

Few Today Are Able to Articulate Basic Doctrines

A fourth reason one-on-one Bible reading is a timely method for disciple-making today is due to the fact that few Americans, and shockingly few evangelicals, are able to articulate basic doctrines of the Christian faith. One-on-one Bible reading with its emphasis on studying the entire counsel of God’s Word is one method by which church leaders can seek to correct these shocking statistics.

In 2018, LifeWay Research, in partnership with Ligonier Ministries, conducted a *State of American Theology* study in order, “to measure the current theological awareness of adult Americans and to expand upon earlier findings.”⁴⁵ 3,002 Americans responded to the report, and the findings are disquieting.⁴⁶ The interactive report database found at www.stateoftheology.com allows researchers to make interesting comparisons, most notably the overall beliefs of Americans in comparison with the beliefs of American evangelicals today.

First, there is confusion over “truth” itself. While 63% of Americans and 93% of evangelicals believe that Scripture is their ultimate authority, 61% of Americans and 37% of evangelicals also believe that “Religious belief is a matter of personal opinion; it is not about objective truth.”⁴⁷

⁴⁵ “2018 State of American Theology Study: Research Report,” LifeWay Research, 3, accessed February 27, 2020, <http://lifewayresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Ligonier-State-of-Theology-2018-White-Paper.pdf>.

⁴⁶ LifeWay Research, “2018 State of American Theology Study: Research Report,” 3.

⁴⁷ Ligonier Ministries, “The State of Theology Data Explorer,” The State of Theology, accessed February 27, 2020, <https://thestateoftheology.com/data-explorer>.

Second, there is confusion about the triune God of Scripture. While most Americans and evangelicals understand the basic concept of the Trinity, Americans and evangelicals alike are confused about the person of Christ. The study found that while 58% of Americans either strongly or somewhat agreed with the Arianistic statement, “Jesus is the first and greatest being created by God,” 71% of evangelicals either strongly or somewhat agreed as well!⁴⁸ Likewise, concerning the Holy Spirit, 59% of Americans either strongly or somewhat agreed with the heterodox statement, “The Holy Spirit is a force but is not a personal being,” while an even larger percentage of evangelicals (61%) either strongly or somewhat agreed too!⁴⁹

Third, there is confusion over issues of hamartiology. For example, over half of evangelicals (56%) are confused about the doctrine of total depravity, either strongly or somewhat agreeing with the statement, “Everyone sins a little, but most people are good by nature.”⁵⁰ Perhaps most shocking of all is the evangelical reaction to the statement, “Even the smallest sin deserves eternal damnation,” with 56% either strongly or somewhat disagreeing. This represents an increase of two percentage points since 2016.⁵¹

Fourth, there is confusion over the exclusivity of Christ and Christian ethics. In 2018, 67% of Americans either strongly or somewhat agreed with the statement, “God accepts the worship of all religions, including Christianity, Judaism, and Islam,” while 53% evangelicals also agreed.⁵² Sadly, this represents an increase in three percentage points for evangelicals since 2016. Also, when polled on homosexuality, 44% of Americans either strongly or somewhat agreed with the statement, “The Bible’s

⁴⁸ Ligonier Ministries, “The State of Theology Data Explorer.”

⁴⁹ Ligonier Ministries, “The State of Theology Data Explorer.”

⁵⁰ Ligonier Ministries, “The State of Theology Data Explorer.”

⁵¹ Ligonier Ministries, “The State of Theology Data Explorer.”

⁵² Ligonier Ministries, “The State of Theology Data Explorer.”

condemnation of homosexual behavior doesn't apply today."⁵³ However, shockingly, 22% of evangelicals also either strongly or somewhat agreed.⁵⁴ In a similar vein, 29% of evangelicals either strongly or somewhat agreed that "gender identity is a matter of choice."⁵⁵

Finally, there is confusion about ecclesiology. 59% of Americans believe, "Worshiping alone or with one's family is a valid replacement for regularly attending church" as do 47% of evangelicals.⁵⁶

One-on-One and Bible Doctrine

The confusion over these doctrines is clearly due to a lack of exposure to the text of Scripture. One-on-one Bible reading is a method of disciple-making that can increase the theological acumen of its participants. This is the case for several reasons.

First, one-on-one Bible reading does not skip over "difficult" passages. One of the great advantages of one-on-one Bible reading is that it does not seek to cherry-pick passages of Scripture, but instead encourages participants to simply read through entire Bible books. Any text is worthy of discussion in one-on-one Bible reading. For example, texts like Paul's teaching on homosexuality in Romans 1:26-27 and the full divinity of Christ as taught in John 1 are not skipped over in one-on-one Bible reading. Instead, they are discussed, even if they offend modern sensibilities.

Second, as theological questions naturally arise in the midst of a one-on-one Bible reading session, rather than dismissing these concerns, participants are encouraged to dig deeper into the texts three "horizons" of the text: the textual, epochal, and canonical horizons.⁵⁷ The textual horizon is the near context of Scripture, that is, what the

⁵³ Ligonier Ministries, "The State of Theology Data Explorer."

⁵⁴ Ligonier Ministries, "The State of Theology Data Explorer."

⁵⁵ Ligonier Ministries, "The State of Theology Data Explorer."

⁵⁶ Ligonier Ministries, "The State of Theology Data Explorer."

⁵⁷ Citing Richard Lints in Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant:*

given biblical text meant to its first readers, uncovered through the grammatical-historical method.⁵⁸ The epochal context is what this text meant in light of its placement within the epochs of redemptive history.⁵⁹ Here questions such as, “Which covenant are the people currently operating under?” are explored.⁶⁰ Finally, the canonical horizon considers the entire Canon of Scripture.⁶¹ As Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum note: “As texts are placed along the story line of Scripture and ultimately interpreted in light of the culmination of God’s plan in Christ, we begin to read Scripture in the way God intended and thus ‘biblically.’”⁶²

Finally, rather than discouraging the use of any and all commentaries and creeds, one-on-one Bible reading, when rightly taught, will also encourage students to consider how doctrinal questions have been handled in the past and present. Participants are encouraged to explore difficult passages by exploring a trusted study Bible, reading historic confessions of faith, and asking their pastors, church leaders, and other mature believers for insight.

As evangelical churchgoers today struggle to articulate basic doctrines of the Christian faith, one-on-one Bible reading stands as an effective and timely method of making disciples, as it exposes participants to theological texts week after week. Sophie De Witt notes, “Studying the Bible one on one allows more time and opportunity to clarify understanding and explore doctrinal issues that a particular passage raises.”⁶³

A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Scriptures, First edition (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 93.

⁵⁸ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 93.

⁵⁹ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 94–98.

⁶⁰ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 94–98.

⁶¹ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 100.

⁶² Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 100.

⁶³ Sophie De Witt, *One-to-One: A Discipleship Handbook* (Bletchley, UK: Authentic Lifestyle, 2003), 13.

America's Upcoming Generations Embody a Post-Christian Worldview

A final reason one-on-one Bible reading is a timely method for disciple-making today is due to the post-Christian worldview that pervades the millennial and Generation Z generations.

A Post-Christian Context

America is rapidly becoming a post-Christian context. According to Pew Research's 2014 Religious Landscape Study, adherents to Christianity decreased from 2007-2014, dropping from 78.4% of the population to 70.6%, with the largest exodus coming from the Roman Catholic Church and mainline denominations.⁶⁴ Evangelicals saw a slight decrease of about a percentage point from 26.3% to 25.4% from 2007-2014.⁶⁵ However, the most striking aspect of the study regards the rise of the so-called "religious nones." During this same time frame, Pew notes, "the percentage of Americans who are religiously unaffiliated – describing themselves as atheist, agnostic or "nothing in particular" – has jumped more than six points, from 16.1% to 22.8%."⁶⁶ This statistic is discouraging yet unsurprising. As the previous studies cited in this chapter have demonstrated, America, by and large, is abandoning its Judeo-Christian heritage.

Millennials

People born between the years 1980 to 2000 comprise the group commonly deemed "millennials" or "Generation Y."⁶⁷ As digital natives in a changing world, Anne Horan notes that millennials "live in a technological culture with real-time

⁶⁴ "America's Changing Religious Landscape," Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project, May 12, 2015, <https://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>.

⁶⁵ Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project, "America's Changing Religious Landscape."

⁶⁶ Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project, "America's Changing Religious Landscape."

⁶⁷ Anne Puidk Horan, "Fostering Spiritual Formation of Millennials in Christian Schools," *Journal of Research on Christian Education* 26, no. 1 (January-February 2017): 56.

communication and information, globalization, pluralism, redefined religious liberties, postmodernism, and moral relativism.”⁶⁸

In 2014, Barna compiled surveys of 30,000 millennials on their values and religious views and published the results in their report, *Making Space for Millennials*.⁶⁹ Speaking of the church attendance, Barna notes, “30% [of millennials] say attending church is not at all important. 40% fall somewhere in the middle. 30% say attending church is very important.”⁷⁰ Those who did not attend church gave a variety of reasons ranging from: “I find God elsewhere” to “It’s not relevant to me” to “Church is boring.”⁷¹ Many millennials believe American churchgoers to be intolerant and hypocritical.⁷²

Concerning the reading of Scripture or other holy books, Thom Rainer and Jess Rainer note 21% of millennials read at least once per week, 12% read less than this, and 67% read “rarely or never.”⁷³ Likewise, when asked how often respondents meet with others to study their Bibles or other sacred texts, 15% study it with others at least weekly, 6% study it less than this, and 79% study it “rarely or never.”⁷⁴

Generation Z

The generation following millennials is Generation Z. Some define Generation Z as consisting of those born between 1993 to 2005,⁷⁵ while others define it as those born

⁶⁸ Horan, “Fostering Spiritual Formation of Millennials in Christian Schools,” 57.

⁶⁹ *Making Space for Millennials: A Blueprint for Your Culture, Ministry, Leadership, and Facilities* (Ventura, CA: Barna Group, 2014), 6.

⁷⁰ *Making Space for Millennials*, 40.

⁷¹ *Making Space for Millennials*, 40.

⁷² *Making Space for Millennials*, 40.

⁷³ Thom S. Rainer and Jess W. Rainer, *The Millennials: Connecting to America’s Largest Generation* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2011), 239.

⁷⁴ Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 239.

⁷⁵ Anthony Turner, “Generation Z: Technology and Social Interest,” *Journal of Individual Psychology* 71, no. 2 (Summer 2015): 103.

between 1999-2015.⁷⁶ They share many of the same traits and beliefs as millennials. James Emory White, however, points out that they are the “first truly post-Christian generation, and numerically the largest” in America.⁷⁷

Over the course of 2016 and 2017, Barna, in partnership with Impact 360 Institute, surveyed over 1,997 teens (ages 13-18), 335 Youth pastors, and 403 “engaged” Christian parents.⁷⁸ This study represents one of the most thorough studies on the spirituality of this new generation to date. They point out that Generation Z is notably relativistic. Many in Generation Z believe, “that what’s true for someone else may not be ‘true for me’; they are much less apt than older adults (especially Boomers, 85%) to agree that ‘a person can be wrong about something they sincerely believe in’ (66%).”⁷⁹ Barna notes, “Americans’ beliefs are becoming more post-Christian and, concurrently, religious identity is changing. . . The percentage of Gen Z that identifies as atheist is *double* that of U.S. Adults.”⁸⁰

One-on-One and a Post-Christian Context

One-on-one Bible reading is a timely method for reaching people in today’s post-Christian context for several reasons.

First, in today’s context, robust teaching is needed when seeking to convert someone to Christ. In years past, one could take it for granted that unbelievers shared a common vocabulary with Christians on topics such as sin, heaven, hell, and a Creator

⁷⁶ *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs, and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (Ventura, CA: Barna Group, 2018), 10.

⁷⁷ James Emory White, *Meet Generation Z: Understanding and Reaching the New Post-Christian World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017), 11.

⁷⁸ According to Barna, “To qualify [as engaged], parents had to (1) identify as Christian, (2) be the parents of a child ages 13 to 19, (3) have attended a church service in the past month and (4) qualify as an ‘engaged Christian’ under the definition designed for this study (see below).” *Gen Z*, 111.

⁷⁹ *Gen Z*, 65.

⁸⁰ *Gen Z*, 25.

God. Today this is not the case. Christopher Brooks points out the issue is further complicated by the fact that many nonbelievers today, “take an à la carte approach to their religious beliefs, combining ideas and philosophies that, in previous generations, were considered mutually exclusive.”⁸¹ The believer in 2021 must labor to define and explain biblical concepts that they would never have had to define 50 years earlier. One-on-one Bible reading, with its slower pace and focus on whole biblical texts, gives the nonbeliever time to process and even “test-drive” the Bible’s worldview as they are exposed to concepts that are foreign to them. Quick, concise gospel presentations will not afford the time and space to help unbelievers process these biblical concepts. These pithy summaries of the gospel are important, no doubt. However, they are only effective after a certain measure of shared understanding occurs. One-on-one Bible reading can help bring about this shared understanding.

Second, contrary to what some may think, millennials are, in fact, very open to people sharing Christ with them and inviting them to read the Bible one-on-one. As Rico Tice and Carl Laferton point out, “People who would never consider stepping into a church will feel far less threatened reading and talking about the Bible with a friend.”⁸² In 2009, LifeWay Research polled 20 to 29-year-olds—31 to 40-year-olds today—about their openness to someone sharing with them about Jesus. 89% said that they would be open to hearing about Christ.⁸³ In the same study, 61% stated they would “be willing to study the Bible if a friend asked me to.”⁸⁴ In the face of such openness, American churches are missing a great opportunity if they do not consider one-on-one Bible reading

⁸¹ Christopher W. Brooks, *Urban Apologetics: Why the Gospel Is Good News for the City* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2014), 49.

⁸² Rico Tice and Carl Laferton, *Honest Evangelism: How to Talk about Jesus Even When It’s Tough* (Epsom, England: The Good Book Company, 2015), 88.

⁸³ Ed Stetzer, Richie Stanley, and Jason Hayes, *Lost and Found: The Younger Unchurched and the Churches That Reach Them* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2009), 55.

⁸⁴ Stetzer, Stanley, and Hayes, *Lost and Found*, 55.

as a strategy for disciple-making.

Third, in terms of reaching the next generation, studies have shown the importance of Bible reading to children’s future perseverance in the Christian faith. A recent study by LifeWay Research discovered that the single-most consistent factor for children continuing to be spiritually healthy into adulthood is a regular habit of Bible reading. Researchers note, “Twenty-nine percent of the young adults [in the study] regularly read the Bible while growing up, according to their parents. On average, that group has 12.5 percent higher spiritual health than otherwise comparable individuals who didn’t . . .”⁸⁵

One of the key findings of Barna’s nationwide study of Generation Z is the discovery that “Church attendance alone is not enough to counter the prevailing post-Christian narrative [for Generation Z].”⁸⁶ Barna notes the noticeable difference in the theological answers of “engaged Christian teens” versus “churched Christian teens.”⁸⁷ For example, while 60% of Generation Z agrees that, “Jesus was a real person who was crucified by Rome and was actually physically raised from the dead,” 85% of churched teens agree, and 94% of engaged Christian teens agree.⁸⁸ While only 52% of Generation Z as a whole agree, “Faith in Jesus is the only way to God,” 76% of churched teens agree, and 96% of engaged teens agree.⁸⁹ The importance of engagement is also revealed in engaged Christian teens’ view of the Bible. While a scarce 42% of Generation Z believes,

⁸⁵ “Young Bible Readers More Likely to Be Faithful Adults, Study Finds,” LifeWay Research, accessed February 29, 2020, <https://lifewayresearch.com/2017/10/17/young-bible-readers-more-likely-to-be-faithful-adults-study-finds/>.

⁸⁶ *Gen Z*, 81.

⁸⁷ Engaged Christian teens, “identify as Christian, have attended church within the past six months and strongly agree . . . with the following: (1) The Bible is the inspired word of God . . . (2) I have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important . . . (3) I engage with my church in more ways than just attending services (4) I believe that Jesus Christ was crucified and raised from the dead to conquer sin and death.” Churched Christians teens were present in church services over the past six months but do not strongly agree with the four statements above. *Gen Z*, 112.

⁸⁸ *Gen Z*, 78.

⁸⁹ *Gen Z*, 78.

“The Bible is totally accurate in all of the principles it teaches,” only 61% of Churched teens believe this.⁹⁰ However, a staggering 99% of engaged Christian teens believe the Bible to be totally accurate.⁹¹

In the midst of discouraging statistics about Generation Z’s divergence from the Christian worldview, Barna notes, “Across the board, engaged Christian teens are just as likely as their older counterparts to say they are very convinced of their Christian convictions.”⁹² However, researchers are quick to point out, “This is not the case . . . for church-going teens who do not qualify as engaged.”⁹³ In light of these statistics, one-on-one Bible reading advocate Jon Nielson is correct when he states, “There is no better spiritual gift to offer your children than steady and consistent . . . exposure to this word of God.”⁹⁴ A culture of one-on-one Bible reading could dramatically impact the retention rate of young people in the Christian faith.

Finally, one last reason one-on-one Bible reading is effective in reaching this post-Christian context is due to how it affords seekers and skeptics space to ask questions and explore Christian teaching in a non-pressured environment. One of the great benefits of one-on-one Bible reading is that it is a very relational and relaxed form of evangelism. Tim Keller has categorized lay outreach along a spectrum of intensity, with the first type of outreach being low-pressure for the unbeliever and the last being high-pressure for the unbeliever. His spectrum is as follows: (1) informal relationship building, (2) formalized one-on-one ministry (which would include one-on-one Bible reading), (3) inviting a nonbeliever to an “official” church event, and, (4) sharing a formal gospel presentation.⁹⁵

⁹⁰ *Gen Z*, 78.

⁹¹ *Gen Z*, 78.

⁹² *Gen Z*, 81.

⁹³ *Gen Z*, 81.

⁹⁴ Jon Nielson, *Bible Reading with Your Kids* (Kingsford, Australia: Matthias Media, 2017), 18.

⁹⁵ Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City*

Notice that one-on-one Bible reading is second on the list. When it comes to disciple-making and evangelizing the lost in a post-modern context, Keller is right to argue, “It should be clear that reaching out to friends and colleagues does not necessarily involve sharing a complete gospel presentation in a single encounter.”⁹⁶ One-on-one Bible reading offers *multiple* encounters with the gospel of Jesus, especially if the Bible books are strategically chosen, which is ideal for someone who is skeptical.

Throughout the course of one-on-one Bible reading, nonbelievers will inevitably encounter passages that are controversial, off-putting, and potentially confusing. In high-pressure situations such as formal church gatherings or formal gospel presentations, skeptics are tempted to keep their questions and objections to themselves for fear of sounding foolish. In a one-on-one Bible reading context, however, the skeptic is free to express his or her doubts without reservation, and the believer can humbly offer suggestions from the text or from Christian theology. Tice and Laferton note, “When you read the Bible as a pair, it’s a format that helps understanding; they can ask questions, clarify things, and so on. . . [It] requires trust. . . and [it’s] non-threatening. . .”⁹⁷ Truth be told, even believers struggle with doubts and questions from time-to-time and will do so until “the partial, finite, and fragmentary . . . give way to understanding the whole context and entire picture of God’s purposes [at the eschaton].”⁹⁸

For all these reasons, church leaders would do well to consider one-on-one Bible reading as a method for making disciples in the 21st century, because it is particularly suited to reach our post-Christian culture today.

(Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 286.

⁹⁶ Keller, *Center Church*, 286.

⁹⁷ Tice and Laferton, *Honest Evangelism*, 89.

⁹⁸ Anthony C. Thiselton, *Doubt, Faith, and Certainty* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 142.

Conclusion

As the landscape of religion in America shifts around believers, the Church must be prepared to adapt its evangelism and disciple-making strategies without losing its biblical footing. One-on-one Bible reading is a strategy that will serve the church well into the 21st century and beyond.

CHAPTER 4

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT

This chapter describes the creation and implementation of a one-on-one Bible reading course for First Baptist Church in Mt. Sterling, Kentucky. This six-week course was designed to help church members grow in their Bible interpretation skills and gain confidence in their ability to make disciples. In the pages that follow, I will (1) describe the development of the course materials, (2) recount the implementation of the project, and (3) present the results of the course’s pre- and post-surveys.

Curriculum Development

The first goal of this project was to develop a six-session one-on-one Bible reading curriculum. The course followed a simple structure: large group teaching sessions followed by one-on-one Bible studies that participants completed with their Bible reading partners before the next large group session. The development of the curriculum began in earnest in January of 2021 with the development of the “CAN*T” Method of Bible study.

The “CAN*T” Method

There are many helpful Bible study methods one can use for reading the Bible one-on-one. Three, in particular, are noteworthy frameworks for one-on-one Bible reading.

Perhaps the most popular method for one-on-one Bible Reading is the Inductive Bible Study Method, which follows the paradigm, “Observation-Interpretation-

Application.”¹ Others include the Swedish Method and the C.O.M.A. Method.² These Bible frameworks are commendable for reading one-on-one. However, they are not without their weaknesses.

The Inductive Bible Study method, (or O-I-A method) is flexible, easy to remember, and allows one to read the Bible at a glance or engage in in-depth study. However, this framework is missing a “Context” step. Admittedly, one is supposed to do context work under the umbrella of “Observation.” However, without a clear reference to this key step, it is easy to skip over it using this method.

The Swedish Method is another helpful framework for Bible readers due to its simplicity. One simply looks for three things in a text: a “lightbulb,” a “question mark,” and “an arrow.” A lightbulb refers to something that “strikes the reader” about the text, a question mark encourages the reader to note things that one does not understand about the text, and an arrow reminds the reader to make life application.³ These three steps encourage readers to not overcomplicate the Bible reading process and allows for engaging Bible discussion. However, the Swedish Method’s emphasis on finding a lightbulb in a given passage may potentially cause readers to miss the author’s intent by focusing attention on a passages’ extraneous details.

Finally, the C.O.M.A. Method has its strengths and weaknesses, as well. The C.O.M.A Method, which stands for “Context-Observation-Meaning-Application,” is a more thorough framework, allowing Bible readers to better understand a Bible passage in its literary and biblical context. However, it lacks a clear way for readers to reflect on what Bryan Chapell calls the passage’s “Fallen Condition Focus” (FCF).⁴ It also does not

¹ Richard Alan Fuhr Jr and Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Inductive Bible Study: Observation, Interpretation, and Application through the Lenses of History, Literature, and Theology* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 38–41.

² David R. Helm, *One to One Bible Reading: A Simple Guide for Every Christian* (Kingsford, Australia: Matthias Media, 2011), 43–48.

³ Helm, *One to One Bible Reading*, 44.

⁴ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd ed.

have a clear step for considering how a passage points to God’s redemptive work in Christ.

To overcome these deficiencies, I devised the four-step acronym, “CAN*T,” which stands for (1) Context, (2) Author’s Intent, (3) Need for Christ, and (4) Takeaway. (1) The Context step encourages Bible readers to consider the passage’s genre, as well as its literary, cultural, and covenantal contexts. (2) After this, the Author’s Intent step aims to help readers discover the authorial intent of the passage. Here the reader asks, “Why did the biblical author write this particular section of Scripture?” (3) Leaning heavily on the work of Bryan Chapell and his “Fallen Condition Focus,” the third step, Need for Christ, encourages readers to consider their fallenness and how a given passage points to Jesus.⁵ (4) Finally, the Takeaway step reminds readers to form concrete life applications based on what they have read and studied. This CAN*T Method of Bible study became the centerpiece of the six-week one-on-one Bible reading curriculum that was developed.

Large Group Sessions

Beginning in January of 2021, I began to craft six large group sessions that introduced one-on-one Bible reading, walked participants through each of the four steps of the CAN*T method, and gave practical suggestions for making disciples through one-on-one Bible reading (see appendix 3).

One-on-One Studies

Each large group session had “homework” for participants in the form of one-on-one Bible studies. These Bible studies explored various passages in Mark’s Gospel utilizing the steps of the CAN*T Method. Questions were provided for each of the four

(Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 50.

⁵ This letter (N*) intentionally has an asterisk beside to signify to Bible readers that this step is broken down into two sub-sections: (1) Our Need and (2) Christ’s Work.

⁶ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 50–52, 282-88, & 299-301.

steps. However, participants were encouraged to not stick to this slavishly. To prepare these studies, a translation of each passage was prepared in Greek with all verbal forms parsed and exegeted using Jonathan Pennington’s 10-step narrative analysis model⁷ (see appendix 4).

Additional Materials

In addition to the large group session manuscripts and Bible studies, a slideshow presentation and fill-in-the-blank handouts were created for each large group gathering. A web page was utilized to store course materials and video recordings for those who missed a session or did not attend in person due to the Coronavirus pandemic (see appendix 6). For accessibility, the Bible studies were not only produced in print form, but also in epub and MOBI file formats for those who preferred e-readers. Finally, a handy One-on-One Bible Reading bookmark was created to help participants further internalize the principles of the course. The bookmarks and course materials were only given to participants after they had completed their pre-surveys.⁸

Expert Panel Review

After developing the large group curriculum and one-on-one Bible studies, the course materials were submitted to an expert panel for evaluation. This expert panel was composed of a local SBC pastor who holds a Doctor of Ministry degree, another SBC pastor with a Doctor of Philosophy, an SBC Director of Missions with a Doctor of Educational Ministry, and an SBC Worship Pastor, who holds a Master of Church Music degree and is also an avid practitioner of one-on-one Bible reading. The curriculum for Weeks 1-3 was submitted to the expert panel on April 15, 2021. The curriculum for Weeks 4-6 was submitted the following week on April 22, 2021. Nine different criteria

⁷ Jonathan T. Pennington, *Reading the Gospels Wisely: A Narrative and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 214–25.

⁸ All of these resources plus links to the large group session videos are available online at FBC’s official “Reading the Bible One-on-One” web page. See appendix 6.

were used to evaluate the materials for each week of the six-week course, using a four-point scale (see appendix 2). None of the evaluations scored lower than 97.685%. Having met the 90% of benchmark of the evaluation criterion, the first goal of the project was complete.

One-on-One Bible Reading Course Implementation

Promotion for the course began on April 28, 2021, with the launch of the aforementioned one-on-one Bible reading web page. The six-week course began on May 12, 2021, and concluded on June 23, 2021.⁹

Because of the Coronavirus pandemic, I gave participants the option of attending the large sessions virtually via FBC's livestream. Additionally, because of the unique circumstances of the pandemic, participants were allowed to read the Bible one-on-one with friends and family members via Zoom or telephone if they so desired. Only one couple participated in the course virtually.

Before the project began or the participants had received any course materials, they were asked to take the One-on-One Discipleship Survey (ODS). To ensure anonymity, the results of the survey were recorded with each participant using a unique Personal ID number. This pre-survey gauged participants' knowledge of hermeneutic principles and confidence in reading the Bible one-on-one. One hundred percent of the course participants filled out the pre-survey before beginning the course. Thirty-four individuals filled out a pre-survey. Having received these surveys, the second goal of the project was met.

Week 1

The first large group session began on May 12, 2021. The focus session for Week 1 was "Why Read the Bible One-on-One?" In this session, participants learned

⁹ Session 3 had to be postponed for one week due to a sudden death in the congregation.

about the biblical basis for one-on-one Bible reading and why it is a timely method for making disciples. The course began by defining one-on-one Bible reading, utilizing David Helm's definition in *One-on-One Bible Reading*.¹⁰ Then, participants considered why reading the Bible one-on-one is an effective method of making disciples. First, it was noted that one-on-one Bible reading is a *timely* method. Several statistics from Chapter 3 of this project were cited and participants were shown why this method is so helpful for 21st century American Christians. Second, it was noted that one-on-one Bible reading is a *biblical* method of making disciples. To support this assertion, several Scripture passages were examined, including Deuteronomy 6:6-8, 20-25; Luke 2:41-52; Acts 2:42; Acts 8:26-40; and Colossians 3:16. Finally, it was mentioned that one-on-one Bible reading is an *easy* method that requires little preparation and creates a non-pressured environment for those needing discipleship. After a brief word was given on how to execute a one-on-one Bible reading session, the course concluded by asking participants to consider how one-on-one Bible reading might impact Montgomery County if Christians in the area seriously adopted it.

As participants left, they were charged to complete their "homework" with their Bible reading partner before the next session. The Bible study for the first session of the course focused on the opening section of Mark's Gospel (Mark 1:1-15).

Week 2

The second large group session the following Wednesday gave a brief overview of the CAN*T Method and focused on the first part of the Context step—Genre. After a brief quiz on the material taught in the previous large group section, participants explored each letter of the CAN*T Method of Bible study. Then, the topic of genre was explored at length. While not exhaustive, the following genres were presented as common genres in Scripture: historical narrative, law, poetry, wisdom literature,

¹⁰ Helm, *One to One Bible Reading*, 11.

prophetic literature, Gospel, epistle, and apocalyptic. Each genre was explained using representative Scriptures and illustrations from everyday life.

After the large group session, participants met with their Bible reading partners and explored Mark 2:1-17, paying particular attention to Jesus' heart for sinners.

Week 3

On May 26, 2021, an hour before the large group session for Week 3 ran, our congregation experienced the sudden loss of one of our dearly loved church members. In light of this tragedy, I, as the Senior Pastor, needed to be there for the family and had to postpone the class one week. An emergency prayer service was held in the place of our meeting.

The following week, however, the class resumed as scheduled on June 2, 2021. After a brief test of participants' knowledge, the first half of the third large group session introduced the remainder of the Context step, unpacking what is meant by the literary, cultural, and covenantal contexts of a given Scripture passage. These contexts were summarized using a mnemonic device, the 3 C's of Context. The first C of context is the passage's *cul-de-sac* (or literary) context. Just like many houses are situated in a cul-de-sac with houses surrounding it, Bible passages are surrounded by other Bible passages within a given Bible book that impact their meaning. The second C of context is the *cultural* context. This context focuses on the historical and cultural data that impact the reading of a Bible passage. The third C of context is the *covenantal* context of a passage. This context encourages participants to consider how God is relating to his people at any given point in redemptive history. The six biblical covenants that were mentioned in the session were the ones noted in Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum's *Kingdom through Covenant*: (1) Creation Covenant, (2) Noahic Covenant, (3) Abrahamic Covenant, (4) Mosaic (Old or Israelite) Covenant, (5) Davidic Covenant, and (6) New Covenant.¹¹

¹¹ Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological*

The second half of the lesson unpacked what is meant by the phrase “Author’s Intent” and gave participants practical ways to discover a given biblical author’s message. To explain how one might determine authorial intent, the illustration of wearing different hats was employed. Depending on the type of Bible passage, one might need to wear a specific “hat” to best determine the meaning of the text. The first hat presented was the *Journalist’s hat*. This hat encourages participants to drill the text with “Who, What, When, Where, How, and Why” questions, all the while noting important details about the text. The second hat was the *Poet’s hat*. It is particularly useful for poetry, wisdom literature, and the apocalyptic genre. This hat encouraged participants to note any common poetic features in the text. The third hat is the *Director’s hat*, which is particularly useful for historical narrative and Gospel passages. This step employed a basic narrative analysis tool. The fourth hat mentioned was the *Lawyer’s hat*. This image helped participants see that the biblical authors often form arguments that can be traced by noting connecting words. Finally, congregants were offered an “optional” fifth hat that participants can employ at any time to help with any scriptural text, the *Scholar’s hat*. The Scholar’s hat was simply a tongue-in-cheek way of saying that readers may always consult a Study Bible, a commentary, or one of their pastors when they are stumped by a given Bible passage. If Bible readers employ the appropriate hat, they will be well on their way to determining the author’s intent behind a given passage of Scripture.

After the large group session for Week 3, participants explored Mark 8:22-33, considering Jesus’ healing of the twice-touched blind man, Peter’s clash with Jesus, and Christ’s radical call of discipleship.

Week 4

The fourth large group session focused on the Need for Christ step of the CAN*T Method. After a test of the participant’s knowledge, the session began. However,

Understanding of the Scriptures, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 620.

before launching into an explanation of the nuts and bolts of these steps, participants were encouraged to consider why this step is necessary. Among other things, several aspects of the fallen human condition were mentioned. Next, this step was explained in-depth. The N* step has two sub-sections to it, which is signified by the asterisk. The first sub-section focuses on “Our Need” and gets Bible readers to consider the fallen human condition found in a biblical passage. The second sub-section asked readers to consider how the passage points to “Christ’s Work.” A four-question diagnostic based on the work of Bryan Chapell was employed to help readers uncover how a particular passage points to God’s redemptive work in Christ.¹²

After the large group session on Week 4, course participants studied Mark 10:17-31 and Jesus’ encounter with the Rich Young Ruler.

Week 5

The fifth large group session concluded the in-depth study of the CAN*T Method by elaborating on the Takeaway step. After a quiz, this session began by asking the question, “Why are concrete takeaways necessary?” Several reasons were given to answer this question with scriptural support throughout. Secondly, the question was raised, “What happens when we don’t take anything away from Scripture?” This section of the talk explored several negative effects that occur in a Christian’s life when they fail to apply God’s Word. Finally, the practical question of “How can believers make solid concrete takeaways?” was explored in-depth. Several practical tips were given that were designed to help participants derive solid, concrete application from a given passage of Scripture. The class concluded with a look at how to make vague life applications concrete by considering the specific ways passages might apply to our everyday life.

Following Week 5’s large group session, participants studied Mark 15:25-39 with particular attention to Jesus’ quotation of Psalm 22.

¹² Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 282–88.

Week 6

The final large group session of the course asked the question, “What next?” The session discussed taking the ministry of reading the Bible one-on-one and reading in various contexts. After a brief test of their knowledge, the course began. Now that participants had honed their Bible reading skills and experienced the satisfaction that comes from reading the Bible one-on-one, they were challenged to consider how they might pass on what they have learned. First, the question was raised, “What keeps us from passing it?” Several obstacles and excuses were examined ranging from the fear of man to the fact that many of us are simply “too busy” to become the intentional disciples God has called us to be. After this, participants were challenged to think about the various types of people with whom they might consider reading one-on-one in the future: mature believers, their spouses, their children and grandchildren, and non-believers. Several specific tips were given for reading the Bible one-on-one with children and non-believers.

The last one-on-one Bible study that participants completed after Week 6’s large group focused on Jesus’ resurrection and the women’s experience at the tomb (Mark 16:1-8). The final eight verses of Mark were a fitting end to the course, as participants considered how difficult is at times to speak of their experience with Christ. However, this is what every believer is called to do.

ODS Results

At the conclusion of the project, the participants were asked to fill out a final One-on-One Discipleship Survey. This post-survey was identical to the previous ODS pre-survey, which gauged both Bible interpretation skills and confidence and motivation to engage in one-on-one discipleship. It was only given to those who had successfully completed the course. That is to say, it was only given to those who had attended, or viewed, all six large group sessions and completed all six of their one-on-one Bible studies with their Bible reading partners. Of the 33 initial course participants, 21

participants finished the entire course and turned in completed pre- and post-surveys. Unfortunately, three of these pre- and post-surveys had to be thrown out due to errors in the way they filled out their forms. Among the 18 participants who finished the course in its entirety and turned in complete pre- and post-surveys, a t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a statistically significant positive change in both knowledge of Bible interpretation principles ($t(17) = -10.292, p < .0001$) and in confidence and motivation to engage in one-on-one discipleship ($t(17) = -3.544, p < .0001$). This positive change marked the successful completion of the third goal of the project, namely, to equip participants to read the Bible one-on-one on their own.

Conclusion

This chapter described the development and implementation of a one-on-one Bible reading course for First Baptist Church. At the conclusion of the course, all three of the project's stated goals were completed. First, a six-session one-on-one Bible reading curriculum was successfully completed, having met the 90% of benchmark of the evaluation criterion. Second, participants' knowledge of Bible interpretation principles and their confidence and motivation to engage in one-on-one discipleship was evaluated using a pre-survey. This goal was met as 100% of participants completed their pre-surveys. Finally, the 18 participants who successfully completed all six large group sessions and one-on-one Bible studies were equipped to read the Bible on their own, having shown a statistically positive change in their pre- and post-surveys.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

Introduction

This chapter evaluates and reflects upon First Baptist Church's six-week one-on-one Bible reading course. First, the project's overall purpose will be evaluated and considered. After this, the project's goals will be assessed. Did the project achieve its aims? Next, the strengths and weaknesses of the project will be examined. This consideration will lead to a section where I reflect on what I would do differently if given the opportunity to repeat the course in the future. Finally, the chapter will conclude with theological and personal reflections.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

As stated in chapter 1, the purpose of this project was to equip members of First Baptist Church in Mt. Sterling, Kentucky to make disciples through one-on-one Bible reading. This was a worthy endeavor for First Baptist Church for two major reasons.

First, the Bible commands believers to make disciples. Jesus' final charge to his followers was for them to "make disciples (*μαθητεύσατε*) of all nations..." (Matt 28:19). This making of disciples was to come about through "going" (*πορευθέντες*), "baptizing," (*βαπτίζοντες*) and "teaching (*διδάσκοντες*) all that Jesus commanded." A disciple-making strategy, such as one-on-one Bible reading that helps believers "teach" the Bible to one another ought to be considered by Christians.

Second, while this project had a biblically-sound basis, it was particularly needed at First Baptist Church. Chapter 1 noted the lack of life-on-life discipleship at

First Baptist Church. Section I of the One-on-One Discipleship Survey (ODS) confirmed this. In this demographic section of the pre-survey, participants were asked, “Has a mature believer ever invited you into an intentional life-on-life discipleship relationship?” Of the 33 participants who turned in their pre-survey, only 10 responded in the affirmative. An additional question in Section I of the ODS was, “Have you ever invited another person into an intentional life-on-life discipleship relationship?” Of the 33 participants who turned in their pre-survey, only 12 responded in the affirmative. While 10 out of 33 and 12 out of 33 are encouraging, it is evident there was still a need to equip individual believers to disciple others at First Baptist.

Add to these reasons, the importance of reading Scripture in community (as evidenced in Chapter 2 of this project) and the unique sociological factors that make one-on-one Bible reading a timely method of disciple-making (as evidenced in Chapter 3) and it becomes clear this project had a needed and noble purpose.

In sum, if members of FBC grew in their knowledge of Bible reading principles and their confidence in reading the Bible one-on-one—*all the while experiencing one-on-one Bible reading firsthand*— it was reasoned that after the course, First Baptist Church would have a core group of people equipped and ready to make disciples. As the rest of the chapter makes plain, this is exactly what happened.

Evaluation of the Project’s Goals

Goal 1 of the project was to develop a six-session one-on-one Bible reading curriculum for use in a large group setting. The curriculum writing process, which began in earnest in January 2021, was completed and available to an expert panel for review by the end of April. Upon review, no single evaluation scored less than 97.685 percent. Because of this, the first goal of the project was successfully met.

Goal 2 of the project was to survey course participants to measure their knowledge of Bible interpretation principles and their confidence and motivation to

engage in one-on-one discipleship. This goal was successfully met, as 100 percent of participants completed their survey before beginning the course.

Goal 3 of the project was to equip members to read the Bible one-on-one on their own. This goal was the pivotal goal. As mentioned in Chapter 4, among those who finished the course in its entirety and turned in complete pre- and post-surveys, a t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a statistically significant positive change in both knowledge of Bible interpretation principles ($t(17) = -10.292, p < .0001$) and in confidence and motivation to engage in one-on-one discipleship ($t(17) = -3.544, p < .0001$). Because of this, the third goal of the project was successfully met.

Strengths of the Project

There were many strengths of this one-on-one Bible reading course.

First, the content of the course truly seemed to help people. After speaking with several church members following the course, several spoke of how enlightening the course was and how helpful they found the CAN*T Method.

This confirmed my conviction that to train people to read one-on-one, it was essential to provide them with hermeneutics training. For example, when David Helm's *One-to-One Bible Reading* was published, Matthias Media produced a free course on the subject to promote his book.¹ It was a helpful course and gave people a lot of confidence in reading the Bible. However, the course was only four sessions and did not give an in-depth look at hermeneutics. On the one hand, we should set participants free to read their Bibles. On the other hand, we must not set them up for failure. Giving participants Bible reading principles before setting them loose to read is essential. The CAN*T Method achieved this. It provided a simple framework for reading the Bible and a clear structure for the class. As participants met outside of the large group sessions to read the Bible, the

¹ David Helm, "One-to-One Bible Reading: The Online Course" (Covenant Life Church, Gaithersburg, MD, 2013), <http://www.reading121.org>.

Bible studies reinforced what the students were learning in each class.

The second strength of this project was the mnemonic devices that were used. Throughout the course of this project, I have become increasingly convinced that pastors should work hard at not only becoming excellent *expositors* but also excellent *teachers* of the Word of God. One of the hallmarks of a truly excellent teacher is the ability to take complex topics and distill them into clear and memorable thought chunks for their students. For this reason, I pushed myself to create mnemonics for the class to help participants remember the lessons of the course. Three of these stood out in my mind and helped contribute to the course's success.

First, the CAN*T acronym turned out to be an excellent memory aid. I believe every single person that took the course would still be able to recite the main steps of the method today. Second, the three C's of context (See appendix 3) was another mnemonic of which I was proud. It is difficult to remember the major areas of context one needs to cover when sitting down to read the Bible. The three C's gave a simple checklist for this. Finally, I felt like the image of wearing different hats (See appendix 3) was a helpful way of getting at the author's intent, because one's strategy must change depending on the genre of Scripture. To rightly understand the biblical author's intent in a psalm, for example, it would be wrong to read and study it like one might study an epistle. The image of a journalist, lawyer, poet, director, and scholar gave participants an easy "hook" for remembering the various strategies one might employ to help determine the author's meaning in a particular passage.

Third, another strength of the project was the fact that this project forced people to sit down and read the Bible. More than one participant expressed that they appreciated how this class forced them to read their Bibles. In the course, it was noted how "busyness" often keeps people from doing the things that they know they ought to be doing. Many in the course appreciated the accountability and structure the Bible studies afforded.

Fourth, I felt like the quizzes were helpful at the beginning of the sessions. Admittedly, for many participants, the quizzes at the beginning of class were not enjoyable in the moment. However, I believed this forced retrieval of information helped solidify the principles of the course. As James Lange writes, in his book, *Small Teaching*, “If you want to retrieve knowledge from your memory, you have to practice retrieving knowledge from your memory. The more times that you practice remembering something, the more capable you become of remembering that thing in the future.”² Lang speaks of the brain using the image of a muscle. Testing helps “strengthen that muscle.”³ For this reason, I was glad I chose to include quizzes at the beginning of each session to help solidify the principles learned in previous sessions.

Fifth, another strength of the course was that it was hands-on and practical. I appreciated that the one-on-one studies did not leave the concepts we were learning in large group in the ether but brought them down to earth. Every one-on-one Bible study through Mark’s Gospel utilized the CAN*T Method and was carefully chosen to reinforce the large group lectures.

The final strength of the course was that it was lay-person friendly. During this course, I strove to distill and simplify concepts for the average layperson. By the end of the time together, this was confirmed in the positive statistical change in the group’s confidence to read the Bible one-on-one.

Weaknesses of the Project

While there were several strengths to this one-on-one Bible reading course, there were also a few weaknesses.

First, while I encouraged participants to not be intimidated by the questions on

² James M. Lang, *Small Teaching: Everyday Lessons from the Science of Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass/Wiley, 2016), 20.

³ Lang, *Small Teaching*, 21.

the pre-survey, it seems as though I did not do as good a job as I thought. After the first session, several participants complained about how difficult the survey was. Perhaps I could have done more to ensure that people did not feel pressured by the pre-survey. Unfortunately, the majority of people that lost interest in the course left after this first session. I am afraid that because their results were so discouraging, they decided they were simply not going to go any further. This was unfortunate because those that did complete the course experienced a statistically positive change in their results.

The second weakness of the project pertained to the “information overload” present, especially in the first three classes. Looking back on these sessions, I believe that some of these simply tried to do too much in too little time. In particular, the second and third large group sessions felt too long. The Context step of Session 2 and the Author’s Intent step of Session 3 could have easily been broken into additional classes. By trying to do too much in too little time, I believe I stretched my audience to their limits.

The third weakness, which relates to the previous weakness, was that the course was truly too short. Six weeks was simply not enough time to (1) explore why a person should read the Bible one on one, (2) discuss the four steps of the CAN*T Method, and (3) conclude with the next steps readers should take.

Fourth, more time was needed to unpack the complex topic of the Need for Christ step. This is because determining a “fallen condition focus” or a “need statement” in a passage is a very difficult concept for laypeople to grasp at first. Many Bible readers are not accustomed to wrestling with the question of “How does this passage highlight my own sinfulness?” Moreover, if searching for a fallen condition focus is difficult for the average layperson, discovering how a passage points to Christ is even more so. For these reasons, having more time to cover Session 4 would have been very helpful.

Fifth, due to COVID, several participants chose to read one-on-one with their spouses. While this was a noble and worthy thing to do, I would have liked to have had more people reading with fellow church members of the same sex. This is because

reading with our spouses can be very “comfortable.” I would love to have seen people step out of their comfort zones and read with their Sunday school classmates or even non-Christians.

Sixth, another weakness of the project had to do with momentum. After the necessary postponement in Week 3, sadly, the course did experience a little momentum loss. However, I would not change how the staff handled the situation. Postponing one week was the right thing to do in light of the congregation member’s passing.

Seventh, another weakness of the project was the fact that the large group sessions did not include an extensive discussion of the Mark Bible Studies. While I always asked how everyone’s one-on-one studies were going at the beginning of each session, we did not review the material for the sake of time. Several participants mentioned this would have been a welcome addition to the course. In retrospect, being able to answer people’s questions on the studies and reinforce the CAN*T Method would have been very helpful.

The final weakness of the project and, perhaps, the most glaring one was the fact that there was no mechanism to force participants outward to read beyond their initial partners. While I do believe this course achieved its aim to *equip* people to make disciples through one-on-one Bible reading, it would have been helpful if there had been a way to ensure people took that knowledge and read with others.

What I Would Do Differently

First, if I could run the course again, I would try even harder to encourage people not to be intimidated by the pre-survey. I would help them understand that the pre-survey is simply a benchmark for the course and nothing more. I would also emphasize that their answers to the pre-survey would in no way affect my grade for the course.

Second, if I ran the course again, I would also increase the sessions from six to eight (or even possibly, ten). This would allow for more time to discuss the Mark Bible

studies and more time to explore the Context, Author's Intent, and Need for Christ steps of the CAN*T Method. I would also most likely increase the class period from one hour to an hour and 15 minutes.

Third, if I had more time, I would do more "in-class practice" with participants with examples from multiple genres of Scripture. One of the tradeoffs of the project came early when I decided that it would be best to have participants track through one book of the Bible, instead of looking at multiple genres of Scripture. To compensate for this in the future, I would give participants more in-class practice time utilizing the Context, Author's Intent, Need for Christ, and Takeaway steps with a wide variety of Scriptures.

Fourth, if I was able to extend the course by two sessions, I would also begin to taper off questions in the one-on-one Bible studies that were specific to the gospel of Mark and replace them with broad, general questions from the CAN*T Method. This would wean them off my exegetical insights and force participants to discover their own. The CAN*T Method bookmark with its generic Bible study questions could serve as a guide in this regard.

Fifth, if I was able to increase the course length, I would also require participants to take one week of the course (Week 7 most likely) and read the Bible with another person that was not their original Bible reading partner. This would serve as a mechanism to propel participants out of their comfort zones and help them grow in their ability to make disciples.

Finally, to solidify the concepts in the course, I would prepare at least one large group session in which participants do nothing but look at passage after passage using the CAN*T Method. I would make the session interactive, calling on participants to guide the discussion. I would also utilize an overhead display to note the groups' insights.

Theological Reflection

Importance of Hermeneutics

First, it was clear to me through the teaching of this course how important it is for laypeople to become better versed in hermeneutics. On the one hand, the Scriptures are perspicuous, that is, they are sufficiently clear for believers to read and digest. Wayne Grudem notes, “the Bible is written in such a way that its teaching is able to be understood by all who will read it seeking God’s help and being willing to follow it.”⁴ On the other hand, it is also the case that there are many hard-to-understand passages in the Bible, as well as other hurdles for modern-day readers when it comes to the task of Bible reading. Graeme Goldsworthy notes several challenges, or “gaps,” that Bible readers must overcome as they approach a given text of Scripture. According to Goldsworthy, these gaps are: (1) the “language” gap, (2) the “culture” gap, (3) the “history” gap, (4) the “literature” gap, (5) the “textual” gap, and (6) the “intended reader/hearer” gap.⁵ Overcoming these obstacles takes intentional study in the area of hermeneutics. As mentioned earlier, if pastors do not provide direction and training for their laity in this regard, most will resort to what Jonathan Pennington calls the “Whatever Strikes Me” method of Bible study.⁶ This can lead to discouragement in Bible reading, as well as a wide variety of aberrant readings. The pre-surveys alone reminded me of the importance of teaching hermeneutics at a lay level. This is essential work for the church today.

Loving God with One’s Minds

Second, after planning and teaching this course, I was also reminded how

⁴ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 1503.

⁵ Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 28–30.

⁶ Jonathan T. Pennington, *Reading the Gospels Wisely: A Narrative and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 169.

important it is for pastors to cast a vision of loving God with all one's mind to their congregations. When asked, "What is the most important commandment?" Jesus responded by reminding the people of the importance of loving God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30). Many churches in Montgomery County emphasize loving God with one's heart, soul, and strength to the neglect of loving him with one's mind. While it is true that God has blessed some in the church with great intellect, loving God with all one's mind is not reserved for an elite class of Christians. Every believer, regardless of their God-given intelligence, is called to "be transformed by the renewal of your mind" (Rom 12:2). Pastors need to be careful not to emphasize "passion" and emotional experience and neglect the clear expectation in Scripture for God's people to know him deeply through his Word. Ministers must be cheerleaders for loving God with one's mind, helping their congregations grow in their knowledge of God.

Dual Authorship of Scripture

Thirdly, after teaching this course, I believe the dual authorship of Scripture needs to be re-emphasized in many congregations. While it is true the Bible is authored and inspired by the one true God, the Lord did not overcome the human author's faculties in writing it. As Article VII of the Chicago Statement on Inerrancy states:

We affirm that God in His work of inspiration utilized the distinctive personalities and literary styles of the writers whom He had chosen and prepared. We deny that God, in causing these writers to use the very words that He chose, overrode their personalities.⁷

This human side of the dual authorship of Scripture seems to be lost on many churchgoers today. Of all the questions on the pre-survey for the one-on-one Bible reading course, the most shocking question for me as a researcher was the question,

⁷ "The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy," The Gospel Coalition, accessed July 31, 2021, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/article/the-chicago-statement-on-biblical-inerrancy/>.

“Who determines the meaning of a given text?” Of the 33 who took the initial survey, 24 got this question wrong. They did not believe the author was, in fact, the person who determined the meaning of a given text. As pastors explain the Scriptures, they would do well to hammer this point. As Robert Plummer points out, “the role of the reader of a text... is to discover the author’s consciously intended meaning.”⁸ Then, and only then, can one rightly apply the Bible to modern-day contexts. If Christians better understood that they are reading real humans who wrote out of genuine personalities and employed various stylistic features, they would be better equipped to read and study the Bible.

The Priesthood of the Believer

Finally, this course reminded me of the importance of the doctrine of the priesthood of the believer. The doctrine is built upon foundational verses like Hebrews 4:14-16 and 1 Peter 2:5-9 and has many implications for a church’s life and ministry. Because the church now has access to God through Christ’s mediatorial work and is now “a holy priesthood” (1 Pet 2:5) in him, churches should eschew any two-tier Christianity in which the clergy are “closer to the Lord” and the laity “farther away.” As Grudem rightly notes:

...the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers...indicate[s] that all have some ability to interpret Scripture and some responsibility to seek God’s wisdom in applying it to situations. All have access directly to God in order to seek his will. The New Testament allows for no special class of Christians who have greater access to God than others.⁹

This has implications for one-on-one Bible reading. While God does give pastors and teachers to the church, they are given to the church precisely “to equip the saints for the work of the ministry” (Eph 4:12). Sadly, in many churches, only the pastors and a select few Sunday school teachers engage in teaching the Word to other believers.

⁸ Robert L. Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*, 2nd ed., 40 Questions Series (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2021), 144.

⁹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1147 n.53.

However, it is clear all believers—at least in some informal sense—are to be “speaking the truth in love” to one another (Eph 4:15). This is where one-on-one Bible reading is so helpful. One-on-one Bible reading provides churches an avenue through which the entire body of Christ may participate in “Word work.” Pastors need to remember that while they are essential to this task in the church, they are not the only ones who are to be engaging in this kind of work. All believers are teachers in the sphere of the home and in the task discipling other believers.

Still some pastors may be hesitant to “set their congregations loose” with a ministry like one-on-one Bible reading. What if people come to incorrect interpretations and faulty conclusions about the Word of God? While this can—and will—happen on occasion, I believe this course has shown this fear can be allayed through a little hermeneutical guidance from pastors. The doctrine of the priesthood of believers reminds ministers that the Spirit of God is at work every time believers open his Word. Instead of withholding this type of ministry from congregation members, I hope the results of this course will encourage pastors to set their people free with their Bibles in hand.

Personal Reflection

Being able to walk participants through a Bible reading course at First Baptist Church was a true honor and privilege. I learned a great deal about myself as a pastor and minister of the gospel. This course stretched me in the following ways.

Teaching the Word

First, this course helped me understand the importance of being a *teacher* of the Word of God. This course showed me the great need for pastors to work hard at explaining, synthesizing, and communicating complex material when teaching laypeople. I fear many seminary-trained pastors assume laypeople come to the biblical text with the same set of assumptions, theological commitments, and—even—reading comprehension skills as that of the pastor. This is not always the case. Most laypeople have had the

theological training the pastor has had. The pastor must remember this and seek to carefully convey information—*much of which will be very new*—to his congregation in a compelling and easy-to-understand way. This course forced me to grow in my pedagogical skill and, for that, I am truly grateful. Additionally, because of my study, I am going to begin incorporating the CAN*T Method into other aspects of our church's life. Before this course, I led a large group Bible study at FBC on Wednesday nights utilizing the Observation-Interpretation-Application inductive Bible study model. Now, I have shifted and utilize the CAN*T Method so that I might build on the successes of the course. I have also started incorporating the CAN*T Method in my sermon preparation as a way of personally engaging with the texts before I preach them.

A Reawakened Passion

Second, this course reminded me how much I love reading the Bible one-on-one, and it has convicted me of my failure to do it during the Coronavirus pandemic. From the moment I first learned about one-on-one Bible reading from British and Australian evangelicals, I have incorporated it into my life as a Christian and a minister of the gospel.¹⁰ When I served as Assistant Pastor in Portland, Maine, I read the Bible with friends, church members, and future leaders of the church. Similarly, in my previous Senior Pastor post in Camden, Alabama, I was quick to read the Bible one-on-one with deacons and non-believers. Nothing in ministry gave me greater joy than poring over the Bible with these men. However, when the Coronavirus pandemic began, and our family made the move to Mount Sterling, I did not immediately resume this ministry again. At the time, it made sense. Many were concerned about reading the Bible in close proximity. Sharing a meal in a restaurant booth seemed unthinkable. Apart from reading with my

¹⁰ Two publishing houses were very formative for me as I embraced one-on-one Bible reading for the first time, Matthias Media (Kingsford, Australia) and The Good Book Company (Epsom, England). Their resources and the authors who write for them continue to shape me as a pastor and disciple maker.

children, the discipline I had developed of reading one-on-one fizzled out in my life. This course, however, has reawakened my passion for this vital ministry, and I want it to continue.

The Pastor as Trainer

Finally, this passage helped me realize the truth of a statement I first heard from Tony Payne and Colin Marshall in *The Trellis and the Vine*, "...Sunday sermons are necessary but not sufficient."¹¹ Without diminishing the primacy of expository preaching at all, I have become increasingly convinced the pastor's job is to not only preach the word but train his people to become active Bible sharers. As Colin Marshall and Tony Payne point out, "crucially, the pastor is also a trainer... His job is to teach and train his congregation, by his word and his life, to become disciple-making disciples of Jesus. There is a radical dissolution then, in this model, of the clergy-lay distinction."¹²

While pastors are essential, they are primarily given to the church to "to equip the saints for the work of ministry" (Eph 4:12). They are not to do all the ministry themselves. Through this Doctor of Ministry project, I have been challenged to never tire of training, as it is essential to the building up of the body.

Conclusion

This chapter evaluated and reflected upon First Baptist Church's six-week one-on-one Bible reading course. In the final analysis, the course was a success. Each of the project's goals was successfully completed and the participants experienced a statistically positive change in both their knowledge of Bible interpretation skills and their confidence to make disciples through one-on-one Bible reading. The course had many strengths,

¹¹ Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine: The Ministry Mind-Shift That Changes Everything* (Kingsford, Australia: Matthias Media, 2009), 93.

¹² Marshall and Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine*, 99.

teaching participants to become better Bible readers through the use of handy mnemonics, quizzes, and hands-on activities. It also had a few weaknesses, the most glaring of which was the short time frame of the course. Upon reflection, the project revealed the importance of hermeneutics, loving God with our minds, and the doctrine of the priesthood of the believer. It also taught me a great deal about myself as a minister and the importance of *teaching* others the Word.

APPENDIX 1

ONE-ON-ONE DISCIPLESHIP SURVEY (ODS)

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to measure participants' knowledge, confidence, and motivation to engage in one-on-one discipleship. This research is being conducted by Robert Christopher Wells for purposes of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will answer the two identical surveys before and after the ministry project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

By completing this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

I agree to participate, Personal ID # _____

I do not agree to participate

Section I

Section I of the One-on-One Discipleship Survey (ODS) will ask a few basic demographic questions about the participants taking this survey.

Directions: Answer the following questions by filling in the blank space provided.

1. What is your age? _____
2. What is your gender? _____
3. Are you married?
____ A. Yes
____ B. No
4. How many years has it been since you first professed Christ? _____
5. How long have you been a member at First Baptist Church? _____

6. Has a mature believer ever invited you into an intentional life-on-life discipling relationship?
___ A. Yes
___ B. No
7. Have you ever invited another person into an intentional life-on-life discipling relationship?
___ A. Yes
___ B. No
8. Do you have any children age 18 or younger living with you in the home?
___ A. Yes
___ B. No

Section II

Section II of the ODS will gauge the participant's knowledge of Bible interpretation principles.

1. Historical narrative, poetry, prophecy, epistolary literature, apocalyptic, and gospel are all examples of what?
___ A. Categories for historical research
___ B. Genres in Scripture
___ C. Hermeneutical Categories
___ D. Categories in Systematic Theology
2. Who determines the meaning of a given text?
___ A. The text itself
___ B. The author
___ C. The reader
___ D. The teacher of that text
3. The book of 2 Samuel is an example of...
___ A. Historical narrative
___ B. Prophecy
___ C. Apocalyptic literature
___ D. Poetry

4. Which of these questions gets at the literary context of a given passage?

- A. What was the preceding passage about?
- B. How does this passage apply to my life?
- C. What were wedding feasts like in Jesus' day?
- D. When was this author writing this letter?

5. Which one of these is a legitimate reason to study the Bible?

- A. To grow in our understanding of the faith
- B. To become equipped to share the gospel
- C. To learn how to better encourage other believers
- D. All of the above

6. Which of the following is NOT considered one of the six major covenants in salvation history?

- A. Noahic Covenant
- B. Mosaic Covenant
- C. New Covenant
- D. Solomonic Covenant

8. What is one of the top dangers when exploring the cultural context of a passage?

- A. There are no dangers inherent in exploring a passage's cultural context.
- B. The temptation to allow historical research to invalidate the plain teaching of Scripture.
- C. Exploring the culture of the Bible may clarify a misconception we may have.
- D. Exploring the cultural context of a passage may help us visualize a narrative's setting.

9. When studying a poetic passage, one should especially be on the lookout for:

- A. Apocalyptic imagery
- B. Connecting words and the passage's overall argument
- C. Metaphor and simile
- D. The rising tension in the passage

10. When studying a NT epistle, one should especially be on the lookout for:

- A. Apocalyptic imagery
- B. The climax of the passage
- C. Metaphor and simile
- D. Connecting words and the passage's overall argument

11. Which of the following is NOT a legitimate way to see how a passage points to Christ?

- A. Looking for how the passage predicts Christ's work.
- B. Looking for how the passage prepares for Christ's work.
- C. Looking for how any symbols that might allegorize Christ's work.
- D. Looking for how the passage reflects God's heart for redemption.

12. When theologians speak of total depravity, they mean that:

- A. Humans are as evil as they possibly can be.
- B. Humans' will, mind, and emotions are all fallen and shot through with sin.
- C. Humans are NOT sinners by nature, but ONLY by choice.
- D. Humans are only depraved if they do not accept Jesus.

13. Which of the following is NOT a concrete application or "takeaway."

- A. Flee sexual immorality.
- B. In a moment, I will make a list of what is troubling me and lift it up to God.
- C. This week, I will invite my hairdresser to our upcoming church event.
- D. By God's grace, today, I will speak to my annoying co-worker in love and compassion.

14. Which of the following is NOT a way to derive life applications or "takeaways" from a text?

- A. Look for direct commands in the passage.
- B. See if there are any truths about God or humanity in the passage.
- C. Look for any good/bad examples in the text.
- D. Note any metaphors that appear in the text.

15. Reading the Bible one-on-one is a timely method of discipleship and evangelism because:

- A. There are fewer copies of God's Word available today than in years past.
- B. People today are busier than ever.
- C. We live in a world where very few people read the Bible regularly.
- D. The United States is more religious than ever.

Section III

Section III of the ODS is a self-assessment of your confidence and motivation for one-on-one discipleship.

Directions:

The questions in this section ask you to give your opinion using the following scale:

SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, DS = Disagree Somewhat,
AS = Agree somewhat, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree

Please circle the appropriate answer.

1. I would feel comfortable sitting down and reading the Bible with a nonbeliever.
SD D DS AS A SA
2. I feel as though I am equipped to disciple a new believer.
SD D DS AS A SA
3. I am confident in my ability to read and interpret the Bible.
SD D DS AS A SA
4. I struggle with understanding the Bible.
SD D DS AS A SA
5. I am confident in my ability to discern when a Bible passage is being used in an illegitimate way.
SD D DS AS A SA
6. I feel confident in my ability to make practical life-applications from a Bible passage.
SD D DS AS A SA
7. Reading the Bible with another believer makes me nervous.
SD D DS AS A SA
8. Reading the Bible with another believer excites me.
SD D DS AS A SA
9. I feel confident in my ability to determine the main point of a given Bible passage.
SD D DS AS A SA
10. I believe making one-on-one Bible reading a regular part of my life is worth the effort.
SD D DS AS A SA

APPENDIX 2
CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

One-on-One Bible Reading Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
Lesson Evaluation:					
1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The large group session material is faithful to Scripture					
The large group session effectively illustrates its teaching points					
The large group session provides practical application for participants					
The large group session is appropriately geared toward lay people					
The large group session is clear and cohesive					
The accompanying Bible study gets at the main point of the passage					
The accompanying Bible study helps participants apply the given passage					
The accompanying Bible study is clear and cohesive					

The accompanying Bible study is appropriate for one-on-one Bible reading					
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APPENDIX 3
LARGE GROUP SESSION OUTLINES

A Word on the Following Outlines

The following six outlines give a brief overview of the weekly large group sessions that comprised the one-on-one Bible reading course. These lectures covered the basics of the one-on-one Bible reading, introduced the CAN*T Method, and explored participants' next steps in light of what they had learned.

Class 1: Why Read One-on-One?

I. Housekeeping

- A. Welcome to the Course
- B. One-on-One Pre-Survey
- C. Commitment throughout the Course

II. What is One-on-One Bible Reading?

- A. Opening Illustration
- B. David Helm's Definition of One-on-One Bible Reading

III. Why One-on-One Bible Reading?

- A. It is Timely.
 - 1. We live in a world in which very few people read the Bible regularly.
 - 2. Few today engage in discipling relationships.
 - 3. Most churchgoers today struggle to share the gospel.
 - 4. Few today can articulate the basic doctrines of the Christian faith.

5. America's upcoming generations already embody a post-Christian worldview.

B. It is Biblical.

1. Discuss Deuteronomy 6:6-8, 20-25.
2. Discuss Luke 2:41-52.
3. Discuss Acts 2:42.
4. Discuss Acts 8:26-40.
5. Discuss Colossians 3:16.

C. It is Easy.

1. One-on-one Bible reading requires little preparation.
2. One-on-one Bible reading is less "pressure-filled" than other forms of evangelism and discipleship.
3. One-on-one Bible reading is adaptable.

III. How to Do It.

- A. Pray.
- B. Read.
- C. Discuss.
- D. Pray Again.

IV. Homework

- A. Explain how the one-on-one Bible studies will work throughout the course.
- B. Briefly explain the letters of the CAN*T Method.

VI. Conclusion

- A. Concluding Illustration

Class 2: The CAN*T Method & Context: Part One

I. Introduction

A. Thoughts on the Study 1

B. Test Your Knowledge

II. The CAN*T Method

A. Context

1. What genre is this?
2. What passages surround this passage?
3. What was the culture like when this was written?
4. What covenant is the passage operating under?

B. Author's Intent

1. The author determines the meaning of a text!
2. Discuss the example of Jeremiah 29:11.

C. Need for Christ

1. Our Need
 - a. How does this passage reveal our sin or fallenness?
 - b. How does this passage show us we need the Lord?
2. Christ's Work
 - a. How does this passage point us to Christ?

D. Takeaway

1. How does this passage apply to my life?
2. What concrete takeaways can I make from this passage?

E. Any Questions So Far?

III. Context: Part One

A. Genre

1. Illustration of Four Statements in Various Genres.
2. A Basic Definition of Genre

B. Biblical Genres

1. Historical Narrative

- a. Explanation of Historical Narrative
- b. Tips for Reading Historical Narrative
 - i. Ask, “Why is *this* here?”
 - ii. Remember description versus prescription.
 - iii. Look for repeated words.
 - iv. Pay attention to the arrangement of accounts
 - v. Historical Narrative Books

2. Law

- a. Explanation of Law
- b. Types of Laws in the Bible
- c. Tips for Reading Law
 - i. Read them in their historical context.
 - ii. Think about how Jesus’ work impacts the passage.
- d. Law Books

3. Poetry

- a. Explanation of Poetry
- b. Tips for Reading Law

- i. Look out for Parallelism.
- ii. Look out for Metaphor and Simile.

4. Wisdom Literature

- a. Wisdom Literature Books
- b. Explanation of Wisdom Literature
 - i. The primary purpose of wisdom literature is to help you navigate God's world.

5. Prophetic Literature

- a. Explanation of Prophetic Literature
- b. Tips for Reading Prophecy
 - i. Remember not all prophetic literature is predictive.
 - ii. Remember some prophecies have more than one fulfillment.

6. Gospel

- a. Explanation of Gospel
- b. Tips for Reading Gospel
 - i. Pay attention to repeated words.
 - ii. Pay attention to geographic markers.
 - iii. Pay attention to what comes before and after your passage.
 - iv. Pay attention to Jesus' explanation of parables.

7. Epistle

- a. Explanation of Epistle.
- b. Tips for Reading Epistles.

i. Pay attention to the author, audience, and why the letter was written.

ii. Remember letters have a beginning, middle, and end.

iii. Remember NT letters present arguments.

8. Apocalyptic

a. Explanation of Apocalyptic.

b. Tips for Reading Apocalyptic.

IV. Quiz

Class 3: Context: Part Two & Author's Intent

I. Introduction

A. Thoughts on the Study 2

B. Test Your Knowledge

II. The Three C's of Context

A. Cul-de-sac Context

1. The cul-de-sac context (A.K.A. the literary context) reminds us to look at the passages that precede and surround the passage.

2. What surrounds my passage? In which section of the book does this passage appear? Where does my passage appear in the entire book?

B. Cultural Context

1. Explanation of Cultural Context

2. While very important, there is a temptation to put too much stock in the cultural context of a passage.

C. Covenantal Context

1. Explanation of the word "covenant"

2. The six biblical covenants (based on Gentry and Wellum)¹

a. Creation

b. Noahic

c. Abrahamic

d. Mosaic

e. Davidic

¹ Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Scriptures*, First edition (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 620.

f. New

III. Author's Intent

A. Illustration of the various “readings” some subscribe to today.

B. Historical-Grammatical Method

1. This is how you and I wish to be read.

2. The author determines the meaning.

C. Four Hats to Determine Author's Intent

1. Journalist's Hat

a. Ask *Who*, *What*, *When*, *Where*, and *Why* questions.

b. Observe lists.

c. Note interesting details.

d. Note important pieces of dialogue.

e. Write down striking statements.

f. Note commands.

g. Circle words or ideas that you would like to explore more.

2. Poet's Hat

a. Useful for the Psalms and Apocalyptic literature.

b. Note any poetic language in the text.

c. Note any comparisons.

d. Write down any repeated phrases.

e. Write down any figures of speech.

3. Director's Hat

a. Useful for historical narratives.

- b. Determine:
 - i. The setting and any characters
 - ii. The setup
 - iii. The rising tension
 - iv. The climax
 - v. The resolution
 - vi. Any following explanation
- c. Put yourself in the character's shoes.

4. Lawyer's Hat

- a. Useful for epistles.
- b. Imagine the biblical author as a lawyer laying out his case.
- c. Note any "connecting" words.

5. An Optional Hat: Scholar's Hat

- a. When stumped, you can also consult scholars.
- b. Places to consult:
 - i. Study Bibles.
 - ii. Devotional, Pastoral, or Technical Commentaries.

D. Bringing It All Together

1. After this work, ask the question: "Why did the author write this passage to his original audience?"
2. Try to boil your answer down to one main point or a few bullet points.

IV. Quiz

Class 4: Need for Christ

I. Introduction

A. Thoughts on the Study 3

B. Test Your Knowledge

II. Why We Need This Step

A. Because we live in a broken and fallen world.

1. Humans are fallen.

a. We are fallen in our minds.

b. We are fallen in our emotions.

c. We are fallen in our wills.

d. Everyone around us is fallen, too.

2. Creation is fallen.

B. Because we resist conviction.

C. Because we trend toward moralism.

D. Because all Scripture points to Christ.

1. Discuss Luke 24:13-27

III. How to Do This Step

A. Need

1. This step is broken into two sub-sections:

a. Our Need

i. Explanation of a “Need Statement”

ii. Where does this passage show my need for Jesus?

iii. Example of various Need Statements.

b. Christ's work

- i. Does this passage *predict* his work?
- ii. Does this passage *prepare* for his work?
- iii. Does this passage *reflect* God's heart for redemption?
- iv. Does it show the *results* of Christ's work?²

IV. Quiz

² Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, Second edition. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 282–88.

Class 5: Takeaways

I. Introduction

A. Thoughts on the Study 4

B. Test Your Knowledge

II. Takeaways

A. Opening illustration about not making concrete takeaways in daily life.

III. Why are Making Concrete Takeaways Necessary?

A. God expects us to apply His Word.

1. Discuss James 1:22-24.

B. We are prone to forget what we just read.

C. They help us sort out how to best respond to ambiguous passages.

D. Applying God's Word is how we change and grow.

1. Illustration of how a garden grows.

E. Takeaways can fortify us against wrong thinking and living.

IV. What Happens When We Don't Take Anything Away from Scripture?

A. We can become puffed up with knowledge.

1. Discuss 1 Corinthians 8:1.

B. Our Bible reading can become stale and boring.

C. We will continue in sin.

D. We stay baby Christians.

1. Discuss 1 Corinthians 3:2-3.

E. We can harm the corporate witness of the church.

V. How Can We Make Solid, Concrete Takeaways?

A. Look for direct commands.

1. Use 1 Timothy 4:7 as an example.

B. Look for good and bad examples.

1. Use Mark 2:1-12 as an example.

C. Look for truths about God and mankind.

1. Look at Psalm 139:1-4.

2. Look at Psalm 23.

D. We can meditate on previous work.

1. The Author's Intent step is especially helpful for deriving application.

2. The Need for Christ step is also helpful for this.

E. Drill the text with application-producing questions.

1. Whitney's list of questions for application:

a. Does this text reveal something I should *believe about God*?

b. Does this text reveal something I should *praise or thank or trust God for*?

c. Does this text reveal something I should *pray about for myself or others*?

d. Does this text reveal something I should *have a new attitude about*?

e. Does this text reveal something I should *make a decision about*?

f. Does this text reveal something I should *do for the sake of Christ, others, or myself*?³

F. Create a principle statement and make it concrete.

³ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1991), 60.

1. Philippians 1:12

- a. Develop a principle statement.
- b. Make it into a concrete application.

2. Psalm 46:1

- a. Develop a principle statement.
- b. Make it into a concrete application.

VI. Conclusion

VII. Quiz

Class 6: What's Next?

I. Housekeeping

- A. Explain the Post-Survey
- B. Test Your Knowledge

II. Introduction

- A. What Now?
- B. An illustration about sharing what we love.

III. What Keeps Us from Passing It On?

- A. Fear of Rejection (A.K.A. the “Fear of Man”)
 - 1. Discuss Proverbs 29:25.
- B. Fear We Don't Know Enough
- C. Busy-ness
 - 1. We prioritize that which is important.
- D. We Aren't Invested in People Like We Ought to Be
 - 1. Perhaps we need to become more proactive in meeting and befriending non-believers and young Christians.
 - 2. Ask: What could I do this week to make it point to serve my neighbors?
Or speak to my neighbors?

IV. What are Some Ways We Can Pass It On?

- A. Read with other mature believers.
- B. Read with your spouse.
- C. Read with your children or grandchildren.
 - 1. If your children live far away, consider using the telephone or ZOOM.
 - 2. Illustration about building spiritual memories with your children.

3. Tips for reading the Bible one-on-one with children:

- a. Use an age-appropriate Bible.
- b. Consider using Bible reading notes.
- c. Read the great “stories” of the Bible.
- d. Use the K.I.S.S. Method instead of the CAN*T Method with kids.

D. Read with New Believers

1. Be intentional with your choice of Bible book.
2. Start with something easy like a Gospel or a letter.

E. Read with Non-Believers

1. Discuss Isaiah 55:11.
2. How to read the Bible with non-believers:
 - a. Pluck up the courage to ask.
 - b. Find a non-threatening location to read.
 - c. Look at one of the Gospels.
 - d. Consider using a “pocket-sized” Gospel.
 - e. Consider not praying... there.
 - i. Pray in your car beforehand if you are dealing with a hardened non-believer.
 - ii. If they have a religious background, feel free to pray at the meeting.
 - f. Do a “test run” before you schedule more meetings.
 - g. Be open to rabbit trails.
 - h. Be open to not knowing all the answers.
 - i. Have fun and watch the Holy Spirit work!

V. Conclusion

1. Concluding illustration about passing it on.
2. Reminder to fill out post-surveys after all sessions and studies are complete.

APPENDIX 4

ONE-ON-ONE BIBLE STUDIES

A Word on the Following Bible Studies

The following six studies are the actual Bible studies participants read with their Bible reading partners following each large group session. These six studies followed the CAN*T Method of Bible study, explored the Gospel of Mark, and reinforced the principles taught in the large group sessions.

Mark 1:1:1-15 (Study 1)

Read Mark 1:1-15

Mark's Gospel begins with an announcement of good news. I wonder what you make of it.

C – Context

What kind of literature is Mark's Gospel? Is it a letter, a prophecy, a proverb, or a historical narrative?

Who wrote this Gospel? Is there anything you might learn about him in a study Bible?

Here are a few places where the gospel writer, John Mark, is mentioned in the New Testament: Acts 12:12, 25; Acts 15:37, 39; Col 4:10, 2 Tim 4:11, Phlm 24, 1 Pet 5:13. If you have time, look up a few of these references. See what you gather about the life of Mark and what kind of man he was.

A – Author's Intent

What jumps out to you from this text?

What does Mark say this gospel is about in v. 1? What is he trying to prove to his readers?

What are the three "testimonies" that Mark highlights in this passage and how do they testify to Christ's identity? (vv. 2-3, vv. 7-8, v. 11)

Who drove Jesus into the wilderness? (v. 12)

After identifying with his people through baptism (vv. 9-11) and going through a time of testing in the wilderness (vv. 12-13), Jesus begins his ministry. What was Jesus' core message? (v. 15)

Why do you think Mark included this section in his Gospel?

N* – Need for Christ

Our Need

How does v. 15 strike you? In what ways does this verse rub up against our sinful nature?

Christ's Work

Instead of calling us to pay him back for our sin and misdeeds, what does Jesus call us to do (v. 15)?

T – Takeaway

What are your takeaways from reading this passage? How does it challenge you, encourage you or cause you to think about God differently?

Mark says his book is good news that centers on a person, Jesus Christ. If Christianity at its core is all about Christ (and not primarily about rules, religion, etc.), why is that truly great news?

Do you struggle to confess your sins to God? How can you work on that this week?

Would you say you have repented and believed the good news about Jesus? If you haven't or are hesitant, what gives you pause?

Mark 2:1-17 (Study 2)

Read Mark 2:1-17

Jesus did and said many things throughout his ministry that were shocking to all those around him. In our text today, we read about two such occasions.

C – Context

What has Jesus been up to since Mark 1:1-15? Flip back and note some of the things he has done that have left people awestruck.

Do you remember what Jesus' main message was as he traveled from town to town? (See Mark 1:15)

A – Author's Intent

What jumps out to you from this text?

Think of the first account as a movie scene. Where is the climax of the passage? (i.e., the place in the passage where the emotional intensity is at its highest)

Why are the scribes upset at Jesus? (v. 6-7) Why is this ironic? What is Mark trying to communicate to us?

Why is Jesus' choice of Levi shocking? (vv. 12-14) (HINT: vv. 15-16)

Does Jesus seem phased by these individuals' past? (v. 15)

Why does Jesus seek out such "scandalous" people? (v. 17)

Why do you think Mark included this section in his Gospel?

N* – Need for Christ

Our Need

How does this passage highlight our sinfulness?

What does this passage reveal is humanity's greatest need? (v. 5)

Christ's Work

How is Jesus perfectly suited to meet this need? (v. 7, 10)

How does v. 17 make you feel?

T – Takeaway

What are your takeaways from reading this passage? How does it challenge you, encourage you or cause you to think about God differently?

Jesus has the authority to forgive sins. Why do we, as sinful humans, bristle when confronted with Jesus' authority?

Jesus has a heart for the sinful, the wayward, and the lost. How might we mirror that heart this week? Is there anyone in your life that you could reach out to this week to pursue them for Christ?

Be honest. Do you see yourself as sinful as Levi, the tax collector? Why or why not? Should you?

How should seeing our sin move our hearts to reach the lost?

Mark 8:22-38 (Study 3)

Read Mark 8:22-38

Jesus performs a miracle in an unusual way, and Peter shows his brashness. Read on to learn more.

C – Context

In Chapter 7:6-7, Jesus quotes from Isaiah 29. What does verse 18 of Isaiah 29 tell us? What do you think Mark is showing us in these chapters?

What passage appears right before this? (Mark 8:14-21) What was Jesus talking about? What was the disciples' ultimate problem? (Mark 8:17, 18, and 21)

A – Author's Intent

What jumps out to you from this text?

What is unusual about the way Jesus heals this blind man? (vv. 22-26)

Who are some of the people that the crowds say Jesus is? (v. 28)

Why would people think Jesus is John the Baptist? (See Mark 6:14)

Why would some people think Jesus is Elijah? (See Mal 4:5-6)

Who does Peter say Jesus is?

Does Peter fully understand who Jesus is? Why or why not? (See v. 33)

What kind of Christ, or “Messiah,” is Jesus going to be? (vv. 31-32)

What must followers of Christ be willing to face if they follow him? (v. 34)

What happens to those who try to “save their own life” during this earthly life? And what about people that “lose their life”? (v. 35)

What does Jesus say about those who ultimately turn away from Christ and his gospel? (v. 38) Does this mean a person can lose their salvation?

N* – Need for Christ

Our Need

How does this passage highlight our sinfulness?

Why do you think Peter rebuked Jesus in v. 32? How are we like Peter?

Christ's Work

How does Jesus' work on the cross give us the strength to take up our own cross and follow him?

T – Takeaway

What are your takeaways from reading this passage? How does it challenge you, encourage you or cause you to think about God differently?

Jesus' mercy on the blind man points to how Christ will one day eliminate suffering altogether. How does that make you feel?

Can you relate to Peter in v. 32? Why do we naturally bristle against a Christ who suffers?

Where is Jesus calling you to "take up your cross" and follow him?

How do Jesus' words sober you in v. 38?

Mark 10:17-31 (Study 4)

Read Mark 10:17-31

How do you think the average person would answer this question: What must a person do to inherit salvation?

C – Context

What passage comes immediately before this? What kind of person enters the kingdom of God, according to Mark 10:14-15?

In terms of “being blessed by God,” what did the typical Jew in the first century think about those who had obtained great wealth?

A – Author’s Intent

What jumps out to you from this text?

What does the rich man want to find out from Jesus? (v. 17)

Of the commandments that relate to our interpersonal relationships (Commandments 5 to 10) which striking commandment did Jesus leave out? (See Exodus 20:12-17)

In light of the above question, why do you think Jesus tells the man to sell all his possessions and give to the poor?

Why do you think the disciples are so astonished? (v. 26)

It is impossible for man to accomplish salvation, but who can? (v. 27)

What did the rich man fail to have? (Remember vv. 14-15)

Why is following Jesus worth it? (vv. 29-30)

What does Jesus say about those in “last place” and those in “first place” in the world’s eyes? (v. 31)

N* – Need for Christ

Our Need

How does this passage highlight our sinfulness?

What is true about all of humanity? (v. 18)

Why is our natural assumption that we can somehow inherit eternal life? (v. 17 and esp. v. 18)

Christ's Work

What does Jesus' question on goodness (v. 18) reveal to Mark's readers about his true identity?

How did Jesus' death and resurrection make the impossible, possible (v. 27)?

T – Takeaway

What are your takeaways from reading this passage? How does it challenge you, encourage you or cause you to think about God differently?

In light of what we have seen in today's study, is Jesus' command to sell all one's possessions intended to be a universal command for all of God's people everywhere? How would you respond to someone who says that it is?

The rich man clearly had made an idol of his wealth. What "good thing" might you love too much? How would you react if the Lord took it away from you?

Is following Jesus' call to self-sacrifice worth it? Why, based on this passage?

Mark 15:25-39 (Study 5)

Read Mark 15:25-39

The cross has always been *the* symbol of Christianity, and yet, crosses were a method of execution. Someone once pointed out that people today do not wear necklaces with electric chairs on them, but many do wear cross jewelry. Why do Christians care so much about the cross?

C – Context

The inscription that would have been placed above Jesus' head on the cross read, "King of the Jews" (v. 26). Based on what we've seen in Mark's Gospel, why is this ironic?

The passersby that mock Jesus say he was out to destroy the temple. To what are they referring? What was Jesus really talking about? (See John 2:19-22)

A – Author's Intent

What jumps out to you from this text?

What is incredibly sad about vv. 31-32?

Jesus says something shocking from the cross. What is it? (vv. 34-35) What do you make of it?

Read Psalm 22:1. What, then, is Jesus reciting in Mark 15:34-35?

What is striking about the middle of this Psalm (vv. 12-18)?

When Jesus breathed his last, what happened elsewhere in Jerusalem? (v. 38)

While the religious leaders mock him, who is it that actually understands something extremely significant has just happened? (v. 39)

N* – Need for Christ

Our Need

How did the religious leaders get to the point where they were able to say things they said about Jesus in this passage?

What does it say about humanity's sinful state that the very people who were waiting on the Messiah crucified him?

Christ's Work

How does Jesus enduring the Father's wrath for us on the cross make you feel?

What did the tearing of the temple curtain mean for sinners and their approach to God? (See Heb 9:7-12)

T – Takeaway

How does Jesus' forsaken state on the cross comfort you when you feel forsaken?

Based on this passage, why did Jesus endure the cross?

Do you ever grow numb to the wonder of the cross? Why do you think that is?

What are some practical ways this week you can remind yourself what the Savior did for you?

How can you emulate the faith of the centurion this week?

Mark 15:40-16:8 (Study 6)

Read Mark 15:40-16:8

Think about the lowest you've ever felt in life. The women who followed Christ were feeling that and more as they watched their Messiah die on the cross.

C – Context

What has happened immediately prior to this passage?

A – Author's Intent

What jumps out to you from this text?

Who witnesses Jesus' death in vv. 40-41?

What happens to Jesus' body after his death? Why do you think Mark includes these details?

What is the angel's message to the women in 16:6?

Why is that particularly encouraging for Peter? (v. 7 - HINT: See Mark 14:66-72)

The original text of Mark's Gospel ends at v. 8. Why do you think Mark ends with the women being very afraid? What is the message for us today?

N* – Need for Christ

Our Need

How does this passage highlight our sinfulness?

How are we sometimes like the women in v. 8?

Christ's Work

How does Jesus' grace shown to Peter encourage us in our fear and shame?

What are some of the implications of the resurrection in terms of our fear of others? Fear of death? Fear of suffering? Fear of persecution?

T – Takeaway

Why do you think we often default to silence, even when we hold in our hearts the greatest news the world has ever heard?

In light of this passage, how can you grow in your boldness this week? ^[P]_[SEP] Who could you share the good news of the resurrection with this week? Is there someone on your heart you could begin praying for on a regular basis that doesn't know Jesus?

Is there anyone you feel might be willing to read the Bible with you? Another Christian? Perhaps, even a non-Christian that needs to hear the good news of Jesus?

How has reading the book of Mark challenged or encouraged you?

Has your understanding of Jesus changed as a result of reading this Gospel? If so, how?

APPENDIX 5
NARRATIVE ANALYSES

A Narrative Analysis¹ of Mark 1:1-15 (Study 1)²

I. Read Actively

1. Isolate the Literary Unit

There are many ways to dissect the “introduction” to Mark’s Gospel. Sound arguments can be made for seeing v. 1, vv. 1-8, vv. 1-11, or vv. 1-13 as the appropriate pericope. However, it can also be argued that the true introduction of Mark extends from v. 1 to v. 15, paving the way for the introduction of Jesus’ Galilean ministry in v. 16. Because I would like to give Bible readers a broad overview of Mark’s Gospel in these one-on-one studies, I have chosen vv. 1-15 as the pericope of this first study.

2. Read the Story Multiple Times

First, I read the text in the UBS5 Greek New Testament. After this, I read the passage in the ESV, NASB, NIV, CSB, NLT, and KJV to see how different translations handled the text.

¹ The narrative analyses in this appendix follow the 10-step model found in Jonathan T. Pennington, *Reading the Gospels Wisely: A Narrative and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 214–15.

² In the initial draft of this Doctor of Ministry Project, I included scanned copies of all six Greek translations from Mark’s Gospel in an additional appendix. However, this drastically increased the project’s page length. Upon reflection, it became clear that these needed to be omitted in the final draft in order to keep the project within a reasonable page count.

The most striking difference was in the NLT, which often aids readers when it comes across difficult texts. In v. 4, the ESV notes, “John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” This is a difficult text for evangelicals because it may sound to some that John is teaching baptismal regeneration. The NLT interprets the phrase for the reader noting that John “preached that people should be baptized to show that they had repented of their sins and turned to God to be forgiven.” I prefer the literal translation of this verse, even though I agree with the theology the NLT espouses in their rendering.

The second most notable difference is how the NIV, CSB, and NLT all render gospel as “good news” in vv. 1, 14, and 15. This is not a major issue, though I still prefer the more literal “gospel.”

3. Identify the Setting and the Characters

The primary settings are the Jordan River, the wilderness of Judea, and the region of Galilee. The primary characters are John the Baptist, the crowds, Jesus of Nazareth, and Satan.

4. Observe the Story

Several features of the text immediately struck me as I read.

First, in this introduction, it is clear Mark is bolstering Jesus’ “resume” as the Messiah, as it were. (1) He does this through the three witnesses that speak on Jesus’ behalf: the prophets in v. 3, John the Baptist in vv. 7-8, and the voice of God himself in v. 11. Each of these creates a feeling of anticipation. (2) By highlighting the Spirit driving Jesus into the wilderness, I am detecting a possible allusion to the Garden of Eden (Adam was driven out of the Garden) and perhaps an allusion to Israel’s temptation in the wilderness during the Exodus. If this is the case, Jesus is being presented as a Second Adam and the true Israel in this text. Second, I find the description of John interesting.

Why did Mark include this in the text? Third, Jesus was not just a healer, a great teacher, and the substitute for sinners, he was a preacher! Verses 14 and 15 make it clear that Jesus followed in the footsteps of John, proclaiming that people should turn from their sin and turn to God.

5. Isolate the Different Scenes

After the introductory verse of Mark 1:1, the pericope of vv. 1-15 may be divided into four major scenes: (1) The ministry of John the Baptist (vv. 2-8), (2) the baptism of Jesus (vv. 9-11), (3) the temptation of Jesus (vv. 12-13), and (4) the preaching of Jesus (vv. 14-15).

6. Analyze the Narrative

(i) Identify the Setting

There are three settings in this pericope, so perhaps it would be best to mention all three. The first setting is the region of the Jordan River (v. 5), the second setting is the wilderness of Judea (v. 12), and finally, the last setting is the region of Galilee (v. 14).

(ii) Identify the Rising Tension

The rising tension occurs in vv. 2-9. By the beginning of verse 9, the reader is on the edge of his seat asking the text, “When is this Mighty One going to appear?” Verse 9 speaks about this man called Jesus being baptized. Could he be the one?

(iii) Identify the Climax of Tension

The climax of the passage occurs in verse 10, as the heavens are torn open, and the Spirit descends on Jesus like a dove. If the narrative ended here, the reader would be shocked and dismayed.

(iv) Identify the Resolution of the Tension

The resolution occurs as Jesus receives the heavenly voice's commendation in v. 11. This truly is the person the people of God have been waiting for, as the Lord himself testifies to Jesus' identity and the pleasure he feels for him.

**(v) Identify the Following Action/
Interpretation**

Mark concludes this passage by mentioning how the Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness, Jesus' subsequent temptation there, and his ministry of proclaiming the gospel of God in Galilee (vv. 12-15). Jesus, the one with whom God is pleased, is now moving forward with his ministry.

7. Think about the Contexts

(i) Acts, Cycles, and Literary Structures

First, the pericope is situated in an introductory "act" of Mark's Gospel, which spans from v. 1 to v. 15 and prepares the reader for what is to come in the life and ministry of Jesus. Second, the passage is also a part of a broader cycle of Mark 1:1-2:12, which seems to focus on the authority of Christ. Finally, this passage is situated in the first half of Mark's Gospel (1:1-8:30), which explores Jesus' identity. Who was this Jesus of Nazareth? In contrast, the second half of Mark's Gospel (8:31-16:8), Mark tends to focus on the suffering of Jesus.

(ii) The Whole Gospel Context

When it comes to intratextuality, the dual themes of Jesus as the Christ and Jesus as the Son of God appear several times in the Gospel. For example, after introducing the theme of Jesus as the Christ in v. 1, the next time that title is mentioned is at the pivotal 8:29, the hinge verse of the entire book. The title also appears at 12:35, 13:2-22, 14:61, and 15:32. Most of these references occur as Jesus locks horns with the religious leaders. The religious leaders have a certain view of the Christ, but what kind of

Christ is Jesus going to be? The phrase “Son of God” appears twice in Mark after this passage. The first time it appears is in Mark 3:11 after a demon recognizes Jesus’ true identity. The irony of this section is that while Jesus’ followers and the crowds do not understand that Jesus is God’s Son, the demons do. The second instance is found on the lips of another unlikely individual, the Roman centurion, in Mark 15:39. This forms a nice bookend. Jesus is revealed as the Son of God in his suffering and crucifixion, something Mark labors to show in the second half of his Gospel.

John the Baptist is referenced again in Mark 2:18 as a question arises about fasting. His death is mentioned in Mark 6. Finally, when Jesus asks about the public’s perception of himself in Mark 8:27, the disciples reply “John the Baptist” as one of the options in v. 28.

Finally, the theme of the “kingdom of God” also appears several times in the Gospel as Jesus teaches the disciples and crowds.

A horizontal reading of this passage sheds light on a few of Mark’s emphases in the text, as well. (1) There is an introductory section about John the Baptist’s ministry in every gospel. Matthew’s account of John’s ministry (3:1-12) includes a section about a run-in between John the Baptist and the religious leaders (vv. 7-10, 12). Luke 3:1-9 and 15-17 speaks of this run-in as well. However, Luke also mentions economic implications of repentance (v. 11), as he highlights John’s interactions with tax collectors, soldiers, and a crowd. John 1:19-28 is similar to Mark’s account. However, it departs when the crowds ask the Baptist if he was Elijah. After considering these details, Mark’s account seems streamlined. The account of John the Baptist’s ministry serves the purpose of witnessing to Jesus and moving the plot along quickly.

(2) The baptism of Jesus also appears in other gospel accounts with each gospel writer highlighting different theological details. For example, in Matthew 3:13-17, Matthew includes John’s protest to baptizing Jesus and the detail that Jesus’ baptism was

to “fulfill all righteousness” (v. 15). On the other hand, Luke’s baptism account (Luke 3:21-22) is short like Mark’s. The only real difference is that Luke mentions how heaven was opened “as Jesus prayed” (v. 21).

(3) The temptation account also appears in the other Synoptics (Matt 4:1-11, Luke 4:1-13). In Matthew and Luke, both accounts are related in great detail. Mark simply mentions the temptation and moves the narrative forward.

(4) Finally, the first days of Jesus’ Galilean ministry are also mentioned in Matthew 4:12-17 and Luke 4:14-15. Matthew includes quotations from Isaiah 9 & 42, while Luke’s account is very brief like Mark’s. It seems to me that Mark mentions these things to set the scene for what is to come but does not want to dwell on the particulars.

Finally, no reading would be complete without considering how Jesus’s death and resurrection impact the passage. In truth, these twin realities form the basis for the entire passage. The death and resurrection of Jesus are the pivotal moments that make the gospel good news indeed. All the preparation work of John the Baptist, all the witnesses that pointed to him in vv. 1-11, and all Jesus’ temptations would have been for naught if Jesus had not died and rose again.

(iii) The Kingdom-focused, Redemptive-Historical Context of the Whole Canon

This passage is filled with kingdom-focus, redemptive-historical themes. First, the first section (1:1-3) is brimming with redemptive-historical anticipation. (1) The word *εὐαγγέλιον* points to this. In Isaiah, the word appears in 52:7 and links it with a coming day of salvation for the people of God: “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news . . . who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.” While it is true that the word *εὐαγγέλιον* had Greco-Roman significance, Rikk Watts notes, “the primary horizon is Israel’s

narrative and in particular Isaiah's prophetic hopes of restoration."³ (2) The mention of Isaiah the prophet in v. 2 further confirms this Isaianic backdrop. The reference to Isaiah 40:3 shows that a new era of salvation is dawning. (3) Mark's use of Malachi 3:1 shows it was not merely Isaiah who was looking forward to this day. Instead, this day of redemption was anticipated by the wide swath of the prophets. The long-anticipated salvation of the people of God is truly at hand as John the Baptist comes on the scene.

Second, the baptism of Jesus (vv. 9-11) has a couple of OT allusions embedded in it. (1) The tearing of the heavens likely alludes to Isaiah 64:1. In this section in Isaiah, Isaiah begs the Lord to have mercy on his people. In verse 1, Isaiah calls on the Lord to reveal himself to the nations. It is striking that Mark sees the Lord answering this prayer through the coming of Jesus. As the Father approves the Son at his baptism and tears open the heavens, he is about to "make [his] name known to [his] adversaries" (Isa 64:1) through the person and work of his Son. Through Christ, the nations will truly "tremble at your presence!" (v. 2). Mark's first audience would have picked up on this theme and saw how the Lord was bringing about Isaiah's long-awaited time of restoration. (2) The voice from heaven also brings to mind many instances of Yahweh speaking to his people in the OT. Most striking is Exodus 4:22-23, where Lord calls Israel his Son. This shows that Jesus Christ, at his baptism, is not only being baptized as the Second Person of the Trinity but also as the perfect Israelite. The Son that Israel was supposed to be.

Third, in the final section, kingdom-focused themes are front and center as Jesus' central message was that the anticipated Kingdom of God had come near. In 2 Samuel 7:16, the Lord promised to David that "your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever." Israel waited in

³ Rikk E. Watts, "Mark," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic), 113.

anticipation for this to happen in time and space. In these verses, we see Jesus Christ establishing that kingdom before Israel's very eyes.

8. Write a Summary Paragraph

In this first section in Mark's Gospel, the Lord has come to restore his people. Three witnesses attest to the Son's authority (the prophets, John the Baptist, and the Father). The baptism and temptation narratives prepare Jesus for this restoration mission, and Jesus' message is that God's kingdom has come near. In light of this, it is appropriate that all people everywhere repent and believe the good news.

II. Articulate the Revelation and Identification

1. The Revelation of God in Christ

In this text, we see that Jesus is the Christ and the Son of God. He is the Lord, whose way has been prepared by John. He is the true Son of God, who has been approved by the Father. He is the One who has endured Satan's temptations and emerged victoriously. Finally, he is the One who is ushering in the Kingdom of God and now calls people everywhere to repent and believe the good news.

2. Identification of Character Traits to be Emulated or Avoided

There are several character traits in the passage that we are to emulate. First, we, like John and Jesus, are to never be ashamed to call men and women to repent of their sins and trust in the Lord (vv. 4, 15). We as believers should emulate their faithful proclamation and speak the truth in love to a lost and dying world. Second, we see John's incredible humility on display, as he points others to the One who would come after him (v. 7). As believers, we should always be seeking to build up Christ's kingdom and not our own. John's humility is a counter-cultural example of greatness. Third, in the Father's

commendation of the Son, we are reminded of the great love he poured out on Jesus. In turn, we should long to please the Father, as Christ pleased the Father by his obedience.

III. Identify a Fallen Condition, Redemptive Solution, and Virtue Formation Goal

The fallen condition in the passage is found in the fact that every person stands in need of repentance. However, the truth is we are often unwilling to admit it. Because of this, both John and Jesus made sure to put repentance at the very center of their message.

The redemptive solution in this passage is found in Jesus, who calls people to repent and believe in the good news. In turning from our sin, we turn to God in Christ. As we do this, believing he is the long-anticipated King and Son of God, we find forgiveness in him.

The virtue that is to be formed in God's people based on this passage is a humility that is quick to repent when we are wrong. Often, humans only repent when the consequences of their sin expose their wrongdoing. In contrast to this, believers should be quick to confess their sins to the Lord, turn from those sins, and believe the gospel of Jesus Christ once again.

A Narrative Analysis of Mark 2:1-17 (Study 2)

I. Read Actively

1. Isolate the Literary Unit

For this Bible study, I have chosen Mark 2:1-17 as the pericope. Two accounts are in view here (1:1-12 and 1:13-17). However, because this Bible study will focus on Jesus and his heart for sinners, it made sense to include Jesus' calling of Levi. As I analyze this text, I will break up each section into two parts: the healing of the paralyzed man and the calling of Levi.

2. Read the Story Multiple Times

To begin my analysis, I first read the text in the UBS5 Greek New Testament. After that, I read the passage again in the NASB, ESV, CSB, NIV, NLT, and KJV translations.

In verse 4, both the CSB and NIV clarify that the roof was not simply uncovered but dug through. This helps readers today understand the makeup of the roofs. We are not to think of a shingle roof like we have today, but a roof made of mud, tile, and sticks.

In verse 5, the NLT has Jesus saying "Child, your sins are forgiven." Instead of "Son, your sins are forgiven like the others. This seems to me to be an unnecessary removal of gender language.

In verse 6, the NASB and KJV render *διαλογιζόμενοι* as "reasoning" while the ESV and the CSB render it "questioning." The NIV and NLT simply translate it as "thinking to themselves."

In verse 9, The NASB renders *κράβαττον* as "pallet," the ESV and KJV render it as "bed," while the others translate it as "mat." Mat seems to be the better translation for readers today.

In verse 13, the NIV and NLT describe the Sea of Galilee as a lake. This is probably clearer for today's readers.

In verse 14, all the modern versions translate *τελώνιον* as "tax booth." The CSB, however, calls it the "tax office." This may conjure the wrong image for modern readers. "Tax booth" seems to be the better rendering.

Finally, in verse 17, the NLT clarifies what Jesus means at the end of v. 17, "I have come to call not those who *think they are righteous*, but *those who know they are sinners* (emphasis added)." While this may be the correct interpretation, I prefer the more literal translation.

3. Identify the Setting and the Characters

The first narrative's setting is a home in Capernaum where Jesus is staying (v. 1). The second narrative's setting is beside the sea of Galilee (v. 13). However, it must not be literally on the seashore, because Jesus is passing by a tax booth (v. 14). After this, Jesus goes back to this house to eat with tax collectors and sinners, which would be an additional setting. The characters in this narrative are Jesus, the paralytic, the paralytic's friends, the crowd, the scribes, Levi/Matthew, Jesus' disciples, the Pharisees, and sinners and tax collectors.

4. Observe the Story

Many things struck me as I read the text as I read the first account. First, Jesus' popularity is growing (v. 2). The word is beginning to get out about his ministry, so much so that he is not able to accommodate those who want to listen to his teaching. Second, Jesus' ministry was focused on preaching (v. 2). This is significant, given that many portray Jesus as a mere healer or social justice warrior. Third, in the healing of the paralytic, it is striking that Jesus commends the four men for *their* faith (v. 5). After this, Jesus heals the man. There is something about the desperation of these men that moves

Jesus' heart. Most shocking of all, Jesus opens by forgiving the man's sin, not immediately healing him (v. 5). This points to a theme that I believe we will see later. Humanity's ultimate problem is sin. A couple of other features that strike me in the first account are as follows. Jesus can know what people are thinking (v. 8). Jesus' words in verses 8 to 11 are incredibly wise, creating the perfect scenario to show his power and authority.

In the second account, I find it striking that Jesus would call a tax collector to be His disciple (v. 14). Equally shocking is his dinner with "many tax collectors and sinners" (v. 15). When both accounts are taken together, there is a repeated theme of the religious leaders' scoffing (vv. 6, 16). Additionally, each instance of unbelief and scoffing is met with a profound reply by Jesus' (vv. 8-9, and v. 17). By placing these two accounts side by side, Mark seems to suggest that, as amazing as Jesus' healing miracles were, his ability and authority to forgive sins is even more shocking.

5. Isolate the Different Scenes

The major scenes in the passage are: (1) Jesus heals the paralytic (vv. 1-12), (2) Jesus calls Levi to follow him (vv. 12-14), and (3) Jesus reclines at table with tax collectors and sinners (vv. 15-17).

6. Analyze the Narrative

(i) Identify the Setting

This section of Scripture has three settings. The first setting is the house where Jesus was staying in Capernaum (v. 1), the second set is the "beside the sea," or, more precisely, Levi's tax booth near the sea (vv. 13-14), and the last setting is back at Jesus' house (or possibly Levi's house) in Capernaum (v. 15).

(ii) Identify the Rising Tension

In the first section (vv. 1-12), the rising tension occurs in vv. 1-9. As the scribes' question in their hearts and Jesus responds with divine knowledge, the temperature in the room rises.

In the second section (vv. 13-17), the rising tension occurs in vv. 13-16, Jesus is pursuing the scandal. Again, the scribes are upset. The stage is set for another confrontation.

(iii) Identify the Climax of Tension

The climax of the first section occurs as Jesus utters his statement, ““But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins—he said to the paralytic— ‘I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home’” (vv. 10-11). At this point, everyone is riveted to Jesus. What is going to happen? The climax of the section occurs as Jesus “hears” their objection to his meal with sinners (v. 17). How will Jesus react to this objection?

(iv) Identify the Resolution of the Tension

The resolution in the first section occurs when the man is miraculously healed in v. 12. The resolution (and following action/interpretation) in the section occurs in v. 17 with Jesus' response, “Those who are well do not need a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”

(v) Identify the Following Action/ Interpretation

Mark closes the first section with a comment about how the people “were all amazed and glorified God, saying, ‘We never saw anything like this!’” (v. 12). This serves as the following action/interpretation. Jesus' words in v. 17 serve as the following action/interpretation in the second section.

7. Think about the Contexts

(i) Acts, Cycles, and Literary Structures

First, while it could be argued that 2:1-12 and 2:13-17 belong in separate pericopes, their common theme of “Jesus calls sinners” causes me to include both passages for this second one-on-one Bible study.

Second, this passage serves as a bridge between an earlier cycle that focuses on the authority of Christ (Mark 1:1-2:12) and another cycle that focuses on several “controversies” that Jesus faced with the religious leaders (Mark 2:13-3:12).

Like Mark 1:1-15, Mark 2:1-17 is situated in the first half of Mark’s Gospel (1:1-8:30), which explores Jesus’ identity. In the second half of Mark’s Gospel (8:31-16:8), there is a shift in focus, delving into Jesus’ suffering.

(ii) The Whole Gospel Context

As one looks at Mark 2:1-17 and examines its intratextual themes, several points come to mind.

First, in Mark’s gospel, the “crowds” (v. 4, 13) serve as an important character in the narrative. In 3:7-9, the crowds flock to Jesus, so much so that they threaten to crush him. In 3:20, Jesus can’t even eat there are so many people to heal. In Chapter 4, a crowd gathers to hear Jesus’ teaching (v. 1). Another crowd gathers in 5:21. One could multiply examples. The crowds follow Jesus and are intrigued by his teaching and miracle-working power, though they aren’t quite sure what to make of his identity.

Second, the theme of faith appears in other passages in Mark. After Jesus calms the storm in Mark 4:40, he chastises the disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?” In Mark 5:34, he tells the woman with the flow of blood that her “faith has made [her] well.”⁴ Finally, after Jesus curses the fig tree in Mark 11, he turns to the disciples and tells them to “Have faith in God” (v. 22) Unlike the fruitless religious

⁴ See also the blind man in Mark 10:52.

establishment of Jerusalem, the disciples were to trust the Lord.

Third, the theme of Jesus' authority is also present in the passage. In Chapters 1-2, this is very much a theme. Jesus has authority over unclean spirits in 1:21-28. He has authority over sickness in 1:29-34 and 1:40-45. He has authority over the Sabbath in 2:23-28. In 2:1-12, in particular, we see Jesus' authority to forgive sin.

Fourth, finally, we see the theme of Jesus' love for sinners. Jesus cares for sinners in this passage. He looks at the paralyzed man and forgives the man's sin in v. 5. He calls Levi, a tax collector in v. 14. He dines with tax collectors and sinners in v. 15. Other places in Mark continue this theme. In Mark 5, Jesus casts out a demon from a man who had been among the graves who was a Gerasene (5:1-13). Jesus has mercy on a Syrophenician woman in 7:26. Jesus has a heart for people on the fringes of society and people who are clearly in rebellion against God.

A horizontal reading is also helpful when interpreting this passage. Both accounts are mentioned in the other synoptic gospels. The healing of the paralyzed man occurs in Matt 9:1-8 and Luke 5:17-26, while Jesus' calling of Levi (A.K.A. Matthew) also occurs in Matt 9:9-13 and Luke 5:27-32.

A horizontal reading of the account of the paralyzed man yields the following. In Matthew, the story is more or less the same. Less detail, however, is given to the events overall. For example, there is no mention of the friends removing the roof of the building in Matthew's account. On the other hand, Luke mentions the account in great detail, pointing out several other details. First, Luke points out that "the power of the Lord was with [Jesus] to heal" in v. 17. Second, he describes the roof of the house in more detail than Mark, mentioning the tiles of the roof (v. 19). It is also worth mentioning that all three synoptic writers make much of the faith of the paralyzed man's friends.

Finally, the interpretation of this passage is affected by Jesus' death and resurrection in this way. When we think about Jesus' authority to forgive sins and his

love for sinners, nowhere is this seen more clearly than at that cross. At the cross, the mercy and justice of God meet. Jesus Christ's love for sinners was such that he was willing to be substituted in their place for their sin. The Son of God cried out, "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34), so that we would not have to be forsaken as we deserve.

(iii) The Kingdom-focused, Redemptive-Historical Context of the Whole Canon

Finally, this passage has several kingdom-focus, redemptive-historical themes. First, there is the issue of sin and authority. One such allusion comes in the religious leaders' retort, "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" This is likely a reference to Isaiah 43:25, "I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins." It is clear from the Old Testament that sins cannot be forgiven by human authorities. The sacrificial system made it clear that the Lord, and the Lord alone, held that kind of authority. However, in Jesus, we have not only the sacrifice for sin but God himself. In many ways, one cannot blame the religious leaders for objecting the way they did. However, Jesus subsequent miracle should have caused them to investigate Jesus' claims further

Second, the passage also brings up the Old Testament theme of the "Son of Man." While the phrase "son of man" appears in many passages in the Old Testament as a generic reference, there are a few instances where it takes on a specific meaning. One of the most striking examples of this is Daniel 7:13, which states, "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him." It seems as though Jesus preferred this moniker over other messianic titles because of its ambiguity and double meaning. Little did the crowd know, they were standing before the very one about whom Daniel prophesied.

8. Write a Summary Paragraph

In these two passages, Jesus shows his authority to forgive sin and his heart to pursue sinners. In the first narrative, the most shocking thing Jesus did was not healing the paralyzed man but forgiving the man's sin. The miracle primarily serves to highlight Jesus' authority to forgive. In the second narrative, Jesus also shocks the scribes with his heart for sinners. He calls a tax collector, Levi, to be his disciples and even dines with sinners and tax collectors.

II. Articulate the Revelation and Identification

1. The Revelation of God in Christ

This text reveals Jesus to be the God of Isaiah 43:25, who has the authority to forgive sin.

2. Identification of Character Traits to be Emulated or Avoided

There are two character traits Christians should emulate after reading this passage. First, Christians should emulate the friends' desperate faith in Jesus and their compassion for their friend. They saw their friend in need and knew Jesus could meet that need. Therefore, they would let no obstacle keep them from bringing their paralyzed friend to Jesus. Second, Christians should also imitate Jesus' heart for sinners. It is easy for Christians to only reach out to "people like us" or friends that primarily indulge in "middle-class" vices like envy, covetousness, and pride—to the neglect of those in our culture that may be involved in more public and a flagrant sin. However, Jesus reaches out to all kinds of people—even sinners and tax collectors. We would do well to consider the people in our lives we believe to be "unreachable" and then pursue them as Christ did.

III. Identify a Fallen Condition, Redemptive Solution, and Virtue Formation Goal

The fallen condition in the passage is found in our tendency to think that our greatest need is anything but the forgiveness of sin. However, this need for forgiveness is the fundamental human problem that the gospel addresses.

The redemptive solution in this passage is found in the fact that Christ not only has the authority to forgive sinners but also pursues sinners.

The virtue formation goal in the passage is the friends' desperate faith. They saw their friends' need for Jesus (even if they did not understand his spiritual need at first) and did anything to get their friend to Jesus. This desperate faith that knows Jesus is the answer to our deepest needs, hurts, and problems should be commended and emulated.

A Narrative Analysis of Mark 8:22-38 (Study 3)

I. Read Actively

1. Isolate the Literary Unit

The pericope chosen for this Bible study is Mark 8:22-38. Some might break this pericope into three individual narratives. However, it is clear from the text that the story of a twice-touched blind man serves as an enacted parable, highlighting the disciples' spiritual blindness in vv. 31-38. For this reason, it seems best to study the three narratives together.

2. Read the Story Multiple Times

First, I read the text in Greek. After this, I read it again in the ESV, NASB, NIV, CSB, NLT, and KJV to note any differences in translation. Overall, the variations in translations were minimal. In v. 22, the NLT adds the clarifying words, "and heal him," when speaking of Jesus' touch. In v. 26, the KJV includes the words "nor tell it to any in the town." This seems to be a text-critical issue. After looking this up in the NA28, I discovered it was indeed a text-critical issue. The best manuscripts do not include this statement. Finally, in v. 29, while the ESV, NASB, and KJV, have Peter telling Jesus that he is the "Christ," the NIV, CSB, and NLT all use the Jewish term, "Messiah." All in all, these differences are minimal and affect the interpretation of the passage very little.

3. Identify the Setting and the Characters

There are three primary settings in the passage. First, 8:22-26 is set in the village of Bethsaida and, later, the outskirts of the city. Second, 8:27-30 is set on the road to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. Finally, 8:31-38 is set in this same region as Jesus calls the crowd around him to listen closely to his teaching.

The characters in the passage include the blind man, the people who brought the blind man to Jesus, Jesus, Peter, the disciples, the crowd.

4. Observe the Story

Several insights jump out to me as I read this text. First, I'm struck by the two-stage healing of the blind man in the passage (vv. 22-25). I've studied this passage before, so I know it is an enacted parable that points to the disciples' blindness. However, I'm still struck by the mastery of Mark and the providence of God in clear parallels between these accounts. Second, I also find it striking that Jesus tells the blind man not to "even enter the village" (v. 26), and Jesus tells the disciples not to tell anyone about him in v. 30. I know this is because they do not understand truly what kind of Messiah he will be. However, it still jumps out to me every time I read this text. Third, Jesus' plain teaching about his suffering is striking (v. 32). Jesus made it very clear what was going to happen to him. Fourth, Peter's rebuke of Jesus and his suffering is seen to be Satanic (v. 33). Fifth, the Gospel call is a call to suffer and deny oneself, just like Jesus suffered (v. 34). Sixth, Jesus takes our allegiance seriously. Verse 38 speaks of the cost of being ashamed of Jesus and his words.

5. Isolate the Different Scenes

This passage may be divided into four scenes: (1) Jesus' encounter with the blind man (vv. 22-26), (2) Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ (vv. 27-30), (3) Jesus' rebuke of Peter (vv. 31-33), and (4) Jesus' teaching on the cost of following him (vv. 34-38).

6. Analyze the Narrative

(i) Identify the Setting

The setting for 8:22-26 is set in the village of Bethsaida and, later, the outskirts of the city. After this, the setting for 8:27-30 is the road toward the villages of Caesarea Philippi. Finally, the setting for 8:31-38 is the region of Caesarea Philippi.

(ii) Identify the Rising Tension

In the first narrative, the rising tension occurs in verses 22-25. As Jesus' healing seemingly "fails," the reader is left wondering what is going to happen the second time Jesus touches this man. In the second narrative, the rising tension is found in vv. 27-29. The tension builds until Jesus asks the all-important question, "But who do you say that I am?" (v. 29). In the third narrative, the rising tension occurs in vv. 31-32, Peter has just rebuked Jesus for his teaching. What is Jesus going to do in response?

(iii) Identify the Climax of Tension

The climax of the first passage occurs in v. 25 as Jesus' touch heals the blind man. The climax of the second occurs when Peter answers, "You are the Christ" (v. 29). In the final narrative, the climax occurs in v. 33 with Jesus' rebuke of Peter's action as Satanic.

(iv) Identify the Resolution of the Tension

In the first section, the resolution of the tension occurs in the phrase "and he saw everything clearly" (v. 25). In the second, the resolution comes in the way Jesus does not deny what Peter has said in v. 30. In the final section, the resolution comes as Jesus tells the crowd, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (v. 34).

(v) Identify the Following Action/ Interpretation

The following action/interpretation occurs in these places. In the first account, Jesus tells the blind man to not even enter the village (v. 26). In the second, he tells the disciples not to tell people who he is (v. 30). Finally, Jesus elaborates on what he means by "deny yourself" and speaks of the cost of being ashamed of him in vv. 35-38.

7. Think about the Contexts

(i) Acts, Cycles, and Literary Structures

First, since I've chosen three sections back-to-back, Mark 8:22-38 comprises its own "act" of Mark's Gospel that focuses on the theme of spiritual blindness and what it means to "see" Jesus clearly as the Suffering Servant. Second, the passage is also a part of a broader cycle that stretches from 6:7 with the Sending of the Twelve until this "hinge" section of the twice-touched blind man. Interestingly, this section is bookended by references to John the Baptist (6:14 and 8:28). Finally, this passage serves as the hinge passage of the two halves of Mark's Gospel (1:1-8:30 and 8:31-16:8).

(ii) The Whole Gospel Context

There are many intratextual themes in this passage. First, Jesus as the "Christ" is given prominence in v. 29. It appears first in Mark's introduction (1:1). There he sets the stage for this book; he aims to show that Jesus truly was the Christ. Mark 9:41 speaks of those who are blessed as a result of blessing the disciples, who belong to "Christ." In Mark 12-13, there are several mentions of the title, Christ. In Mark 14, at Jesus' trial, Jesus is asked directly if he is the "Christ, the Son of the Blessed" (v. 61)? Finally, as Jesus is reviled at the cross, the name "Christ" is invoked by the passersby. Second, the "messianic secret" is also a theme in Mark's Gospel. There are many examples of Jesus telling people to not tell others about him (Mark 1:43-44, 5:43, etc.). Even after his Transfiguration, Jesus told Peter, James, and John to not tell (9:9). This is because Jesus did not want people to misunderstand his identity. Jesus was coming as the Messiah, but a suffering Messiah. Finally, Jesus' foretelling of his death and resurrection also occurs two other times in Mark (9:30-31 and 10:33-34). Each of these instances is followed by a misunderstanding on the part of the disciples. It was very difficult for the disciples to understand that Jesus came to suffer, die, and rise again.

A horizontal reading of the passage also yields insight. The account of the twice-touched blind man does not appear in Matthew or Luke. However, Peter's

confession and Jesus' death and resurrection prediction do. In Peter's confession account, Matthew 16:13-20 gets specific and mentions that some people were saying that Jesus was "Jeremiah" in addition to other prophets. Similarly, Luke 9:18-21 also expands on this account. Luke points out that people were saying that Jesus was possibly an Old Testament prophet who had been raised from the dead (v. 19). Luke also has Peter claiming Jesus as the Christ "of God" in v. 20, a term that neither Matthew nor Mark uses. Apart from this, Luke is very similar to Mark. The biggest addition comes in Matthew's gospel who mentions that Peter was blessed because of his confession (v. 17) and that this insight came to him from the Father. Additionally, there is a significantly larger section on the apostles' message, as well as a new name given to Peter in v. 18-19. In the rebuke of Peter in Matthew 16:23 (which Luke doesn't include) it is interesting to point out that Jesus tells Peter he is a "hindrance" to him. Also, when Jesus foretells his death and resurrection in Matthew 16:21-28 and Luke 9:22-27, these accounts are very similar to the one included in Mark's gospel.

Finally, the interpretation of this passage is greatly affected by Jesus' death and resurrection. Looking back, one sees that Jesus' predictions about his death and resurrection were exactly right. He did not come to bring in an earthly Kingdom with his first coming. He came to suffer, die, and rise again. As his disciples, we also are called to suffer as we follow him. Following Christ in this life will not be easy. It will require self-denial.

(iii) The Kingdom-focused, Redemptive-Historical Context of the Whole Canon

There are many kingdom-focused, redemptive-historical themes in this passage. First, is the theme of spiritual blindness. Earlier in Mark 8:18, Jesus quotes from Jer. 5:21 and Ezek. 12:2, which highlighted the people of God's stubborn resistance to following the Lord's commands. The disciples in the passage are certainly blind to who

Jesus is as the Suffering Servant. Second, there is a theme here of the Messiah as the one who will “open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness” (Isaiah 42:7). Part of what Jesus is doing in his healing miracles is not only pointing to his authority but also previewing what life will be like in the eschaton, as suffering and evil are abolished forever. Third, there is a likely allusion to Daniel 7:13 in v. 38. Watts notes:

The combination of the “coming of the Son of Man,” the glory (Dan. 7:14) of the Father (cf. “Ancient of Days,” “Most High” [Dan. 7:9, 13, 22, 25]), and the holy “angels” (cf. the hosts of Dan. 7:10, and the “holy ones” of Dan. 7:22, 25, 27; cf. Zech. 14:5) is generally agreed upon to point to Dan.”⁵

To be ashamed of the Son of Man in his first coming will result in terrible judgment at his second.

8. Write a Summary Paragraph

Through the healing of the blind man, we see firsthand the disciples’ spiritual blindness. The two-stage healing serves as an enacted parable that points to the disciples’ transition from blurry vision to clear vision. Peter does not understand Jesus’ mission as the Messiah who must suffer and rebukes Jesus. Jesus, in turn, rebukes him and teaches his disciples the true meaning of discipleship, namely, unashamedly following our Savior by denying ourselves and taking up our cross daily.

II. Articulate the Revelation and Identification

1. The Revelation of God in Christ

This text reveals Jesus as the eschatological Son of Man in Daniel 7:13. He is truly the one who approaches the Ancient of Days and received an everlasting dominion.

⁵ Watts, “Mark,” 184.

2. Identification of Character Traits to be Emulated or Avoided

Christians should avoid the brash attitude of Peter rebuking the Lord and Peter's unwillingness to consider following a suffering Messiah. Peter, at that moment, believes himself to know Jesus' mission better than Christ himself. He believes that the Messiah should not suffer and die. However, Jesus makes it plain that all of his believers must walk the road of suffering if they are to follow him faithfully.

III. Identify a Fallen Condition, Redemptive Solution, and Virtue Formation Goal

The fallen condition in the passage is found in our aversion to suffering and self-denial. No one, in their sinful flesh, wants to follow Jesus into suffering. No one wants to have to deny their selfish desires and agendas.

The redemptive solution in this passage is found in following our suffering Messiah. He willingly suffered. He denied himself. He took up the cross. In the moments we get depressed about our daily trials and sufferings, we should look to Jesus who gladly endured these things for us (Heb 12:2).

The virtue formation goal is to unashamedly follow after Jesus by taking up our cross and denying ourselves. Every day, we should seek to crucify our agenda if it conflicts with Christ's agenda. We should be willing to follow Jesus even if it means personal suffering.

A Narrative Analysis of Mark 10:17-31 (Study 4)

I. Read Actively

1. Isolate the Literary Unit

The literary unit in this section is Mark 10:17-31. It contains the entire plotline of the Rich Young Ruler and Jesus' remarks about the encounter. While vv. 17-31 is conceptually related to the passage that immediately precedes it (vv. 13-16), it makes good sense for this one-on-one study to only focus on vv. 17-31.

2. Read the Story Multiple Times

First, for this step, I read the passage several times. I utilized the UBS5 Greek New Testament, as well as the ESV, NASB, NIV, CSB, NLT, and KJV English translations. Notable translation differences arise at several places in the text.

In v. 17, all the modern translations render the title given to Jesus as “Good Teacher,” while the KJV uses “Good Master.” In v. 19, the NLT clarifies what is meant by the phrase “Do not defraud.” It says, “You must not cheat anyone.” In v. 21, the ESV, NASB, and KJV translate the *καὶ* in the last sentence as “and,” while the NIV, CSB, and NLT renders it “then.” In v. 22, there is a good bit of difference in the way the phrase, “disheartened by the saying” is rendered in English. The NASB, ESV, and KJV essentially say the same thing. However, the NIV and NLT render it, “at this, the man’s face fell.” The CSB uses the word “dismay” to refer to the man’s reaction. Dismay does not seem like the best rendering of this. In v. 24, the largest difference comes with the KJV, which seems to add the phrase “how hard is it for them that trust in riches.” I suspect this is a textual criticism issue. In v. 25, the NLT adds the phrase “in the world.” This seems unnecessary. In v. 29, there are some different renderings of the word “land.” These aren’t incredibly significant. Finally, in v. 31, the NLT attempts to explain Jesus’ meaning behind the phrase, “But many who are first will be last, and the last first.” In this

verse, the NLT says, “But many who are the greatest now will be least important then, and those who seem least important now will be the greatest then.” Personally, I do not prefer this rendering, because it does too much “interpreting” for the reader. I believe most modern readers will be able to work out Jesus’ meaning.

3. Identify the Setting and the Characters

The setting for this passage is the road as Jesus’ sets on his journey (v. 17). He is currently somewhere in “the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan” (v. 1). The characters in this passage are the rich man, Jesus, the disciples, and Peter.

4. Observe the Story

Several things struck me as I read the text. First, I was struck by the man’s use of the word, “inherit,” (v. 17) when speaking of eternal life, since this man is a wealthy man (v. 23). Thematically, this seems to really fit the situation. One can easily see, a how rich man might be tempted to think of salvation in monetary terms. To the Jews of the first century, wealth was a sign of God’s blessing. Second, I was also struck by Jesus’ omission of the command to not covet, as well as his inclusion of, “Do not defraud” in v. 19. As I explored this more, it’s clear that Jesus left out the coveting command, because this man struggled with that particular sin. This is why Jesus asks the man to sell all his possessions. It was not intended to be a universal command. However, I am not sure why Jesus spoke of the command to not defraud, when it does not appear in the Ten Commandments. Third, the astonishment of the disciples in v. 26 is noteworthy. They were genuinely shocked that this man who had everything going for them was far from the Kingdom. Finally, I was comforted by the words Jesus spoke in vv. 29-31 to Peter. There are times in all of our lives that we wonder, “Is the gospel really worth it?” Jesus’ words in vv. 29-31 remind believers that the sacrifices that might be called to make for the gospel cannot compare to the blessings for those in Christ.

5. Isolate the Different Scenes

The scenes in this passage are as follows. (1) The rich man approaches Jesus and interacts with him (vv. 17-21). (2) Then, the rich man goes away sad in verse 22. (3) Finally, Jesus interacts with his disciples about the Kingdom (vv. 23-31).

6. Analyze the Narrative

(i) Identify the Setting

The setting of the passage is found in v. 17. Jesus and his disciples are on the road somewhere around the “region of Judea and beyond the Jordan” (10:1).

(ii) Identify the Rising Tension

The rising tension comes in vv. 17-24a, as the rich man goes away and the disciples reel from Jesus’ words about how difficult it is for the rich to enter God’s kingdom.

(iii) Identify the Climax of Tension

The climax of the passage occurs in v. 24b-25. After shocking them with his statement in v. 23, he says an even more shocking statement in vv. 24b-25.

(iv) Identify the Resolution of the Tension

The resolution of the tension occurs as the disciples ask, “who can be saved?” and Jesus speaks of God’s ability to make all things possible (v. 26-27).

(v) Identify the Following Action/ Interpretation

The following action and interpretation comes in vv. 28-31 where Jesus gives one more piece of clarifying wisdom in response to Peter’s words in v. 28. Following Jesus and his gospel, though it may seem difficult, is well worth the sacrifice.

7. Think about the Contexts

(i) Acts, Cycles, and Literary Structures

First, the pericope is situated in an act that includes Jesus' teaching on children in 10:13–16. The reader is invited to compare and contrast these two sections and see that the rich man was missing what Jesus commends in v. 15. Second, the passage is also one segment of a larger cycle from Mark 9:30-10:52 that speaks of Jesus' suffering and the cost of following him. In this cycle, Jesus makes two of his three "passion predictions" in 9:30-31 and 10:33-34. Finally, this passage is situated in the second half of Mark's Gospel (1:1-8:30) that tends to focus on the suffering of Jesus, generally.

(ii) The Whole Gospel Context

In terms of intratextuality, several features come to the fore. First, the theme of God's "commandments" arises in several places in Mark's Gospel. In Mark 7, Jesus comes down on the religious leaders for "teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (v. 7) and leaving God's commandments in vv. 8-9. In Mark 10:3-5, he expands on the purpose of God's command regarding divorce and the peoples' hardness of heart. Finally, in Mark 12:28-31, when asked about which commandment is the most important, Jesus summarizes the law of God in two commands (vv. 29-31).

Second, the "kingdom of God" also appears in several other places in Mark. Jesus' ministry began with an announcement of the Kingdom in 1:15. He speaks at length about the Kingdom in his parables in Mark 4. Before his transfiguration, Jesus mentions that "there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power" (9:1).

However, for the purposes of this section, Jesus' most important teaching on the Kingdom comes in Chapters 9, 10 and 12 of Mark, when Jesus speaks of "entering the Kingdom." Those that enter the kingdom are those that battle their sin (9:47) and

those who receive it like a child (10:15). In Mark 12:34, a religious leader is commended on being “not far from the Kingdom,” after he congratulates Jesus on a wise answer to the question of which commandment was the most important.

Finally, the cost of discipleship is a theme in this passage. The cost of discipleship is highlighted all throughout Mark, but especially in the second half of Mark’s Gospel. Notable sections include the following. (1) Jesus’ teaching on denying yourself and taking up your cross (8:34-38), (2) Jesus’ teaching on being “servant of all” in 9:35, (3) Jesus’ teaching on battling sin (9:42-49), and (4) Jesus’ teaching on true greatness in 10:35-45, among others.

A horizontal reading of this passage yields the following insights. The greatest differences come when comparing Mark with Matthew. In Matthew’s gospel, we learn that this man is a young man (19:20). In Matthew’s account there is also a greater emphasis on “doing” and earning salvation. The young man says, “what good deed must I do to inherit eternal life?” (v. 16). Matthew’s account also omits, “do not defraud,” focusing instead of Jesus’ call to love neighbor as self (19:18-19). The passage in Matthew’s account concludes with the mention of the disciples sitting “on twelve thrones” (v. 28) and a reminder that “the first will be last, and the last first” (v. 30).

Luke’s account is very similar to Mark’s with no drastic changes. However, Luke does mention that the rich man is a “ruler” in 18:18. Luke also omits the references to, “Do not defraud” in v. 20.

Finally, the interpretation of this passage is affected by Jesus’ death and resurrection in this way. Jesus’ death and resurrection is what makes salvation possible in v. 27. Our deeds will never earn us salvation. The rich man lacked the quality that the children had in 10:14, namely, utter dependence. Instead, of looking to God in Christ as his only hope, the rich man looks to his own good deeds and apparent blessing by God. It is only by trusting in what Christ did for us on the Christ and anyone “inherits” salvation.

(iii) The Kingdom-focused, Redemptive-Historical Context of the Whole Canon

This passage also has a couple kingdom-focus, redemptive historical themes. First, as mentioned earlier, God's commands are not only a theme in Mark but a theme throughout the entirety of the Bible. Of course, the importance of the Ten Commandments for Old Testament Israel cannot be overemphasized. Exodus 20:12-16 and Deuteronomy 5:16-20 were crucial in shaping the moral life of the people of God. However, it is striking that some in Jesus' day viewed the Ten Commandments as a means by which they might earn salvation. When Ten Commandments are given, the Lord makes clear he has already redeemed the people (Exod. 20:2). However, as many of the reformers pointed out, the humans are prone to works-righteousness. Jesus rightly uses the Law to evaluate the rich man's heart. Sadly, he cannot see his sin and is confirmed in his self-righteousness.

Second, the Kingdom of God is also a theme throughout the Bible. From the promise given to God's people in Genesis 3:16 to the Davidic covenant in 2 Samuel 7, the story of the Old Testament (and the New Testament for that matter!) is truly the story of the long-awaited Kingdom of God coming through the Messiah.

8. Write a Summary Paragraph

In this passage, a rich man approaches Jesus to ask him how he might inherit salvation. Jesus attempts to show the man his sin of covetousness but the man does not embrace Jesus' message out of his love for possessions. The following teaching of Christ shows that it is impossible for any to be saved apart from the miraculous work of God and that following him is difficult but worth it.

II. Articulate the Revelation and Identification

1. The Revelation of God in Christ

Jesus is the God of the Old Testament and the Giver of the Ten Commandments, who through his death and resurrection makes an impossible salvation possible to all who would depend on Him.

2. Identification of Character Traits to be Emulated or Avoided

The character traits in this passage are primarily negative. First, the rich man approaches salvation from a works perspective. This is to be avoided by God's people. Salvation is not by works—as Ephesians 2:8-9 reminds us—and comes only through faith. Second, he is unable to see his sinfulness when Jesus quotes the Law to Him. The people of God are to be quick to see their sin and quick to understand that “none is righteous, not even one” (Romans 3:9) Third, he puts his possessions above the costly call to follow Jesus. Jesus makes clear that the call to follow him is a call to self-sacrifice. It is a call to forsake our sin. However, it is a calling that is absolutely worth it (10:29-31). Finally, the disciples are not to be emulated either, because their astonishment at Jesus' interaction with the rich man reveals that they had, at least on some level, linked material blessing as an expression of God's pleasure with a person's inward spiritual life.

III. Identify a Fallen Condition, Redemptive Solution, and Virtue Formation Goal

The fallen condition in the passage is found in John's message in v. 17 and the human tendency to look to our deeds as the basis by which we find acceptance with God.

The redemptive solution is found in Christ, who grants eternal life, not on the basis of our deeds, but on his perfect record of righteousness. He is the God who makes the impossible possible.

Finally, the virtue formation goal is found in the preceding passage. In contrast to the rich man, we are to receive the Kingdom of God like little children. (10:13-16). We are to utterly depend on Christ's work to save us and follow the Lord in trusting obedience.

A Narrative Analysis of Mark 15:25-39 (Study 5)

I. Read Actively

1. Isolate the Literary Unit

While a case can be made for beginning this passage at v. 21 or 22, v. 25 is also a reasonable beginning to the pericope because it focuses solely on the crucifixion itself. Also, one could argue to end the pericope at verse 41, instead of v. 39, as I have. However, I made the choice to end at v. 39 because the next Bible Study will focus on the women that go to the tomb to anoint Jesus.

2. Read the Story Multiple Times

First, I read this crucifixion passage in the UBS5 Greek New Testament. Then, I read it in the ESV, NASB, NIV, CSB, NLT, and KJV. There were a few minor differences among the translations. First, in several places, the NIV, CSB, and NLT render the “hours” of the day into modern day hours. Thus, the third hour becomes “nine in the morning” and the sixth hour becomes “noon.” I do not have a problem with this and think it is a reasonable accommodation for modern readers. Second, as noted earlier, there is a tendency in the NIV, CSB, NLT to render “Christ” as “Messiah” in v. 32. Finally, the most significant difference is in the NASB and KJV translations in v. 28. The ESV, NIV, CSB, and NLT do not include the verse. Apparently, this is a text critical issue. The best manuscripts do not include verse 28.

3. Identify the Setting and the Characters

The primary setting of this passage is Golgotha, a site outside the city of Jerusalem where criminals were regularly crucified in the first century. Also, the temple is mentioned. The characters in the passage are Jesus, the soldiers, passersby at the crucifixion, the robbers, the religious leaders, and the Roman centurion.

4. Observe the Story

There are several features of this text that struck me upon my first reading of it. First, I was struck by how this section is filled with irony. The superscription that read, “King of the Jews” (v. 25), the fact that people were mocking Jesus’ words about the temple when he was really talking about himself (v. 30), and the fact that it is a Roman centurion who understands Jesus’ identity are all ironic. The people of God could not see that they were actually crucifying their Messiah. Second, the quotation from Psalm 22 is very striking. Not only is Jesus teaching us about his “abandonment” at the cross as he endures the wrath of God for us, he is also pointing the people back to OT prophecy. This psalm in particular is breath-taking when read in light of its final fulfillment in Christ. Third, it is significant that when Jesus dies, the temple’s curtain is torn in two. The barrier between God and man has now been broken in the person and work of Jesus. Finally, Mark’s gospel began with “the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” in 1:1. Now, at long last, we see someone (besides demons) finally understanding that Jesus is, in fact, the Son of God.

5. Isolate the Different Scenes

This passage can be divided into the following four scenes. (1) Jesus is reviled on the cross (vv. 25-32), (2) Jesus cries out and dies on the cross (vv. 33-37), (3) The curtain in the temple is torn (v. 38), and (4) the centurion responds to Jesus’ crucifixion (v. 39).

6. Analyze the Narrative

(i) Identify the Setting

The setting of the passage is Golgotha, as well as the temple.

(ii) Identify the Rising Tension

The rising tension occurs in vv. 25- 36. The tension builds as Jesus is reviled and is at a fever pitch by the time sour wine is given to him in v. 36.

(iii) Identify the Climax of Tension

The climax of the passage occurs in verse 37 as Jesus cries out and dies.

(iv) Identify the Resolution of the Tension

The resolution follows as the curtain in the temple is torn in two (v. 38).

**(v) Identify the Following Action/
Interpretation**

The passage ends with the following action, namely, that a Roman centurion understands that Jesus was truly the Son of God (v. 39)

7. Think about the Contexts

(i) Acts, Cycles, and Literary Structures

First, the pericope is included in an “act” that includes the mocking, beating, and crucifixion of Jesus, beginning at 15:16 and continuing until 15:47. Second, the passage is also a part of a broader cycle of Mark 14:43-16:8 which focuses on the arrest, trial, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus. Finally, this passage occurs in the second half of Mark’s Gospel (8:31-16:8), which focuses on Jesus’ suffering as opposed to his identity.

(ii) The Whole Gospel Context

We see several themes in Mark’s Gospel in this passage. First, the passion predictions that Jesus made earlier have finally come true (8:31, 9:30–31, 10:33–34). The entire second half of Mark’s Gospel that focused on Jesus’ suffering has finally come full circle. Just as Jesus predicted, he [suffers] “many things and [is] rejected by the elders

and the chief priests and the scribes and [is] killed... (Mark 8:31).”

Second, in Mark’s Gospel, there are several Gentiles that respond to the Lord. Most notably, we think of the Syrophenician woman in Mark 7. We see this theme of Gentiles coming to the Lord in the faith of the centurion at the cross. The centurion sees Jesus and is the first person, besides demons, to acknowledge what Mark emphasized in 1:1—that Jesus is the “Son of God.”

Third, we see another mention of Jesus, as the “Christ.” The first mention of this title came at the beginning of Mark’s Gospel. The second mention comes on Peter’s lips in 8:29. It occurs sporadically throughout the second half of Mark’s Gospel, until the high priest asks him about it in 14:61. Finally, here at the very end of Mark’s Gospel, it comes on the lips of chief priests with the scribes mocking him. They did not realize that they in fact had crucified the long-awaited Messiah.

A horizontal reading also proves useful in understanding this passage. In Matthew’s Gospel, the narrative about the crucifixion of Jesus closely follows Mark (Matthew 27:31-44). However, as the chief priests and scribes mock Jesus, Matthew adds, “He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” (v. 43). This again shows the religious leaders’ hardness of heart. Likewise, Matthew’s account of Jesus’ death (27:32-44) follows closely to Mark’s, but, unlike Mark, includes the account of the raised saints in vv. 52-53.

In Luke’s Gospel, Luke describes the crucifixion (Luke 23:33-43) but also focuses on Jesus’ compassion. In v. 34, he mentions Jesus forgiving his oppressors. In v. 39, he elaborates on the abuses hurled against him by the one criminal, while dealing with his gracious interaction with the repentant criminal (vv. 40-43). Also, as Jesus dies (Luke 23:44-49), Luke records Jesus’ committal of his spirit to God (v. 46) and the centurion’s profession is not as pronounced as Mark’s, focusing instead on Jesus’ innocence (v. 47).

In John's Gospel, some of the details of the crucifixion are expanded. He goes into greater detail about Jesus' inscription and Pilate's hand in it (vv. 19-22). He also speaks in greater detail about how the casting of lots for Jesus' clothing, fulfilled Scripture (vv. 23-24). Finally, he chronicles Jesus' interaction with his mother Mary and the disciple Jesus loved (presumably John himself) (vv. 25-27). Also, as Jesus dies, John mentions Jesus' thirst (vv. 28) and his uttering of the phrase, "It is finished" (v. 30).

All this to say, it seems as though Mark is going for a more streamlined crucifixion narrative, detailing the events themselves. He focuses on the Father's abandonment of Jesus and highlights the faith of the centurion.

Finally, the interpretation of this passage is affected by Jesus' death and resurrection in this way. This passage is *the* crucifixion narrative. However, because Christians know the resurrection is coming, it colors the way we read this passage. The hopelessness of the narrative is met with great hope. The ironies present do not bring despair but wonder and amazement in believers. This passage should sober any Christian. It was our sin that held Jesus to the cross, but knowing the resurrection comes in the following chapter augments our understanding of this terrible event, making believers erupt in praise and thanksgiving to God.

(iii) The Kingdom-focused, Redemptive-Historical Context of the Whole Canon

This passage has many kingdom-focus, redemptive historical themes. First, Watts is correct to point out that, "Mark's passion narrative is replete with echoes of the 'righteous sufferer' psalms."⁶ The most obvious reference is that of Psalm 22 that Jesus speaks while on the cross in v. 34. In particular that passage speaks not only of the abandonment by God (v. 1), but also the mockery (v. 7) Jesus endured on the cross.

⁶ Watts, "Mark," 235.

Second, there is a theme of Elijah that runs through this passage as well. Apparently, people misheard Jesus' cry in v. 34, as him calling Elijah. Since Elijah was taken up into heaven (2 Kings 2) and Malachi mentions the role of an Elijah-like figure before the day of the Lord (Mal. 4:5), this seems to be informing the peoples' taunts at the cross. Evidently, some looked to Jesus as this very figure (Mark 8:28).

Third, the temple curtain being torn in two has deep theological significance. As the author of Hebrews points out, "Behind the second curtain was a second section called the Most Holy Place" (v. 3). This Most Holy Place was off limits to all but the high priest once a year. However, once Jesus died on the cross, "he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood" (v. 12). The temple curtain being torn signified that Jesus had "put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Heb 9:26). Now, because of Jesus' death, God can be approached by sinners that come in the name of his only Son, Jesus Christ.

Finally, the reference to Christ as the "King of the Jews" and "the King of Israel" has echoes back to the Davidic covenant in 2 Samuel 7 and the anticipation that David's throne would "be established forever." (2 Sam 7:16). Ironically, the people simply could not see that Jesus was indeed the Davidic King they had longed for all the while.

8. Write a Summary Paragraph

In Jesus' crucifixion, he dies as the righteous sufferer of the psalms. He is abandoned by the Father as he experiences the wrath of God for our sins. The very people who should have been waiting for the King of Israel and the Christ crucified their Lord. Ironically, only a Roman centurion sees and understands Jesus' true identity in his death (v. 39).

II. Articulate the Revelation and Identification

1. The Revelation of God in Christ

As Jesus is brutally crucified and mocked by his own people, Jesus dies not only as the righteous sufferer in the Psalms, he also dies as the Davidic King and very Son of God.

2. Identification of Character Traits to be Emulated or Avoided

There are several character traits in the passage that we are to emulate and avoided. First, Jesus' submission to the Father in this moment is breathtaking. He endures the cross and is abandoned by God in order to save us from our sins. Second, while this is a very minor point, it is significant that in the midst of Jesus' suffering, his mind goes back to the Psalms. The Psalms were meant to be a source of great encouragement to God's people in the midst of trial. We would do well if we meditated and sung them more, especially in moments of great suffering. Third, finally, the faith of the centurion is also clearly on display here. Like the centurion, Mark wants his listeners to look upon the crucified Christ and come to the same conclusion, "Truly this man was the Son of God" (v. 39). While there are many traits to emulate in Jesus, there are many to avoid, namely, the derision of the passersby and the religious leaders. How awful is it that the very people waiting on the Messiah mocked him so! If not for the grace of God, this could have been any one of us.

III. Identify a Fallen Condition, Redemptive Solution, and Virtue Formation Goal

The fallen condition is found in the fact that the people cannot see their need for a suffering servant to die for them. They see Jesus' death as Jesus' humiliation and defeat, not his great victory.

The redemptive solution is found in Christ, enduring the wrath of God for us.

The virtue formation goal is found in the centurion's confession. May we all look to the crucified Savior and be moved to faith in him!

A Narrative Analysis of Mark 15:39-16:8 (Study 6)

I. Read Actively

1. Isolate the Literary Unit

For this last Bible study, I have chosen Mark 15:40-16:8. Some might suggest Mark 15:42-16:8, as a more appropriate pericope, including the introduction of Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome in the previous study. However, because much of the study focuses on the women, it seemed appropriate to include them in this pericope.

2. Read the Story Multiple Times

First, I read the text in the UBS5 Greek New Testament. Then following my initial reading in Greek, I read the passage in the ESV, NASB, NIV, CSB, NLT, and KJV to note any differences in the way these translations render the text. Truly there were no notable differences in the texts. A few times the NLT offered clarifying renderings such as in v. 42, “All this happened on Friday” as opposed to, “the day before the Sabbath.” The true question that interpreters need to wrestle with is whether or not to include 16:9-20 as a part of the text (the KJV does). While many support its inclusion, I am not convinced. I agree with most modern translations that, because the earliest manuscripts do not include vv. 9-20, we should not treat them as part of the inspired text. However, I do support the decision to include the text in brackets.

3. Identify the Setting and the Characters

The primary settings are Golgotha (vv. 40-41), the area where Pilate is located (vv. 42-45), and the tomb of Jesus (15:46-16:8). The characters include Mary Magdalene, Mary (mother of James), Jesus, Pilate, Joseph of Arimathea, a Roman centurion, and a young man (in all reality, an angel).

4. Observe the Story

Several things struck me as I read the text. First, the devotion of the women in contrast to the disciples' abandonment of Jesus is noteworthy. The disciples that once so adamantly followed Jesus (I think here especially of Peter) have now utterly abandoned him. It is the women that have the courage to stand at the foot of the cross and anoint Jesus' body. Second, the surprise of Pilate jumps out to me. This eye-witness detail gives me confidence that this account is true to life. Third, the fact that Joseph was looking for the Kingdom of God it is encouraging. It is a great reminder that not all of the religious leaders were closed off to Jesus. The Lord is still in the business of converting the religious to himself. Fourth, the angel's words about Peter strike me. In light of his denials of Jesus (Mark 14:66–72), this would have come as a great relief to him. Jesus Christ held out grace to even one who had been ashamed of him. Finally, the women's fear and the abrupt ending of Mark's Gospel have always intrigued me. I believe it causes us to ask the question, "In light of what we have seen in this gospel about Jesus, how will we respond?"

5. Isolate the Different Scenes

The passage breaks down into the following scenes. (1) First, the women observe Jesus' crucifixion (15:40-41), (2) Then, Joseph approaches Pilate, obtains Jesus' body, and buries him while Mary and Mary observe (15:42-47). (3) Finally, the women approach the tomb, find it empty, and encounter the angel (16:1-8).

6. Analyze the Narrative

(i) Identify the Setting

There are three settings in this pericope: Golgotha (vv. 40-41), the area where Pilate is located (vv. 42-45), and the tomb of Jesus (15:46-16:8).

(ii) Identify the Rising Tension

The rising tension occurs in 15:40-16:4. Jesus has died and now we are talking about his funeral arrangements. However, things really heat up as the women notice the stone is missing in v. 4.

(iii) Identify the Climax of Tension

The climax of the passage occurs when the ladies enter the tomb and find a young man (an angel) sitting in tomb (v. 5).

(iv) Identify the Resolution of the Tension

The resolution occurs as the angel tells the women to not be afraid because Jesus has been risen and to tell Jesus' disciples the news (v. 6).

(v) Identify the Following Action/ Interpretation

The following action occurs as the women flee the tomb (v. 8). They do not share the news (at least, at that time). This cliffhanger ending invites the reader to consider their own response to the resurrection of Jesus.

7. Think about the Contexts

(i) Acts, Cycles, and Literary Structures

First, because this Bible study will cover the death and resurrection of Jesus, it doesn't fit neatly into a just one act, though a case could be made that it fits into a larger "act" beginning at 15:16. Second, the passage is one section in a broader cycle of Mark 14:43-16:8 which shines the spotlight on Jesus' arrest, trial, crucifixion, and resurrection. Finally, as in our last passage, this section occurs in the second half of Mark's Gospel (8:31-16:8), which focuses on Jesus' suffering.

(ii) The Whole Gospel Context

There are several intratextual themes in this passage. First is the role of women. In Mark's Gospel, several women display faith in Jesus. In Mark 5, for example, the woman with the discharge of blood exemplifies desperate trust in Jesus. In Mark 7, a woman with a demon-possessed daughter pleads with Jesus for her healing. In Mark 7, another woman, this time a Gentile (Syrophenician) shows incredible faith in the Lord. Finally, in Mark 14, a woman honors the Lord by anointing him at Bethany. In each of these instances, we see these women being held up as an example of faith. Women in Mark are vital to Christ and his ministry.

Second, as mentioned earlier, the Kingdom of God is a prominent theme in Mark's Gospel. Joseph was a man waiting for the Kingdom of God (15:43). Not all of the religious elites rejected Jesus.

Finally, the theme of Jesus' resurrection is also emphasized elsewhere in Mark. Of course, the three passion predictions come to mind but also, Jesus' words in 14:28, "But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee." Jesus had predicted his resurrection on several occasions, but the disciples still failed to look for it.

After a horizontal reading of the text, several things are worth noting. In Matthew's Gospel, Joseph's interaction with Pilate is more streamlined and does not include Pilate's amazement at Jesus' death coming so quickly. On the other hand, Matthew goes into more detail at the tomb, speaking of the earthquake that happened (28:2), the appearance of the angel (v. 3), and the fear of the guards (v. 4). Finally, he mentions that the women did tell the disciples what they had seen (v. 8).

Regarding the burial of Jesus, Luke's Gospel is very similar to that of Mark's. However, Luke goes into great detail about Joseph, emphasizing that Joseph "had not consented to their decision and action" (23:51). He also notes that the tomb that Joseph had never contained a body (23:53). Luke's resurrection account mentions that there were two angels not just one (24:4). The angels also go into more about Jesus' prediction of his

passion and resurrection (v. 6-7). Like Matthew, Luke has the women telling the disciples the news (v. 9) and the disciples' unbelief (v. 11). Finally, Luke includes Peter rushing to the tomb (v. 12).

John's Gospel, as expected, has a completely different angle on the burial and resurrection. He does relate Joseph's actions, but also mentions Nicodemus (19:39). He also mentions that the tomb was a garden tomb (19:41). John relates the resurrection mainly from Peter and the beloved disciple's perspective, only mentioning Mary Magdalene (20:1).

Finally, this passage is affected by Jesus' death and resurrection in the following way. This is the resurrection. This is truly the most important event in human history. As Paul says if the resurrection is false, "we are of all people most to be pitied" (1 Cor 15:19). If there had been no resurrection, there would be no forgiveness of sin and no salvation. This passage is truly pivotal for the entire Bible.

(iii) The Kingdom-focused, Redemptive-Historical Context of the Whole Canon

This passage is vitally important for the history of redemption. While it wasn't completely clear to God's people that the Messiah would be resurrected, there are Scripture passages that support it. For example, in Psalm 16:10, we read, "For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption." It is through the resurrection of the Messiah that the Lord will truly "swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth for the Lord has spoken" (Isaiah 25:8). As Jesus says in Revelation 1:17-18, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades."

8. Write a Summary Paragraph

In Jesus' resurrection, we see several themes coming together. We see the

grace of God to the fringes of society in revealing the resurrection first to women. We see the grace of God being held out for Peter. We see Jesus vindicating his predictions. However, most importantly, we see that the wrath that Jesus endured for us was not in vain. Because he was raised, he now holds out salvation for the people of God.

II. Articulate the Revelation and Identification

1. The Revelation of God in Christ

Above everything else, Jesus' resurrection proves that he is the Christ, the Son of God that Mark spoke of in Mark 1:1.

2. Identification of Character Traits to be Emulated or Avoided

There are several character traits in the passage that we are to emulate. We should emulate Joseph's patient waiting of the Kingdom and his courage even in the face of apparent failure. We should avoid the fear that kept the women from telling the resurrection story (at least, initially).

III. Identify a Fallen Condition, Redemptive Solution, and Virtue Formation Goal

The fallen condition is seen in the women's reluctance to share the good news of the resurrection out of sheer terror. We too can be scared to share the gospel, even when it has affected us deeply.

The redemptive solution is found in Jesus' gracious words to Peter. He holds out grace for his weak and failing disciples.

Finally, the virtue formation is found in Joseph's bold move in asking for Jesus' body. He risked a great deal when he did this.

APPENDIX 6
COURSE WEB PAGE AND VIDEOS

Course Web Page

FBC's official "Reading the Bible One-on-One" web page contains links to the large group session videos, large group sessions notes, the one-on-one Bible studies in Mark, and a CAN*T Method bookmark. Visit <https://fbcmtsterling.com/1-on-1> to access these resources.

Large Group Session Videos

The following links provide direct access to the various large group session videos.

Session 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qmtAZVEQkng>

Session 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b5rWfAcm00I>

Session 3: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E2jLJm-a9ms>

Session 4: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xbydDc1LKfc>

Session 5: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rumpmz1c214>

Session 6: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-1yzJ7TEHqc>

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ABSTRACT

EQUIPPING MEMBERS TO MAKE DISCIPLES THROUGH ONE-ON-ONE BIBLE READING AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, MT. STERLING, KENTUCKY

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2021
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This Doctor of Ministry project was developed to equip members of First Baptist Church in Mt. Sterling, Kentucky to make disciples through one-on-one Bible reading. This was achieved through a six-week one-on-one Bible reading course. During this course, the large group sessions focused on the biblical/theological underpinning for one-on-one Bible reading, basic principles of hermeneutics, and practical advice for successful one-on-one Bible reading partnerships. After each session, participants read through a Bible study on the section of Mark with a Bible reading partner as homework.

Chapter 1 explores the ministry context of First Baptist Church, as well as the rationale, purpose, research methodology, and the definitions/delimitations of the project. Chapter 2 gives the biblical and theological basis for the project, exploring how one-on-one Bible reading is one method by which Christians can fulfill Christ's command to make disciples. Chapter 3 flows from this chapter and considers why this method of disciple-making is particularly effective for churches today. After this, chapter 4 provides a clear description of the project and will outline its implementation. Finally, chapter 5 evaluates the project and includes personal and theological reflection.

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