

HELPING NEW MEMBERS TRANSITION FROM
BIBLE INFORMATION CLASS TO PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY

by

Daniel I. Lewig

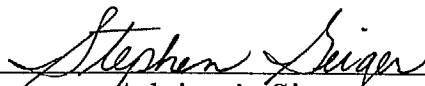
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For many adult confirmation students, in-depth study of the Bible ends when they complete the final pages of their Bible Information Class. During multiple weeks and months these new members are instructed in the truths and teachings of the Bible. Each week they get into the Word personally, see its meaning in their lives, and grow in faith and knowledge. But at the end of the course personal growth in the Word stagnates and all the momentum of consistent study of the Word is lost. What can pastors and new members do to keep the momentum going? How can pastors help new members transition from directed study to personal Bible study? How can they help new members, who turned the pages of Scripture throughout many weeks of study at church, keep the pages turning at home? This paper is a study of how to help new members read the Bible on their own.

Current thought and countless pages of research provide practical tips on how to begin personal Bible study. The challenge is found in the lack of specific guidance and instruction for new members on this topic. There is a one size fits all approach to personal Bible study. Therefore, this paper seeks to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of current thought and research, highlight which tools and methods are best for new members and identify gaps that need to be filled.

Upon discovery of these gaps, this paper then attempts to offer solutions which address those needs. It further explores areas in which pastors can better educate, equip and encourage new members in their personal reading. This study is a tool for helping to meet the personal needs of new members that will set them up for successful study of the Word.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: FOSTERING A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD	1
I. HISTORICAL CONTEXT: A DECLINING TREND IN PERSONAL STUDY	2
A. Current challenges behind the trend	3
B. Current challenges are changing former assumptions	5
II. BIBLICAL REVIEW: A SCRIPTURAL ANSWER TO THE WHY QUESTION	6
A. Personal study helps new members give their own confession	7
B. Personal study helps new members live their faith	8
C. Personal study helps new members share their faith	9
D. Personal study helps new members pray in faith	10
III. LITERATURE REVIEW: CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS TO STUDY	11
A. Understanding	12
B. Time	19
IV. PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS FOR PERSONAL STUDY	20
A. Additional resources	21
B. Setting up successful study	23
CONCLUSION	24
BIBLIOGRAPHY	26
APPENDIX	29

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Introduction

In a person's lifetime they develop close relationships. There are individuals people have known since childhood. They grow up developing bonds that last a lifetime. They know every intimate detail. They can describe that person in full, like writing an autobiography about that person. I've grown up with a friend who I have known since kindergarten. We've been best friends since second grade. I'm confident, if asked, I could write an autobiography for him and be extremely accurate. There wouldn't be any major gaps or inaccuracies. As relationships develop, people get to know everything about the other person—their likes and dislikes, goals and disappointments, hobbies and interests, and the list goes on. Numbers and dates such as birthdays and anniversaries become memorized. A person knows if their friend has children, how many, their names and their lives. Family and extended family information becomes mentally cataloged. Imagine a couple getting married. Imagine how well they know their spouse.

A litmus test on how well friends know each other is to imagine writing an autobiography about each other. What would they be able to include? Would there be any major gaps, in information or time? Would they be confident the information was accurate? If someone actually had to put pen to paper, I think they would be amazed at how much they actually know about that person.

Christians have a close relationship with their God. They share an intimate relationship and intimate knowledge of their Savior. Yet if a Christian was asked to put pen to paper, to write an autobiography of their Savior, could they confidently and accurately do so? What would they include? Would there be any major gaps, in information or time?

New believers are just beginning that relationship with their Savior. Faithfully they have been getting to know their Savior through weeks of focused study in an adult confirmation class. The challenge every pastor has is how to keep the relationship growing after the confirmation class ends. How does a pastor keep the momentum going as new members transition from directed group study to independent personal study? How does a pastor encourage new members

to keep growing, keep studying Scripture on their own? It begins with an awareness of the challenges that get in the way of such a study.

Historical Context: A Declining Trend in Personal Study

The top-selling book of all time is the Bible. But most people don't know Abraham from Adam. It's a staple in nearly every home, but many may not be able to even remember where it is on their shelf. It may be the most prominent dust catcher in circulation. The truth is, people are much more comfortable and knowledgeable in the world of American Idol than in the world of Scripture. "16% of proclaimed Christians read their Bible daily."¹ Church attendance is considered great if two-thirds of members are in church on a given Sunday. For most Christians, their only exposure to the Word is that one hour a week at church—and that's only if they are there every week. Is it a generational problem? A Christian research group does not hold back when giving their "state of the union" on Christianity in America today.

American Christians are basically illiterate. Although most of them contend that the Bible contains truth and is worth knowing, and most of them argue that they know all of the relevant truths and principles, our research shows otherwise. And the trend line is frightening: the younger a person is, the less they understand about the Christian faith.²

While that would be an easy excuse, the numbers have been steadily declining over the years. "Since 1990 the percentage of Americans who read their Bible has decreased by 15%." How can believers, those who confess Jesus to be their Savior, say they have a high value for him and then have little value for his Word? How can they have such a lack of zeal for the only book that bears eternal significance in their life?

Current challenges behind the trend

¹ Gallup, Alec and Simmons, Wendy, "Six in Ten Americans Read Bible at Least Occasionally." The Gallup Organization. [article online]; available from: <http://www.gallup.com/poll/2416/Six-Ten-Americans-Read-Bible-Least-Occasionally.aspx>. October 20, 2000.

² The Barna Group, "Barna Reviews Top Religious Trends in 2005" [article online]; available from: <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/166-barna-reviews-top-religious-trends-of-2005?q=american+christians+illiterate>; internet.

One of the biggest challenges is the removal of the Bible from its central place in the home. If people want to learn about the Scriptures, they go to church. They talk to their pastor. When they want their children to learn about the Bible, they send them to Sunday School. They send them to catechism class. The full religious structure and all of the religious education is outsourced. The problem with this method is that it fails to recognize where most of one's learning or education takes place—in the home. “83% of all learning happens in the home.”³ This method has other glaring deficiencies. Most of the growth of religious knowledge and spiritual growth ends at confirmation. In a vicious cycle, the lack of knowledge feeds into intimidation. Most people feel uncomfortable in leading family devotions. Most people feel uncomfortable reading the Bible on their own. This intimidation leads to not picking up the Bible.

While some feel inadequate in picking up a Bible on their own, others don't see the necessity. These are individuals who have a “good enough” mentality. I know that Jesus is my Savior and died for my sins. Isn't that enough? The focus is on benchmarks. I know enough to get a passing grade. Pastor Mark Braun sees the challenge and danger of this mentality. ““They are too confident of their ability to remain faithful to Jesus Christ while ignorant of the Scriptures that give witness to him!”⁴

Similar to a good enough mentality is a graduation mentality. One of the biggest challenges to personal study is the perception they've completed all the instruction they need. It's the same challenge the church faces with catechism students after confirmation. Bible study is not seen as “a book to grow with over a lifetime,”⁵ but more of a rite of passage.

Another challenge comes from a misconception and misuse of Sunday morning worship. For almost 90% of WELS members, this is the only method of continuing instruction in the

³Degner, Steve, “Encouraging Christian Education in the Home”, Paper to the Arizona/California Pastor Conference, 1977. [essay online]; available from: <http://www.wlssays.net/files/DegnerEncouraging.pdf>; internet, 7.

⁴ Braun, Mark, “How To Encourage Bible Study In The Parish”, Paper to the Metro-North Pastoral Conference, 1989. [essay online]; available from: <http://www.wlssays.net/files/BraunEncourage.PDF>; internet, 4.

⁵ Koester, Craig. *A Beginners Guide to Reading the Bible*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1991). 11.

Word.⁶ While gathering around the Word through lessons and exposition of a sermon is a wonderful part of growing in the Word, making it the only means and time for growth is using the sermon “to do what it cannot fully do.”⁷

Sometimes a person may see value in reading the Bible, but feel they are being pulled in too many directions to do anything about it. One of the common complaints every pastor hears is, “Pastor, I just don’t have time.” And it would be foolish to ignore the challenges of a two-income household, the increase of single parents, and children’s activities that fill up many schedules. The prospect of “adding more” comes at a time when many would love to add less. But the better question may not be how to find more time, but how to get more out of the time someone has. Pastor Mike Novotny of Eastside Lutheran Church in Madison, Wisconsin, believes the issue deals more with priorities and not demand. Novotny commented in an interview how “the average person in America watches four hours of television a night.” The truth is, people will always find time for what they enjoy doing, or what they feel is important or valuable. “One makes or takes time for something that should be found towards the top of one’s priority list.”⁸

These are all challenges but none of these expose the real problem. “By nature no sinner is dedicated to Scripture study.”⁹ The sinful nature in every human being wants to do anything but study the Word of God. And no matter what era we live in, in the 21st century, the 20th century, the 1st century, or any other time, the same root problem is there. The reason why it’s important to begin with that fundamental and foundational problem is to recognize that the first challenge we have to deal with in studying the Word is ourselves.

Current challenges are changing assumptions

⁶ Braun, 2.

⁷ Braun, 2.

⁸ Staude, Steven, “Building Home Bible Study,” Paper to the Central Pastor/Teacher Conference, 1982. [essay online]; available from: <http://www.wlssays.net/files/StaudeStudy.pdf>; internet, 3.

⁹ Lawrenz, John, “Using Scriptures at Home,” Paper to the South Atlantic District Convention, 1979. [essay online]; available from: <http://www.wlssays.net/files/LawrenzUsing.pdf>; internet, 2.

What do all of these challenges mean when it comes to helping new members read the Bible on their own? A pastor who just encourages his new members to read the Bible on their own, or just gives them a reading schedule or a one-year or two-year Bible may have good intentions, but may just be setting his members up to fail. A pastor must avoid making key assumptions. A pastor cannot assume new members have had experience with picking up the Bible and reading it on their own. A pastor cannot assume new members grew up in a family where this habit was modeled for them by their parents. A pastor cannot assume new members know how to begin to study the Bible. A pastor cannot assume his members feel qualified to take on such a challenge. With so many demands on time, a pastor cannot assume new members will be able to delve into a daily reading program. In such an instantaneous and short attention span culture, a pastor cannot assume members will have no trouble keeping up with this new daily habit. How does a pastor help his new members, those who have just completed a Bible Information Class and are new to his church, deal with and overcome such challenges? In this paper I seek to help new members, who have just graduated from a Bible Information Class, transition from directed, group study to personal Bible study. To address this challenge, I propose educating new members on the Biblical importance of personal Bible study, equipping new members with the methods and resources that best help individuals with little to no Biblical background, and encouraging new members with a follow up strategy to help them begin and maintain this new habit of personal study.

The “Why” question is probably one of the most fundamental questions we learn to ask from the very moment we learn how to talk. How many times have you heard a child ask, “Why?” Sometimes it is of an inquisitive nature, a means to gaining understanding. Why do you have to go to work? Why do I have to go to bed now? Why do I have to take a nap? As children grow up, especially in the teen years, it morphs into a value question. Why do I need to learn algebra? How will I ever use algebra in my day-to-day life? The why question seeks value, importance and relevancy. Without an answer to the why question, there is a lack of motivation and a lack of willingness to devote any hard work or any time at all to the task.

Why study the Bible? The why question is no different with the topic of the Bible than with any other topic in an individual's life. And with the time constraints already mentioned,

new members must see the value of personal study of the Scriptures in order to be willing to commit any time to this new habit. The purpose of this Biblical review is to show how Scripture answers the why question and gives the benefits of personal Bible study.

Biblical Review: A Scriptural Answer to the Why Question

“The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want.”¹⁰ Psalm 23 is one of the most well-known portions of the entire Bible. It is most commonly used at funerals. It beautifully expresses the wonderful relationship between the lamb-believers and their Shepherd-Lord, a relationship that grows through daily trust and builds over a lifetime. Psalm 23 shows the benefits and blessings that come from having such a close, personal relationship with God. It also serves as a wonderful introduction on the benefits of personal Bible study.

The sheep's life is fully dependent on its shepherd. A sheep's sustenance, provision, protection and everything it needs to survive come from its shepherd. The picture of the relationship between a sheep and a shepherd was not picked on accident. Lamb-believers are just as dependent on their Shepherd-Lord. One of the ways they show their trust in him is by studying his Word.

The Word of God is the source of spiritual strengthening. “Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”¹¹ Through the Bible, the believer is strengthened to replace fear with trust. “Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”¹² Every believer who reads the Bible and obeys it is “blessed.”¹³ Through the Bible the believer is comforted. “Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”¹⁴ Through the Bible the believer finds guidance. “Your Word is a

¹⁰ Psalm 23:1.

¹¹ Romans 10:17.

¹² Isaiah 41:10.

¹³ Luke 11:28.

¹⁴ Matthew 11:28.

lamp to my feet and a light for my path.”¹⁵ Through the Bible the believer finds assurance. “And surely I will be with you always until the very end of the age.”¹⁶ Through the Bible the believer is reminded of God's love. “God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”¹⁷ Through the Bible the believer is reminded of God's forgiveness. “As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.”¹⁸ While these are all true and wonderful blessings that come from reading Scripture, they do not answer the why question. All these things a believer can do when they go to church. Why read the Bible personally instead of studying the Bible at church, either in class or in worship?

Personal study helps new members give their own confession

A believer reads the Bible to know it well enough to say or confess what they believe. When the Last Day comes, no one will be able to hide behind a corporate confession. A believer will not find his congregation or his church denomination and enter heaven via the *en masse* confession. It's not about what the WELS confesses. “Who do you say I am?”¹⁹ Jesus first asked his disciples what others said about him, but what mattered most was their individual confession. It's about what the individual believer confesses. This is not to say the individual believer can only grow in their confession by personal study. Attending worship and hearing God's Word faithfully expounded through law and gospel teaching every week most certainly increases believers' abilities to confess what they believe. Good preaching has the believers in the pew see themselves in the text, see where they have sinned, see where the Word heals them, and see how it applies to their own lives.

¹⁵ Psalm 119:105.

¹⁶ Matthew 28:20.

¹⁷ Romans 5:8.

¹⁸ Psalm 103:12.

¹⁹ Mark 8:29.

The purpose of personal Bible study is to build on, not replace, weekly worship. The Bereans searched the Scriptures daily. Bible study, delving into God's Word, was a regular part of their everyday lives. The Scriptures were written not just for weekly use, not just for worship use, but also for individual use.

Martin Luther went through a lengthy process to translate the Bible from Latin into everyday German. He did this so all Germans could read the Bible on their own. He did this so they could see for themselves exactly what the Scriptures taught and be able to say “Der HERR ist mein Hirte.”²⁰ The believer reads and re-reads Scripture to know what he confesses and to see that his confession is on the basis of Scripture. This is especially true for the new believer. The new believer had to make a confession of that faith in order to become a member. The more a new believer reads the Scriptures, the more they see and trust their confession isn't based on what a specific church teaches, but on what their Savior teaches. The more a new believer reads the Scriptures, the more they can grow and build upon their confession. The new members who continue to read the Bible see how the added familiarity helps them to better understand and more clearly speak their confession.

Personal study helps new members live their faith

A believer reads the Bible to know it well enough to live it. Every person is different. Each person has their own strengths and weaknesses. While one sin may not be as great of a temptation for one person, it may be for another person. Every person has their own context, their own life that may be vastly different from the person next door. Pastors see this challenge in sermon writing. With various members at different stages in their lives, one of a pastor's greatest challenges is taking a Biblical text and trying to apply it to the lives of everyone sitting in the pew. One may be sick, one may be healthy. Another may be weak and struggling, another strengthened and growing. Different Bible stories may affect the same person differently depending upon what is going on in their life at that time. Believers who read the Bible on their own allow themselves the opportunity to see what God's Word says to them at that particular place and time in their lives and how they can live and apply what they have read in their lives.

²⁰ Psalm 23:1. Translated, “The Lord is my Shepherd.” Luther Bibel 1545, [accessed online]; available from: www.biblegateway.com.

Reading the Bible on their own allows new members to see how the words of Scripture speak directly to them. It also allows them to look for ways they can carry out what they've learned in their day-to-day lives.

The only way believers can live their lives as people who live in the Bible is to let the Bible dwell in them richly. The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Colossians, reminds the Christian congregation not only to have the Bible dwelling in them, but dwelling in them richly.²¹ “The word richly implies more than a mere Sunday usage of His almighty Word.”²² The more believers make reading the Word part of their lives, the more it becomes their life.

Personal study helps new members share their faith

A believer reads the Bible to know it well enough to share it. One of the best ways teachers can engage their students and help them understand what they are learning is to have them give a presentation or teach the topic to their peers. To be able to teach something, it is essential to understand the topic yourself in order to help someone else understand what it means. The same principle applies when a believer shares God's Word with others, whether to their children or to their unchurched neighbor. Moses encouraged Israel to share God's Word with their children and to make this sharing part of their everyday lives.

These commandments I give to you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the door frames of your houses and on your gates.²³

Notice where Moses' encouragement began. These commandments are to be on the people's hearts. How can you share what you do not know?²⁴ This is why Scripture encourages

²¹ Colossians 3:16.

²² Staude, 5.

²³ Deuteronomy 6:6-9.

²⁴ Scharf, Erwin, “Personal Bible Study,” Paper for the Michigan District Teachers Conference, 1965. [essay online]; available from: <http://www.wlssays.net/files/ScharfBible.pdf>; internet, 2. Scharf quotes Luther “Kann auch ein Pastor selig werden?” to highlight the importance of understanding and applying the Scriptures to yourself

to “always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope you have.”²⁵ When the Ethiopian didn't understand what he was reading, it was Philip who was able to explain it to him.²⁶ Philip would not have been able to explain it to him if he didn't first understand what it was saying himself. New members have seen the impact God's Word has made on their lives. And whether they have children or other friends, they have people in their lives who need to know what they have been blessed to know. The better they understand God's beautiful truths, the better they will be able to put it in their own words in daily conversations, explain what they believe, and have confidence in sharing their faith with others.

Personal study helps new members pray in faith

A believer reads the Bible to know it well enough to pray it. If reading the Bible is how believers see God talking to them, prayer is the way believers continue the conversation with God. Reading the Bible shows believers how to pray. Many times we see Jesus modeling prayer for his disciples, not just what to pray but how to pray. Jesus often would go off and find a quiet place to pray. He taught his disciples a prayer that balanced their confession of God, along with asking God to provide for their physical and spiritual needs. God invites every believer to pray to him and hold him to his promises. “Call upon me in your day of trouble, I will deliver you and you will honor me.”²⁷ For new believers, prayer may seem very foreign to them, like another language. But the more they read the Word, the more they are connected to the “language”²⁸ of their God and the easier they will be able to “speak the language” of prayer.

The why question is always a very important question. Scripture goes to great length to answer that question and demonstrate the value of personal Bible study. Believers read the Bible on their own so they can speak it, live it, share it, and pray it. And when believers make Bible

so you can teach it to others. Scharf also points out that we “grow through sharing.”

²⁵ 1 Peter 3:15.

²⁶ Acts 8:26-40.

²⁷ Psalm 51:15.

²⁸ Becker, Siegbert, “How to Study Your Bible.” [essay online]; available from: <http://www.wlssays.net/files/BeckerBible.pdf>; internet, 4.

study a part of their every day lives, they are truly blessed and strengthened. New believers need this strengthening as they continue to develop strong roots in God's Word. In the parable of the farmer and the seed,²⁹ Jesus shows how seed scattered on good ground can take root and flourish. As new Christians continue to grow, it's important they continue to be watered and fed by the Word. The more they are in the Word, the more this faith takes root and flourishes as these lamb-believers are able to confess their faith, live out their confession, share their confession, and pray to their Shepherd-Lord.

Literature Review: Challenges and Current Solutions to Personal Study

The challenge in undertaking a project like this is the wealth of material that can be found on personal Bible study. I found multiple essays that had been given at pastor's and teacher's conferences over the last 50 years. What's interesting is how you could take any one of those papers and switch them with another paper and it would not be out of place. Each paper held the same conviction on the importance of personal Bible study, dealt with the same problems, and offered similar tips and encouragement. And all of the literature I reviewed attempted to address two major areas: understanding and time constraints.

When new members were asked about what type of assistance they wanted most to help them study the Bible, their answers revolved around being able to better understand and apply what they've read. There is nothing a member wants more than to be able to correctly understand and apply what God's Word is saying. Sometimes that involves help or a little direction. As the Ethiopian said to Philip, "How can I understand unless someone explains it to me?"³⁰ The challenge with personal study is not having a pastor standing by to answer any questions. Since a pastor cannot be there every time a member opens up the Bible, the goal of any pastor is to equip his members to read with understanding.

²⁹ Mark 4:1-20.

³⁰ Acts 8:31.

Understanding

To understand the Bible, one needs to focus on three major areas: context, comprehension of the text, and application. The first challenge is context. “The total setting of the life and history of the Scriptures is of great importance if one is to understand more fully a given period, event, or passage of the Bible.”³¹ The words on every page of Scripture were not placed at random. The words were spoken to a specific people at a specific time at a specific place for a specific purpose. How can someone fully understand what is being said if they don't first understand why it is said? The Apostle Paul warns in his first letter to the Corinthians against sexual immorality and against the dangers of pursuing worldly pleasures. How much more weight would those words have to readers if they understood that the city of Corinth was an equivalent to Las Vegas? “The Corinthian culture was noted for its debauchery, and too much of Corinth began to grow in the church.”³² New members typically lack this knowledge or background.

Context is like a zoom lens on a camera. It allows readers to zero in on the specific details of a person, city, and culture or to zoom out and see the full picture, to keep the main point in mind. F.C. Grant, in his book *How to Read the Bible*, encourages people to “keep in mind from the beginning where you intend to go.”³³ When someone reads a book, reviewing an outline every now and then is a helpful reminder of the main point of the book and the main point the author is trying to convey. Especially if a new member is spending multiple days or even weeks in one specific book, reminders of the immediate context of the chapter before and after that day's reading is important, and so is a review of the purpose of the book.

Many books and resources have tried to address the challenge of context. Study Bibles offer at least a page of background information at the beginning of every book of the Bible. The

³¹ Danker, Frederick, *Multipurpose Tools for Bible Study*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993). 244.

³² Today's Light Bible, “Get the Big Picture”, (St. Louis: Cph, 1999). 1562.

³³ Grant, F.C, *How to Read the Bible*, (London ; New York: Nelson, 1959). 55.

Concordia Self-Study Bible offers a page of information that gives insight into the place and date of the book's writing, the author's purpose for writing, and other useful background information. Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, authors of *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*, provide “orienting data” that focus on the context and emphases of the book. They also offer specific advice for reading the book, to understand the details and message of the book in its original context. The design is to give a “sense of the whole,” a way for readers to gather information to help them read on their own. Pastor Don Patterson wrote the book *Bible Basics* specifically to help people who are new to the Bible understand what it is they are about to read. Patterson goes to great lengths to help new believers “wade into the waters” of Scripture for the first time, and help readers fit people and events into the broader framework of Scripture.³⁴

Commentaries also offer extensive contextual information. The problem is they are not the best help for every audience, especially new believers. The People's Bible series addresses this problem by writing specifically for members and not pastors. Pastor Wayne Mueller, author of the *Revelation* commentary in this series, highlights the reader-friendly approach when he writes, “They tried to avoid the technical jargon which limits so many commentary series to professional Biblical scholars.”³⁵ Because of this many congregations have the People's Bible in their libraries for members to borrow to help their personal study of the Scriptures. When readers allow the Bible to speak in its own way, examining its impact on the men and women who first heard it and enter their world, readers may find themselves viewing Scripture and their own world in a new way.³⁶

When readers understand context, the information behind the words, they are better prepared for the challenge of trying to understand the words themselves. This is a challenge that can keep people from even attempting to open a Bible. In one-on-one interviews with new members, one person commented on how it took him a long time to start reading the Bible on his

³⁴ Patterson, Donald. *Bible Basics: Finding Tools to Read and Interpret Scripture*. (Milwaukee: NPH, 2010). 5.

³⁵ Mueller, Wayne. *The People's Bible Commentary*, preface to Revelation, (Milwaukee: NPH, 1997). V.

³⁶ Koester, Craig, *A Beginners Guide to Reading the Bible*. (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1991). 95.

own because he was afraid of reading it or understanding it incorrectly. He is not alone with this line of thought. John Carlson, in his book *Getting More from Your Bible Reading*, writes “Some students of the Bible have no confidence in their ability to interpret correctly and are therefore fearful.”³⁷ While this is a challenge for many Christians, it affects one specific group the most. The less experience one has with the Bible, the greater the fear and the lack of confidence. Carlson also believes this fear is seen most often in “young, new Christians.”³⁸ Knowledge is power. As knowledge increases, fear of misinterpreting decreases. To accomplish this, seeing Christ as the focal point of the Scriptures is critical.

The foundation of studying Scripture is seeing Christ as the purpose and center of every book and every page.³⁹ Understanding everything the Bible teaches about Christ is the “important framework” that rests on that foundation.⁴⁰ This framework stands upright when believers take the time to find out what the Scriptures really mean, and avoids a flimsy framework of reading one's own thoughts and impressions into the text, which can cause someone to misinterpret what the Bible is really saying.⁴¹ The more believers understand what the Bible teaches, the more they know what it doesn't teach. Understanding both what the Bible says and doesn't say are equally important.

After someone has gathered and wrestled with all the background information about what they are reading, they are ready to tackle the reading itself. As Philip saw the importance of helping the Ethiopian understand what he read, so also we see the importance of helping people understand what they read today. Comprehension is best achieved through questions. Questions

³⁷ Carlson, John, *Getting More from Your Bible Reading*. (Tulsa : Bethany House, 1982). 7.

³⁸ Carlson, 7.

³⁹ It's important to make the clarification here that comprehension and reason only have their use in view of faith. The assumption being made without a lengthy discussion is the value of comprehension after one has come to faith. Head knowledge is not the goal of Scripture. Only when someone believes in Jesus as their Savior through God given faith can someone appreciate everything the Bible says about him. The goal of comprehension in view of faith, then is to understand as clearly as possible, as much as Scripture makes clear, everything the Scripture teaches about God, his relationship to mankind, and his plan of salvation.

⁴⁰ Richards, Lawrence, *Creative Personal Bible Study*, (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1987). 8.

⁴¹ Grant, 8.

seek to find an answer. The goal of a reader is to ask questions that help them understand what they are reading. The problem lies in knowing which questions to ask. Sometimes people act like asking questions is a sign of weakness, but really it's a sign of wisdom. "Knowing what you don't know is wisdom."⁴² The only way someone can know more or learn more is if they are willing to be honest and admit what they do not know.⁴³ Some methods focus on self-discovery, encouraging people to ask questions about things they didn't understand when reading or questions about things they want to know more about. Using a journal, where someone can jot down notes and questions about what they've read is an excellent way to foster self-discovery. For new members this would be an excellent way to review what they have learned as they complete specific books of the Bible or to see how much they've learned in the past month or year, etc.

Some resources try to address the challenge of comprehension by helping readers ask the right questions, while providing answers as well. Commentaries try to "answer the questions" by providing more insight and explaining the key points of the text. The People's Bible tries to lower the fear factor by not making readers feel the pressure of trying to answer questions on their own. This commentary offers members a way they can have a pastor "in the room", so to speak, to guide them in understanding what they are reading. It is important, however, that people ask questions and wrestle with what they are reading and try to seek out the answers on their own before going to the "expert." The more a reader is able to figure something out on their own, the more likely they are to retain what they have learned.

Other methods focus on providing specific questions for the reader to answer that are directed at helping the reader grapple with the main point. The Whole Bible Project provides a sheet of questions to answer for every chapter of the Bible. It asks questions that help believers gain a deeper understanding of what they read and highlights key verses of the reading. The Whole Bible Project helps the reader to be more engaged in what they are reading. Rather than just being provided with the answers, it allows for more self-discovery. One pastor I interviewed

⁴² Patterson, 67.

⁴³ Patterson, 68.

said his congregation uses the Whole Bible Project as a take home Bible study.⁴⁴ Each week members would pick up the new sheet in the back of church. It would also have an answer sheet from the previous week's work. In order to be used best, the People's Bible may need some supplemental information. The People's Bible does an excellent job of answering questions, but new members may struggle to think of what questions to ask. It may be easier to have at least a few already prepared questions to start with to provide direction.

Study Bibles are the most convenient way for members to gain more understanding without juggling multiple books. Study Bibles are not as in-depth as separate resources, but they do provide notes on overall books, including outlines, and specific notes on individual verses. The Lutheran Study Bible and the Concordia Self-Study Bible are two of the most well-known options available. The major difference between the two is found in the translation used. The Lutheran Study Bible uses the English Standard Version while the Concordia Self-Study Bible uses the New International Version. Because the ESV can be more rigid and focuses on more of a word-for-word literal translation, it may not be the best option to help a new member understand what they are reading.

For some new members, a chronological approach can help with understanding. This Bible reorganizes the order of the books of the Bible, sometimes incorporating portions of books into other books as it tries to give a time line approach to the Bible. For example, while the four gospels all present information from a different perspective and offer a different witness to the work of Christ, for new members it may blur together and seem confusing. A chronological Bible puts the chain of events of the four gospels together and offers one account of the story, while presenting, if multiple gospels have recorded the same event, references to where you can find the other accounts in the gospels. I think this type of Bible could be beneficial especially for new members. One downfall, however, is a chronological Bible doesn't provide background information or study notes.

While resources like the Chronological Bible try to help comprehension through better understanding of the flow of thought, some people believe the best way to understand what one

⁴⁴ Pastor David Priebe at Bay Pines Lutheran Church in Seminole, Florida has between 20 and 30 copies of each week's study taken home by members each week.

is reading is through a whole-book approach. Julian Love writes in his book, *How to Read the Bible*, that each book of the Bible is a “single unit of thought.”⁴⁵ Reading a book all the way through allows “the flow of a single idea to not get interrupted.”⁴⁶ Listed below is a chart of the average time it takes to read through many of the books of the Bible. Love states that, “more than half of the 66 books of the Bible can be read in an average of about 20 minutes, no one of them requiring an hour.”⁴⁷

From the Old Testament*	From the New Testament*
Ruth.....20 minutes	Galatians.....30 minutes
Esther.....45	Ephesians.....30
Ecclesiastes.....45	Philippians.....20
Song of Solomon.....30	Colossians.....20
Lamentations.....40	I Thessalonians.....20
Hosea.....45	II Thessalonians.....10
Joel..... 20	I Timothy..... 25
Amos..... 40	II Timothy.....20
Obadiah.....5	Titus.....10

* Times are approximate. A more rapid reader may need less time.

Siegbert Becker also was a proponent of this approach.⁴⁸ The reasoning was the reader could see the outline of the book and its main emphases better in one sitting or at least by reading

⁴⁵ Love, Julian, *How to Read the Bible*. (New York: Macmillan, 1940). 16.

⁴⁶ Love, 16.

⁴⁷ Love, 16.

⁴⁸ Siegbert Becker in his essay “How to Read Your Bible” believes reading a chapter a day may make it difficult to follow the flow of thought. Reading entire sections or divisions can help someone see the flow of thought better,

the book according to its story divisions.⁴⁹ The goal of this approach is to read through it once in one sitting and then to go back over the book at a slower pace, looking to answer any questions the readers might have had when they first read the book. New members may find this approach to be very valuable, and if they have the time, it may be the best approach.

When readers understand what the Bible is saying, then they can begin to apply its truths to their own lives. In today's ego-driven society, the relevancy of Scripture to someone's daily life is probably the most asked question. What does this mean for me? This is a very valid question and a question every believer is encouraged to ask. It's a question new members especially ask as they seek to connect the dots between the world of Scripture and their own world. This question is where the rubber meets the road. Personal involvement or personal application makes the Bible "come alive."⁵⁰ Seeking personal application is a very valid approach because the Bible is a very personal book. Lawrence Richards, author of *Creative Personal Bible Study* says, "In the Scriptures readers meet two people. They meet themselves and they meet God."⁵¹ The believer is encouraged to study the Scriptures not just to learn information but to listen to God's personal Word to them.⁵² The Old Testament dealt with God speaking personally to his people, or through one of his prophets. The Apostle Paul has many letters in the New Testament that were written to individual people or individual churches. The writer to the Hebrews makes the point that just as God spoke personally to his people in the day of Moses, those same words also applied to them over 2,000 years later. In chapter three the writer to the Hebrews quotes Psalm 95, "Today if you hear his voice." He applied the words of

and reading through the entire book in one sitting can be beneficial as well. Becker proposes either reading sections as proposed by an outline or reading an entire book without stopping to take notes. After finishing reading, then write down any questions that came to mind when you read. Was there any phrase or concept that stood out to you? What was the main point? What didn't make sense or is there something you would like to learn more about? Going back over the book and re-reading gives a chance to answer those questions as you read.

⁴⁹ Love, 26.

⁵⁰ Carlson, 104.

⁵¹ Richards, 50.

⁵² Richards, 10.

warning that was given to God's people during the time of Moses to the people of his own day, just as those words could be applied to believers living another 2,000 years later today.

The purpose of personal application is to look for God-pleasing ways to respond to very personal situations. Many people look for Scriptural guidance or principles on what to say or what to do in a given situation. The challenge for new members is learning how to see those applications when they read and learning how to apply what they've read to their own lives. Personal application is one of the driving forces behind devotion books. They take a portion of Scripture and help their readers reflect on what they have read with an illustration or story from everyday life. Author Max Lucado has sold millions of devotional books, which focus on applying the truths of Scripture to today's world. *Meditations* are one of the most well-known devotion books in WELS circles. Pastors try to help their members apply the truths of Scripture to their own lives weekly through sermons in worship. The goal of any pastor is to show his members that Jesus did not just die for the whole world, but he died for each of them personally. I've heard many pastors on more than one occasion encouraging their members to read John 3:16 out loud and substitute their own name for "the whole world." Helping members, especially new members, see how God loves them personally is one of a pastor's biggest joys. When members are able to apply God's Word to their own lives, their appreciation and understanding of the Scriptures grows.

Time

The second major area my research attempted to address is limited time. Ideally every member can spend hours in the Word and can read multiple commentaries and ponder every question connected to what they have read. But this is obviously not a reality when it comes to the demand on time. There are many resources and tools that try to meet those demands.

Our own church body has tried to recognize this need and taken steps to address it. The WELS offers daily devotions and a three-year reading program on their website that anyone can freely sign up for and have them sent to their email. One congregation puts together their own

daily devotion and sends it to their members via email.⁵³ Other church bodies offer similar resources and other websites offer daily reading programs like Bible Gateway. For new members who have limited time, there are multiple resources that can be sent to them in a variety of ways that can address this need. But it's important for new members to evaluate not just which resources to use, but which fit best with the amount of time they can dedicate to their study. For new members with limited time, what time they do have would best be spent in the Bible itself, rather than in someone's explanation and application of the text. While devotional books can be a wonderful blessing, reading the Bible itself allows God to speak directly to the readers, from his heart to theirs. Especially for new members who still possess limited knowledge of the Bible, every minute they spend in their Bible is time well spent.

One-year and two-year Bibles also try to address issues of time. In addition to providing direction and a reading plan, one of their goals is to provide daily opportunities to read the Bible in 15 minutes or less. The Today's Light Bible is a two-year Bible that offers in its opening paragraph of context a way to shorten the reading on days that are busier than others. For every reading it includes a "if time is short, read ____." Like the other one-year and two-year Bibles, each reading takes 15 minutes or less, but to help someone to keep up with their reading on days they are even more pressed for time, the Today's Light Bible offers a way to shorten the reading to still fit it into someone's limited schedule.

There are many resources out there that try to address the challenges of context, comprehension, application and time. But in many cases, to address each of them involves multiple books. Asking any member, let alone new members who are just getting started in personal Bible study, to include a reading guide, commentary, and devotion book, as part of their study is unrealistic. So what is the best way to help new members grow in understanding, while having realistic expectations of time?

Practical Solutions for Personal Study

⁵³ Mountain of the Lord in Rib Mountain, Wis. sends out a "Passage of the Day" daily devotion that focuses on one verse of Scripture and offers two to three paragraphs of explanation and application followed by a short prayer. Not only is this sent to members, but it can be forwarded on exponentially. Occasionally people who are not affiliated with the church, such as a nurse in Texas, send an email thanking them for doing this and telling them how it has helped them, such as being able to share some of the devotions with patients in a cancer ward.

This question is what led me to the Today's Light Bible. While it is not a study Bible and does not have verse-by-verse notes or a book overview with outline and purpose, it still provides “study materials” for readers as they walk through the text. The goal of this Bible is to raise the reader's understanding and comprehension of the text by focusing on context and application. At the beginning of each reading there is an opening paragraph called “Get the Big Picture.” This section “gives a helpful overview of the day's text before reading the passage.”⁵⁴ It also has a paragraph at the end of each reading called “Sharpen the Focus” that helps readers “understand the passage and see its meaning for their lives.”⁵⁵ It is very user-friendly and would be an excellent tool to help new members understand what they are reading and get the most out of their study.

There is one other Bible that takes a similar approach. The NIV Quest Bible is geared towards members with little to no Biblical background. It is a study Bible with notes that try to explain key words and concepts in the text. It provides background information and contextual helps. The Quest Bible does have one major drawback. The notes and additional information are written from a reformed perspective. While a discerning eye would be needed for any member, it is especially true for new members. New members cannot always discern right away if something is correct according to Scripture. Having a Bible that could potential lead an unsuspecting new believer down an incorrect path defeats the purpose of trying to help new members feel more comfortable walking down the path on their own. The Today's Light Bible notes are written from a conservative Lutheran perspective. While a reader always has to view what they are reading with a discerning eye, the resource that requires the least amount of discernment is usually preferred.

Additional resources

One of the challenges of this project is the lack of resources that are geared specifically for new members for personal Bible study. One of my goals with this project was to create additional resources that educate, equip, and encourage new members in personal Bible study.

⁵⁴ Today's Light Bible, vi.

⁵⁵ Today's Light Bible, vi.

In the appendix is a BIC lesson on “The Benefits and Blessings of Personal Bible Study.” It walks people through four answers to the why question that are listed in the Biblical review section of this paper, along with an examination of some helpful resources, such as Luther's Four Strands.

Another goal was to create a supplement to the Today's Light Bible called “Capturing the Context,” using the gospel of Mark as an example. The purpose of this supplement is to help new members understand what they are reading and grow in their knowledge and faith. The supplement offers additional contextual information, which helps new members better understand what they are reading. It provides geographical information, explains key words and concepts, and provides information about people in the text. The concepts of the Quest Bible and Patterson’s book *Bible Basics* support this format and take the time to educate, explain, and encourage.

A pastor will be hard pressed to find a member, after studying what God's Word says about personal Bible study, who doesn't agree that personal study is beneficial. Many new members can begin their study with good intentions. They may even be very successful for the first couple weeks. But beginning a new routine or habit can be challenging. Very quickly challenges to time, busy work schedules and family commitments can get a new member off track in their study. All of a sudden one missed day becomes two, and then a week, and before they even realize it, the new-found habit is gone. In order for a personal Bible study to be successful, having some sort of follow-up program is essential.

Many churches already use this follow up method for other areas such as weekly worship. When members have missed worship for a few weeks, either elders or the pastor follows up with them to “check in” and see how they are doing. The purpose of this visit is to show care for the member, as well as encourage them to keep growing in God's Word and in his relationship with them. Many times members appreciate the encouragement. Just seeing the elder or pastor can serve as a reminder of their desire to continue to grow and strengthen their relationship in their Lord.

Follow up is important not just to help new members when they are struggling to keep the habit alive, but also as a checkup of their growth and understanding.⁵⁶ Are they understanding what they are reading? Do they have any questions they haven't been able to answer? A follow up program can also help new members assimilate into the congregation. One idea is to match up a new member with a “veteran” member of the congregation who can become a “Bible buddy” who can read with them to encourage them in their reading and help them answer questions.

Setting Up Successful Study

Many Bibles and reading plans assume a daily reading program works for everyone and is the preferred choice. What happens when a day is missed? People feel more pressured to “catch up” and if they don't, the missed days can pile up. Eventually a person can feel so guilty or discouraged that they stop reading altogether. Some people are blessed with the gift of organization. Their planners are well managed and their calendar has everything in order. Unfortunately not everyone has this gift. How can someone help a mismanaged person keep up with their personal study?

For any Bible study to work it must be intentional. Picking a consistent time⁵⁷ can help with habit formation. If someone has challenges with organization, use a plan that helps them work around their weakness and helps to improve it. One member I interviewed suggested putting their Bible on their pillow so it would be more difficult to forget to read or not to take even a few minutes to read. Or if someone is a morning person, perhaps leaving a Bible on the kitchen table would be a great visual to open up the pages.

⁵⁶ Another way to encourage members in their personal study is to offer a Bible class at church that walks through the past week's readings. Trinity Lutheran Church in Minoqua, Wis. has a Bible class on Sunday mornings that reviews the past week's readings from the Today's Light Bible. It is an opportunity for members to ask questions about what they've read, as well as increased confidence they can read on their own because they will always a way they can make sure they are understanding everything they are reading. It is also another way members can dig deeper into what they've learned.

⁵⁷ Scharf, 5.

Personal study must be personal. The goal is to use any or every tool that best matches “one’s own needs.”⁵⁸ If someone has a limited Biblical background, one of the goals of their study might be to emphasize Biblical history. If someone finds the key concepts of Scripture to be challenging, perhaps a focus on definitions of key words and phrases would be beneficial. Dr. John Lawrenz, who wrote an essay for a conference over 25 years ago on encouraging and developing home Bible study, believes the best thing pastors can do to equip and encourage new members in their personal Bible study is to “set them up succeed, not fail.” The goal is to have people in their Bibles daily.⁵⁹ But that goal isn’t always able to be achieved right away and for some it would be unwise to recommend it. If someone has the goal to get into shape that doesn’t mean they can immediately start running in 5k races or bench press 200 pounds. With proper commitment and hard work, someone could possibly work up to it. But it is a gradual process and to do it before someone is ready can be a detriment.

Failure is one of the most powerful emotions anyone can experience. Some people’s failed attempts at personal Bible study can make someone feel it’s impossible to achieve when perhaps the problem was they tried to do too much too soon. To encourage new members in their study, and following the advice of Dr. Lawrenz, I included a supplemental reading plan for those who may not be ready for everyday reading, while still beginning to create the daily habit of personal Bible study.

Conclusion

But as for me, I will always have hope; I will praise you more and more. My mouth will tell of your righteousness, of your salvation all day long, though I know not its measure. I will come and proclaim your mighty acts, O Sovereign LORD; I will proclaim your righteousness, yours alone. Since my youth, O God, you have taught me, and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds. Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your might to all who are to come.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Carlson, 113.

⁵⁹ Schmiede, Glen, “A Biblical Look at Bible Study.” Paper for South Atlantic District Pastor’s/Teacher’s Conference, 1984. [essay print ed. only]; available from: Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay Files; 11.

⁶⁰ Psalm 71:14-18.

A good friend can share nearly every significant detail of their friend's life. Everything they have done together, and even major events in their friend's life they were not a part of, they can share many details. The reason why God offers encouragement to read his Word is to learn and proclaim. The psalmist in the above quote has learned what God has done for him. He knows how God has always been there for him and has helped him during difficult times and good times. And now he is recounting the relationship he has with his God and his joy in sharing it with others. The psalmist cannot proclaim every detail about God because not everything about God is revealed. But what he does know, he proclaims. My prayer is that new members open their Bibles as often as possible to share in the joys of the psalmist and of the beautiful relationship they have with their God. "Every time you open your Bible, God is speaking to you personally from his heart to yours."⁶¹ This is a relationship that began before they took their first breath on this earth. God knows every intimate detail about them. I pray they look forward to learning as much as they can about their God and what he has done for them.

⁶¹ Patterson, 94.

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Appendix

CONTENTS

I.	BIC LESSON	
	A. Teacher's guide	30
	B. Student handout	34
II.	GOSPEL OF MARK READING PLAN	
	A. Author's note	39
	B. Reading plan	40
III.	GOSPEL OF MARK "CAPTURING THE CONTEXT" HANDOUTS	
	A. Introduction	61
	B. Chapters 1 & 2	62
	C. Chapters 3 & 4	64
	D. Chapters 5 & 6	66

The Blessings and Benefits of Personal Bible Study

Introduction Question: Agree/Disagree: People who hear God's Word at church do not need to study the Bible at home.

What God's Word Does Say About Personal Bible Study:

- Psalm 23
- Luke 11:28
- John 8:31
- Psalm 119:105
- 2 Peter 3:18

Making Bible Study Personal:

- Job 19:25-27
- Mark 8:27-32
- Acts 17:11

- *“I didn't know”*

1) Reading the Bible personally allows the believer to _____ it.

- Colossians 3:16
- Matthew 5:16
- Deuteronomy 6:6-9

- *“Practice what you preach”*

2) Reading the Bible personally allows the believer to _____ it.

- Acts 8
- Romans 10:14-21
- 1 Peter 3:15

- *A Second Grader Shares a Valentine with his Class*

3) Reading the Bible personally allows the believer to _____ it.

- Genesis 32:22-30
 - Proverbs 3:5-6
 - Psalm 51:15
 - Genesis 18:16-33
- The best way to learn a language is through immersion. Can you think of why?

4) Reading the Bible personally allows the believer to _____ it.

Making Use of Bibles and Reading Methods (Types, Versions and Plans, oh my!)

Versions:

- Why are there so many different “versions” of the Bible?
- What should I keep in mind when considering different versions?
- Application: Playing the game “Telephone”

Types:

What is a Study Bible?

- Psalm 118 (pg 912)
- What do you like about it? What don't you like?

What is a Chronological Bible?

- May 2nd (pg 499)
- October 12th (pg 1348)
- What do you like about it? What don't you like?

What is a One-Year or Two-Year Bible?

- Scripture example from a one-year/two-year Bible
 - 1 Samuel 26 (pg 419)
 - Luke 15 (pg 1435)
 - What do you like about it? What don't you like?
-
- Application: Is one Bible better than others?

Methods:

What are Luther's Four Strands?

- 1) What does this text lead me to thank God for?
 - 2) What does this text lead me to confess?
 - 3) What does this text lead me to pray for?
 - 4) What does this text lead me to do?
- Using Mark 9:17-24, try to work through Luther's Four Strands.
 - What do you like about this method? What don't you like?

What is SOAP?

- Scripture:
- Observation:
- Application:
- Prayer:
 - Using Matthew 7:24-27, try to work through SOAP.
 - What do you like about this method? What don't you like?

What is One Chapter, Two Questions?

- What does this mean?
- What does this mean for me?

- Using Daniel 6, try to work through one chapter, two questions.
- What do you like about this method? What don't you like?

5 Tips for Personal Reading

- 1) Make it a priority
- 2) Pick a consistent time
- 3) Keep it simple
- 4) Have a goal in mind (What do you want to get out of this study?)
- 5) Find someone who can read along with you

The Blessings and Benefits of Personal Bible Study

(Teachers Guide)

Introduction Question: Agree/Disagree: People who hear God's Word at church do not need to study the Bible at home.

What God's Word Does Say About Personal Bible Study:

- Psalm 23 (*focuses on the personal relationship each believer has with their God*)
- Luke 11:28 (*every believer who is in the Scriptures and obeys them are blessed*)
- John 8:31 (*a indicator you are a follower of Jesus, a mark of discipleship*)
- Psalm 119:105 (*provides guidance for daily living*)
- 2 Peter 3:18 (*encouraged to keep growing in our faith*)

Making Bible Study Personal:

- Job 19:25-27 (*Job could only make this confession by knowing what God's Word said*)
- Mark 8:27-32 (*Jesus reminds Peter that his confession must be entirely his own. It doesn't matter who other people say he is, but only who Peter says Jesus is*)
- Acts 17:11 (*The Bereans were able to see if Paul's preaching was correct by comparing it to what the Scriptures taught. The goal is to know not just what the Scriptures say but what they don't say.*)

- Application Question: "I didn't know" (*When a child's mom is upset that they didn't put their laundry away after she cleaned it and folded it and put it in a laundry basket in their room, children answer "I didn't know" that I couldn't just leave it in the basket. If someone gets pulled over for speeding, how many times do they try to say "I didn't know that was the speed limit." People try to hide behind ignorance as an excuse. Ignorance will not be an excuse to God. No one will be able to say that "I didn't know that Jesus was God" and be able to go to heaven. The Bible was written so that believers may know that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." (John 20:31) Reading the Bible helps you to know more about your Savior and know "you have eternal life." (1 John 5:13)*)

- 1) Reading the Bible personally allows the believer to _____ it.
(confess)

- Colossians 3:16 (*Being in the word “richly” helps you in your relationships with others and encouraging Godly living.*)
- Matthew 5:16 (*The more a believer is in the Word, the more their actions reflect their faith*)
- Deuteronomy 6:6-9 (*Being in the Word helps parents instruct their children in the Lord, and make the truths of Scripture a part of their everyday lives.*)
- Application Question: “Practice what you preach” (*You could begin by asking them to explain what the phrase means. This phrase is most often used in a negative connotation to remind someone to “walk the walk if they are going to talk the talk.” In a positive sense, the idea behind this is someone’s life should be in line with their confession. We read the Bible to encourage ourselves live out our confession of faith and follow the one who practiced his preaching perfectly.*)

2) Reading the Bible personally allows the believer to _____ it.
(live)

- Acts 8 (*Philip could only explain to the Ethiopian what he was reading only if he read it first*)
- Romans 10:14-21 (*Like Philip and the Ethiopian, Paul emphasizes that need for believers to share their faith because they are the instruments God uses to bring others to faith*)
- 1 Peter 3:15 (*Believers prepare themselves to share the Word by focusing on Christ and his Word. Reading the Bible equips believers to share their faith.*)
- Application: Valentine's Day (*2nd grader in Sheboygan tried to hand out valentine candy hearts with John 3:16 written on them. He knew what the Bible said about love and tried to share it. For more information, <http://www.greenbaypressgazette.com/article/20120216/GPG0101/302170014/No-religious-valentines-Sheboygan-school-tells-2nd-grader>*)

3) Reading the Bible personally allows the believer to _____ it.
(share)

- Genesis 32:22-30 (*hold God to his promises*)
- Proverbs 3:5-6 (*pray with trust*)
- Psalm 51:15 (*bring our needs to him*)
- Genesis 18:16-33 (*pray boldly*)
- Application Question: The best way to learn a language is through immersion. Can

you think of why? *(The more someone is surrounded by a language and has to live in it, the quicker they pick up the language and are able to use it themselves. This is why serious language students go on immersion trips to develop their skills. The same is true for learning the language of Scripture. The more people are in tune with Scripture and God's will for them, the more their prayer life reflects this "immersion.")*

- 4) Reading the Bible personally allows the believer to _____ it.
(pray)

Making Use of Bibles and Reading Methods (Types, Versions and Plans, oh my!)

Versions:

Why are there so many different "versions" of the Bible? *(Versions all have a different audience in mind. Some translations focus more on thought-for-thought, to allow for a more conversational translation. Other translations focus on word-for-word to stay true to the original Greek or Hebrew.)*

What should I keep in mind when considering different versions? *(Too far in the thought-for-thought direction leads someone too far away from the original meaning and too far in the word-for-word can make it hard to understand because it is a clunky translation. The goal is to find a balance that accurately reflects the original text.)*

Playing the game "Telephone" (This game involves one person whispering something into the ear of the person next to them, and each person whispers what they think they heard into the next person's ear until it is whispered back to the person who originally said it. It is amazing to see just how distorted the message becomes by the time it makes its way back to the person who said it. The goal of the game is to stay accurate to the original. The goal of every translation should be its accuracy to the original. When looking at different versions, one should remember this goal in choosing a version that accurately reflects what the person who originally wrote it said.)

Types:

What is a Study Bible?

- Psalm 118 (pg 912) *(have them especially read the note on verse 22)*
- What do you like about it? What don't you like? *(during this time you can point out the strengths and weaknesses of a Study Bible)*

What is a Chronological Bible?

- May 2nd (pg 499)
- October 12th (pg 1348)
- What do you like about it? What don't you like? *(during this time you can point out the strengths and weaknesses of a Chronological Bible)*

What is a One-Year or Two-Year Bible?

- Scripture example from a one-year/two-year Bible
- 1 Samuel 26 (pg 419)
- Luke 15 (pg 1435)
- What do you like about it? What don't you like? *(during this time you can point out the strengths and weaknesses of the One-Year or Two-Year Bibles)*

- Application: Is one Bible better than others? *(every Bible has a specific use in mind. Each one tries to help a reader gain more understanding and grow in the Word. The goal is selecting one that will help a someone get the most out of their study. For new members, the Today's Light Bible might be the best choice)*

Methods:

What are Luther's Four Strands?

1. What does this text lead me to thank God for?
 2. What does this text lead me to confess?
 3. What does this text lead me to pray for?
 4. What does this text lead me to do?
- Using Mark 9:17-24, try to work through Luther's Four Strands. *(Answers will*

vary)

- What do you like about this method? What don't you like?

What is SOAP?

- Scripture: *(The actual verses you are reading)*
- Observation: *(What is going on in the text?)*
- Application: *(What does this mean for me?)*
- Prayer: *(What is something I studied I can pray about?)*
 - Using Matthew 7:24-27, try to work through SOAP. *(Answers will vary)*
 - What do you like about this method? What don't you like?

What is One Chapter, Two Questions?

- What does this mean?
- What does this mean for me?
 - Using Daniel 6, try to work through one chapter, two questions. *(Answers will vary)*
 - What do you like about this method? What don't you like?

(If someone has picked which method they like using the most, it may be beneficial to assign more practice with the method as part of their homework throughout the rest of the adult confirmation course.)

5 Tips for Personal Reading

- 1) Make it a priority *(commitment)*
- 2) Pick a consistent time *(intentional)*
- 3) Keep it simple
- 4) Have a goal in mind *(What do you want to get out of this study?)*
- 5) Find someone who can read along with you *(follow up)*

Gospel of Mark Reading Plan

Author's Note

This reading plan is an adaptation of the Today's Light Bible daily reading schedule. It is also best used with the "Capture the Context" handouts. The goal of this reading plan is to help new members who are not used to daily reading gradually begin a daily reading plan. It is a "chunk reading" format that has someone read two chapters in one setting, which should take around 10-15 minutes. Each successive day of the week after that reading, there will be review passages to look at along with a short prayer. Each of these day's readings could be done in as little as 1-2 minutes. This is intended to help someone become accustomed with being in the Word daily without the challenge of carving out time in a schedule that may prevent someone from being willing to pick up their Bible and read.

This plan also attempts to help a new member grow in their prayer life. The first week provides prayers for the member to use. In those prayers there is a section where the new member can include their own requests and petitions. This is intended to give them the opportunity to be active involvement, instead of just reading what is listed. After the first week, members are encouraged to come up with their own prayer using the acronym PRAY, which stands for "Praise," "Repent," "Ask," and "Yield." By the end of this reading plan, the goal is to help new members successfully establish a personal reading habit, increase their reading if able, and become more comfortable in their prayer life.

Reading Plan for the Gospel of Mark

Week 1: Mark 1 & 2

Day 1

Reading: Mark 1 & 2

Prayer: Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name; your kingdom come; your will be done, on earth as in heaven; give us today our daily bread; forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us; lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil; for the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever, Amen.

Day 2

Reading: Mark 1:7-8

Prayer:

Dear Jesus, you came to earth so you could wash away the sins of all people. With water connected to your gracious promises, you washed my sins away through Baptism. Help me to remember the relationship I now have with you through my Baptism. As I go through this day, I ask you to (pray for others/help with a problem you are having/ask for comfort/guidance/strength). Help me to keep my eyes on you throughout my day. Thank you for the opportunity to grow in your Word. In your name I pray, Amen.

Day 3

Reading: Mark 1:10-11

Prayer:

Dear Jesus, on my own I could never have God's favor. My sins have separated me from you. But through faith in you, because God is pleased with you, he is pleased with me. Because he loves you, he loves me. Help me to remember how much I am loved. Help me to remember you came to earth so I could have God's love. As I go through/end this day, I ask you to (pray for others/help with a problem I am having/ask for comfort/guidance/strength). And as I go through/end my day, help me to remember how much I am loved. In your name I pray, Amen.

Day 4

Reading: Mark 1:17

Prayer:

Dear Jesus, only by your grace am I able to follow you. You have made me your own, not because of anything I have done, but because of everything you have done. As I go through/end this day, I ask you to (pray for others/help with a problem I am having/ask for comfort/guidance/strength). Help me to be a fisher of men and look for opportunities to share with others in my life what you have done for them. In your name I pray, Amen.

Day 5

Reading: Mark 1:40-41

Prayer:

Dear Jesus, as I study your Word I give thanks for your willingness, for your willingness to save people who don't deserve to be saved. I give thanks for your willingness to save me. How great is your compassion! As I go through/end this day, I ask you to (pray for others/help with a problem I am having/give thanks for a blessing I have received/ask for comfort/guidance/strength). Help me to look to you in every need, remembering the compassion you have already shown me. In your name I pray, Amen.

Day 6

Reading: Mark 2:9-12

Prayer:

Dear Jesus, you didn't just come to heal people of their physical problems, but also of their spiritual problems. Help me to marvel at the greater miracle you showed the paralytic man, and help me remember how I share in the miracle of sins forgiven. As I go through/end this day, I ask you to (pray for others/help with a problem I am having/give thanks for a blessing I have received/ask for comfort/guidance/strength). I pray to you knowing you hear me and trust you will always do what is best for me. In your name, Amen.

Day 7

Reading: Mark 2:15-17

Prayer: Apostles Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. On the third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Week 2: Mark 3 & 4

Day 1

Reading: Mark 3 & 4

Prayer: Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name; your kingdom come; your will be done, on earth as in heaven; give us today our daily bread; forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us; lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil; for the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever, Amen.

Day 2

Reading: Mark 3:34-35

Prayer:

P: Praise God or give thanks for something you read in his Word, or for something else you would like to give thanks

R : Repent, ask for forgiveness for something that you have done wrong

A : Ask God to watch over others and help them, and ask God to watch over and help you

Y: Yield, end your prayer with full trust in God's will and confidence he knows what you need better than you do and will answer your prayer according to your eternal good. (example: "not my will but yours be done.")

Day 3

Reading: Mark 4:14-20

Prayer:

P: Praise

R: Repent

A: Ask

Y: Yield

Day 4

Reading: Mark 4:21-22

Prayer:

P:

R:

A:

Y:

Day 5

Reading: Mark 4:26-27

Prayer:

P:

R:

A:

Y:

Day 6

Reading: Mark 4:30-32

Prayer:

P:

R:

A:

Y:

Day 7

Reading: Mark 4:39-41

Prayer: Apostles Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. On the third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Week 3: Mark 5 & 6

Day 1

Reading: Mark 5 & 6

Prayer: Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name; your kingdom come; your will be done, on earth as in heaven; give us today our daily bread; forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us; lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil; for the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever, Amen.

Day 2

Reading: Mark 5:33-34

Prayer:

P: Praise

R: Repent

A: Ask

Y: Yield

Day 3

Reading: Mark 5:35-36

Prayer: Luther's Morning Prayer/Luther's Evening Prayer

Luther's Morning Prayer

I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, your dear son, that you have kept me this night from all harm and danger. Keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life my please you. Into your hands I commend my body and soul and all things. Let your holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen.

Luther's Evening Prayer

I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, your dear son, that you have graciously kept me this day. Forgive me all my sins, and graciously keep me this night. Into your hands I commend my body and soul and all things. Let your holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen.

Day 4

Reading: Mark 5:38-40

Prayer:

P:

R:

A:

Y:

Day 5

Reading: Mark 6:26

Prayer:

P:

R:

A:

Y:

Day 6

Reading: Mark 6:40-44

Prayer:

P:

R:

A:

Y:

Day 7

Reading: Mark 6:55-56

Prayer: Apostles Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. On the third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Week 4: Mark 7 & 8

Day 1

Reading: Mark 7 & 8

Prayer: Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name; your kingdom come; your will be done, on earth as in heaven; give us today our daily bread; forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us; lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil; for the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever, Amen.

Day 2

Reading: Mark 7:14-22

Prayer:

P: Praise

R: Repent

A: Ask

Y: Yield

Day 3

Reading: Mark 7:37

Prayer: Luther's Morning/Evening Prayer:

Luther's Morning Prayer

I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, your dear son, that you have kept me this night from all harm and danger. Keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life my please you. Into your hands I commend my body and soul and all things. Let your holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen.

Luther's Evening Prayer

I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, your dear son, that you have graciously kept me this day. Forgive me all my sins, and graciously keep me this night. Into your hands I commend my body and soul and all things. Let your holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen.

Day 4

Reading: Mark 8:21

Prayer:

P:

R:

A:

Y:

Day 5

Reading: Mark 8:27-29

Prayer:

P:

R:

A:

Y:

Day 6

Reading: Mark 8:31

Prayer:

P:

R:

A:

Y:

Day 7

Reading: Mark 8:34-38

Prayer: Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. On the third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Week 5: Mark 9

Day 1

Reading: Mark 9

Prayer: Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name; your kingdom come; your will be done, on earth as in heaven; give us today our daily bread; forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us; lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil; for the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever, Amen.

Day 2

Reading: Mark 9:5-7

Prayer:

P: Praise

R: Repent

A: Ask

Y: Yield

Day 3

Reading: Mark 9:19a

Prayer: Luther's Morning/Evening Prayer

Luther's Morning Prayer

Luther's Evening Prayer

I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, your dear son, that you have kept me this night from all harm and danger. Keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life my please you. Into your hands I commend my body and soul and all things. Let your holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen.

I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, your dear son, that you have graciously kept me this day. Forgive me all my sins, and graciously keep me this night. Into your hands I commend my body and soul and all things. Let your holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen.

Day 4

Reading: Mark 9:22b-24

Prayer:

P:

R:

A:

Y:

Day 5

Reading: Mark 9:30-31

Prayer:

P:

R:

A:

Y:

Day 6

Reading: Mark 9:33-35

Prayer:

P:

R:

A:

Y:

Day 7

Reading: Mark 9:42-43

Prayer: Apostles Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. On the third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Week 6: Mark 10 & 11

Day 1

Reading: Mark 10 & 11

Prayer: Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name; your kingdom come; your will be done, on earth as in heaven; give us today our daily bread; forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us; lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil; for the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever, Amen.

Day 2

Reading: Mark 10:14-15

Prayer:

P: Praise

R: Repent

A: Ask

Y: Yield

Day 3

Reading: Mark 10:22b-23

Prayer: Luther's Morning/Evening Prayer:

Luther's Morning Prayer

I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, your dear son, that you have kept me this night from all harm and danger. Keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life my please you. Into your hands I commend my body and soul and all things. Let your holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen.

Luther's Evening Prayer

I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, your dear son, that you have graciously kept me this day. Forgive me all my sins, and graciously keep me this night. Into your hands I commend my body and soul and all things. Let your holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen.

Day 4

Reading: Mark 10:26-27

Prayer:

P:

R:

A:

Y:

Day 5

Reading: Mark 10:42-45

Prayer:

P:

R:

A:

Y:

Day 6

Reading: Mark 10:46-52

Prayer:

P:

R:

A:

Y:

Day 7

Reading: Mark 11:7-10

Prayer: Apostles Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. On the third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Week 7: Mark 12 & 13

Day 1

Reading: Mark 12 & 13

Prayer: Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name; your kingdom come; your will be done, on earth as in heaven; give us today our daily bread; forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us; lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil; for the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever, Amen.

Day 2

Reading: Mark 12:10

Prayer:

P: Praise

R: Repent

A: Ask

Y: Yield

Day 3

Reading: Mark 12:27

Prayer: Luther's Morning/Evening Prayer:

Luther's Morning Prayer

I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, your dear son, that you have kept me this night from all harm and danger. Keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life my please you. Into your hands I commend my body and soul and all things. Let your holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen.

Luther's Evening Prayer

I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, your dear son, that you have graciously kept me this day. Forgive me all my sins, and graciously keep me this night. Into your hands I commend my body and soul and all things. Let your holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen.

Day 4

Reading: Mark 12:28b-32

Prayer:

P:

R:

A:

Y:

Day 5

Reading: Mark 12:38-40

Prayer:

P:

R:

A:

Y:

Day 6

Reading: Mark 13:5-6a

Prayer:

P:

R:

A:

Y:

Day 7

Reading: Mark 13:31

Prayer: Apostles Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. On the third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Week 8: Mark 14 & 15

Day 1

Reading: Mark 14 & 15

Prayer: Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name; your kingdom come; your will be done, on earth as in heaven; give us today our daily bread; forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us; lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil; for the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever, Amen.

Day 2

Reading: Mark 14:22-24

Prayer:

P: Praise

R: Repent

A: Ask

Y: Yield

Day 3

Reading: Mark 14:36

Prayer: Luther's Morning/Evening Prayer:

Luther's Morning Prayer

I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, your dear son, that you have kept me this night from all harm and danger. Keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please you. Into your hands I commend my body and soul and all things. Let your holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen.

Luther's Evening Prayer

I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, your dear son, that you have graciously kept me this day. Forgive me all my sins, and graciously keep me this night. Into your hands I commend my body and soul and all things. Let your holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen.

Day 4

Reading: Mark 14:38

Prayer:

P:

R:

A:

Y:

Day 5

Reading: Mark 14:72-73

Prayer:

P:

R:

A:

Y:

Day 6

Reading: Mark 15:33-34

Prayer:

P:

R:

A:

Y:

Day 7

Reading: Mark 15:38-39

Prayer: Apostles Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. On the third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Week 9: Mark 16

Day 1

Reading: Mark 16

Prayer: Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name; your kingdom come; your will be done, on earth as in heaven; give us today our daily bread; forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us; lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil; for the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever, Amen.

Day 2

Reading: Mark 16:1-6

Prayer:

P: Praise

R: Repent

A: Ask

Y: Yield

Day 3

Reading: Mark 16:14

Prayer: Luther's Morning/Evening Prayer:

Luther's Morning Prayer

I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, your dear son, that you have kept me this night from all harm and danger. Keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please you. Into your hands I commend my body and soul and all things. Let your holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen.

Luther's Evening Prayer

I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, your dear son, that you have graciously kept me this day. Forgive me all my sins, and graciously keep me this night. Into your hands I commend my body and soul and all things. Let your holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen.

Day 4

Reading: Mark 16:15-16

Prayer:

P:

R:

A:

Y:

Day 5

Reading: Mark 16:19

Prayer:

P:

R:

A:

Y:

Day 6

Reading: Mark 16:20

Prayer:

P:

R:

A:

Y:

Day 7

Reading: Mark 1:1

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, I thank you for the opportunity to study your gospel. As I see Jesus revealed as the Son of God, I know I have someone who has saved me from my sins. Encourage me to keep growing in your Word. As I go through/end this day, I ask you to (pray for others/help with a problem I am having/ask for comfort/guidance/strength). I bring these requests to you with full confidence that you will work everything out for my eternal good. In Jesus name, Amen.

Mark

An Introduction

A look at what the gospel of Mark is about

Who is Jesus Christ? Mark doesn't waste any time. In his opening words he reveals what he would like you to know about him. "The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God." The only way you can show this is not with words, but with actions. This is why Mark is known as the action gospel. As you read Mark's gospel, see Jesus in action. See his miracles. As you read Mark's gospel, see how he ends where he began, and may you too proclaim like the Roman soldier, "Surely this was the Son of God."

WHO IS MARK?

Mark was a New Testament believer who worked closely with Peter and Paul after Jesus' earthly ministry. Sometimes referred to as John (his Hebrew name), Mark (his Latin name) sailed with Paul on his first missionary journey. He most likely was introduced to Paul through his cousin Barnabas, who also was sent out with Paul as a missionary. Peter was so endeared to Mark that he once referred to Mark as "his son." Evidence points to Peter as the eye-witness source for Mark's gospel, causing this letter to also be known as Peter's gospel.

PLACE/DATE OF WRITING

It appears the gospel of Mark was written while he was in Rome with Peter. The style and character of the gospel itself, which make it probable that the book was written for Gentile (non-Jewish) readers, confirm the tradition that Mark wrote his gospel in Rome. The gospel is therefore to be dated around 60 AD, since Peter did not reach Rome until his later years.

GEOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

In the next "Capturing the Context" handout, societal customs, information about location, including maps, and other information that will be beneficial will be listed here.

DEFINITIONS

In the next "Capturing the Context" handouts, key words and phrases will be explained.

CONCEPTS IN MARK

- Immediately:* Mark uses this word 42 times in his book. Highlights and emphasizes the action taking place.
- Kingdom of God:* It can be a reference to location (heaven) or the people who dwell within the kingdom (all believers), but most often it refers to God's ruling activity, which takes place on earth through the gospel.
- Miracles:* Something accomplished beyond human power. Jesus' miracles showed him to be the Son of God and his loving care to act and help his people.
- Son of Man:* Jesus repeatedly used this term to describe himself and his humanity, emphasizing how became one of us in order to save us.
- Parables:* Stories from everyday life Jesus would share to explain an abstract truth with a concrete example.
- Isaiah:* Many of Jesus' quotations of the Old Testament in Mark come from Isaiah.

QUOTES

- "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."*
- "Who is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him."*
- "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."*
- "For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*
- "I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will not enter it."*

Mark

Chapters 1 & 2

The beginning of Jesus ministry

Mark does not record any information about Jesus birth or childhood. His focus is on showing Jesus as the promised Savior, who has come to heal his people—healing broken bodies and broken hearts. Just like the paralytic man, when we put our trust in Jesus as our Savior, we hear the same words, “Your sins are forgiven.”

DEFINITIONS

- Gospel:* Literally “good news,” it is the message that God has provided a way to save his people through his Son, Jesus Christ.
- Disciple:* Followers or learners, most often used in reference to the followers of Jesus.
- Repentance:* Confessing sin and turning away from it.
- Blaspheming:* To deny God or try to take his place of authority in thought, word, or action.
- Sabbath:* Weekly day of rest and worship. No one was allowed to work. Religious leaders added their own laws, requiring people to even stricter rules than what God required. In the Jewish calendar, the day was arranged from sundown to sundown, so the Sabbath would have begun Friday evening until Saturday evening.

PEOPLE

- Isaiah:* Old Testament prophet who lived about 700 years before Jesus was born, yet foretold Jesus birth purpose, and his death. He focused so much on the Promised Savior that his book is referred to as the 5th gospel. Mark references a prophecy about John the Baptist in chapter 1; throughout the book Jesus refers to Isaiah and quotes him more than any other Old Testament book.
- John the Baptist:* The one Isaiah prophesied who would prepare the way for the Savior to come; teacher who focused the people on their need for a Savior.
- Pharisees:* Religious leaders who focused more on themselves than the people they were leading. Often at odds with Jesus and his teachings.
- Tax Collector:* Considered traitors; worked for the Roman government; kept some taxes for their own gain.

CONCEPTS

- “Show yourself to the priest.”* Usual custom; if people no longer had a contagious disease, they would show themselves to the priest who would officially allow them to return.
- Guests of the bridegroom* Jesus compares his disciples with the guests of a bridegroom. A Jewish wedding was a particularly joyous occasion, and the celebration with it often lasted a week. It was unthinkable to fast during such festivities, because fasting was associated with sorrow.

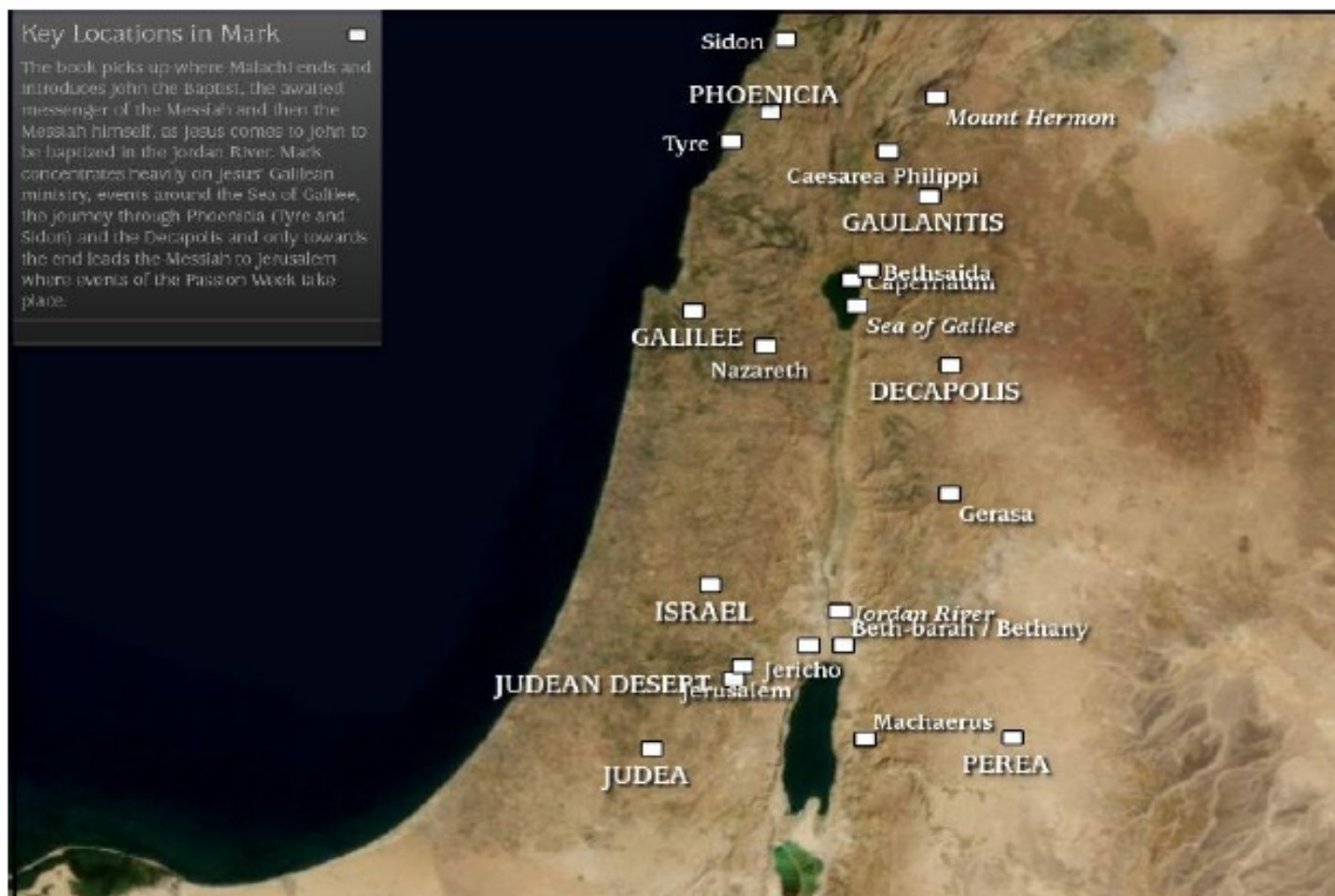
QUOTES

- “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”*
- Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”*



Key Locations in Mark

The book picks up where Malachi ends and introduces John the Baptist, the awaited messenger of the Messiah and then the Messiah himself, as Jesus comes to John to be baptized in the Jordan River. Mark concentrates heavily on Jesus' Galilean ministry, events around the Sea of Galilee, the journey through Phoenicia (Tyre and Sidon) and the Decapolis and only towards the end leads the Messiah to Jerusalem where events of the Passion Week take place.



GEOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

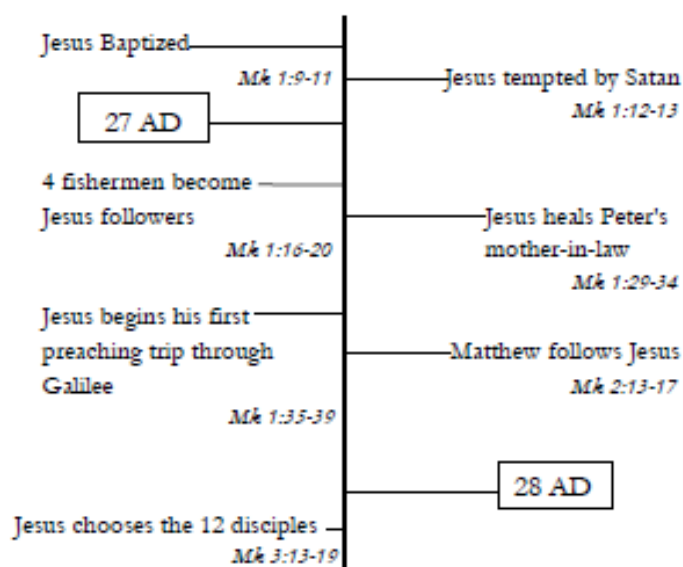
Whole Judean: Judea's boundaries extended about 55 miles north to south and about the same east to west, extending from the Mediterranean to the Dead Sea. Term emphasizes the high interest created by John's preaching.

Jerusalem: Capital of Judea and spiritual life of the people. Place of the kings since David in the Old Testament, intended to point to the great King who was to come.

Capernaum: Small sea-faring town along the northern portion of the Sea of Galilee. Only significance is it was the place where Jesus spent the majority of his three year ministry. Even today, Capernaum has a sign that says "the town of Jesus."

Region of Galilee 60 miles north of Jerusalem, Galilee was predominantly a sea-faring town. The Region of Galilee is located on the western side of the sea of Galilee and is 60 miles long and 30 miles wide.

TIME LINE OF JESUS' MINISTRY*



*Exact dates, even year dates, are generally unknown. The purpose of this time line is to give a little insight into the sequence of events in Mark. Not everything Jesus did was recorded. Other events are also recorded in the other gospels, in Matthew, Luke, and John.

Mark

Chapters 3 & 4

Many people begin to follow Jesus

Already we see the lines being drawn between the religious leaders and Jesus. As Jesus begins to speak in story form, listen to the same encouragement to sow your seed not in man-made laws, but in “good soil,” rooted in the Word of God. Listen to the one who has power over wind and waves, who used his power to save lives from sin, including yours.

DEFINITIONS

Parables: Usually stories out of ordinary life used to illustrate a spiritual point. Most had one single point and not every detail was meant to have significance.

Sickle: reaping hook used to cut grain; used in figurative sense to indicate time is up and the Last Day has come.

Apostle: Literally means, “one who is sent out.”

PEOPLE

12 apostles: The training of the Twelve included not only instruction but also continuous association with Jesus. They received special training so they could continue to share Jesus message after his earthly ministry was done.

Simon Peter: Jesus gave him the name Peter, which means rock. It became a descriptive title, referencing Simon's character and leadership qualities from among the disciples.

Judas the Betrayer: “The betrayer” was a name Mark adds to foreshadow Judas' role in Jesus final days.

Jesus' family: Jesus' earthly relatives, including his half brothers and sisters, struggled with Jesus' revelation as the Son of God. Jesus took this opportunity to emphasize that his true relatives are those who do the will of God and have faith in him.

CONCEPTS

The Parable of the Sower: Jesus explanation of faith; those who respond to his words by obeying his teachings, putting them into practice in their lives, and putting their full trust in him, they are the ones who are rooted in the good soil of his Word. Only his Word is able to produce such a harvest.

“The secret of the kingdom of God”

In the New Testament, secret refers to something God has revealed to his people. The secret (that which was previously unknown) is proclaimed to all, but only those who have faith understand. Only through Jesus, God's revealed Son, can we enter the kingdom of God (heaven).

Lamp on a Stand:

Jesus purpose was to reveal himself as the Savior of the world.

“The Kingdom of God is like”

Through parables, Jesus tries to describe his ruling activity and how he advances his kingdom. Sometimes it is a reference to heaven or to the people of the kingdom, i.e., believers.

The Parable of the Growing Seed

Emphasis is on the power and reliability of the gospel.

The Parable of the Mustard Seed

Insignificant beginnings with great results. Jesus and the disciples were not impressive. But a day will come when Jesus true greatness and power will be seen by all the world.

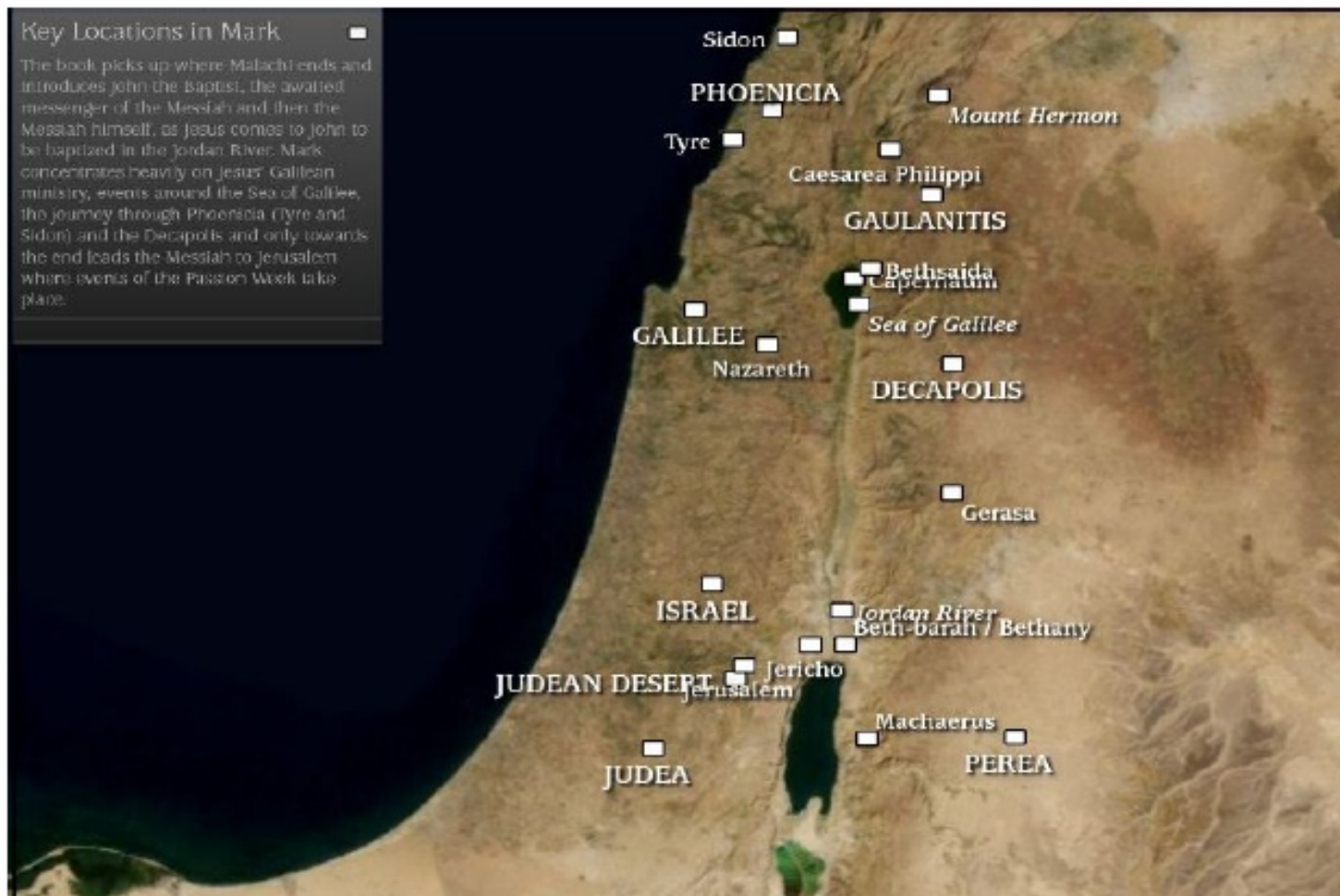
QUOTES

“Who is this? Even the winds and waves obey him!”



Key Locations in Mark

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GEOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

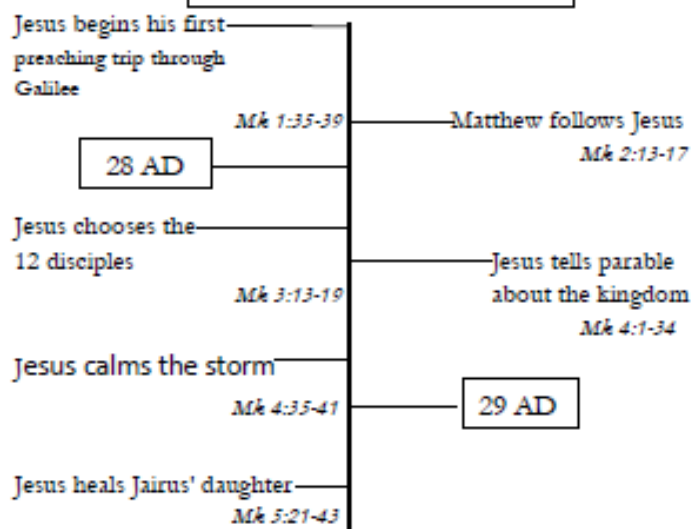
Large Crowd: Evidence of Jesus rapidly growing popularity. Crowds came not just in the nearby vicinity, but all the way south of Judea (Idumea) and as far north as Tyre and Sidon. Remembering the type of transportation at this time, people who were traveling 50 or 100 miles had to travel for one-to-two weeks to see Jesus.

Sea of Galilee: Situated in a basin surrounded by mountains, the Sea of Galilee is particularly susceptible to sudden, violent storms. Cool air from the Mediterranean is drawn down through the narrow mountain passes and clashes with the hot, humid air lying over the lake.

The Sower: In that day, a farmer scattered seed by hand. Roads and paths would sometimes go through the fields, so some seed would inevitably fall on bad ground.

The Mustard Seed: The smallest of all seeds planted, which grows into the largest of all garden plants, up to 15ft.

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Mark

Chapters 5 & 6

See the compassion of Jesus

At this time the disciples had been with Jesus for around a year. What have they learned? In these two chapters they see Jesus' compassion on all people, including those many would rather overlook. Jesus is the help of the helpless. Now Jesus sends out the disciples to offer that same help, armed to heal the body and charged to heal the soul with the message of the gospel.

DEFINITIONS

Anointed: Oil was commonly used as ointment to help people with their ailments. Jesus equipped his disciples to help those in need through acts of kindness and miraculous power.

PEOPLE

Jairus: Synagogue rulers operated like a church council president today, members who had administrative responsibilities for the upkeep of the building and supervising the worship.

Bleeding woman: Like those who had a skin disease, this woman was not allowed to go out in public. The fact that she went out in public showed her desperation. This is also why Jesus asked "Who touched me?" He didn't ask for his sake, but hers. He wanted her to come forward so he could commend her faith in him and assure her of her healing, now and permanently through sins forgiven.

Herod: Roman ruler over Galilee and Perea from 4 BC to 36 AD.

Wailers: It was custom at this time for families to hire "professional mourners" to show how much they were grieving over their loved one who died. While Mark doesn't fully say, evidence in the gospel of Matthew indicates there were at least some musicians were already on hand, as part of the mourning ceremony had already begun.

CONCEPTS

"Shake the dust off your feet" This was a symbolic act practiced by the Pharisees when they left an "unclean" Gentile area. Here it represented an act of solemn warning to those who rejected God's message.

The 5,000: The number counts only the men and does not include the women and children who were also present. The size of the crowd is amazing in light of the fact the neighboring towns of Capernaum and Bethsaida probably had a population of only 2,000 to 3,000 each.

"fourth watch of the night" According to Roman customs, the night was divided into four watches: 1) 6pm-9pm, 2) 9pm-midnight, 3) midnight-3am, and 4) 3am-6am

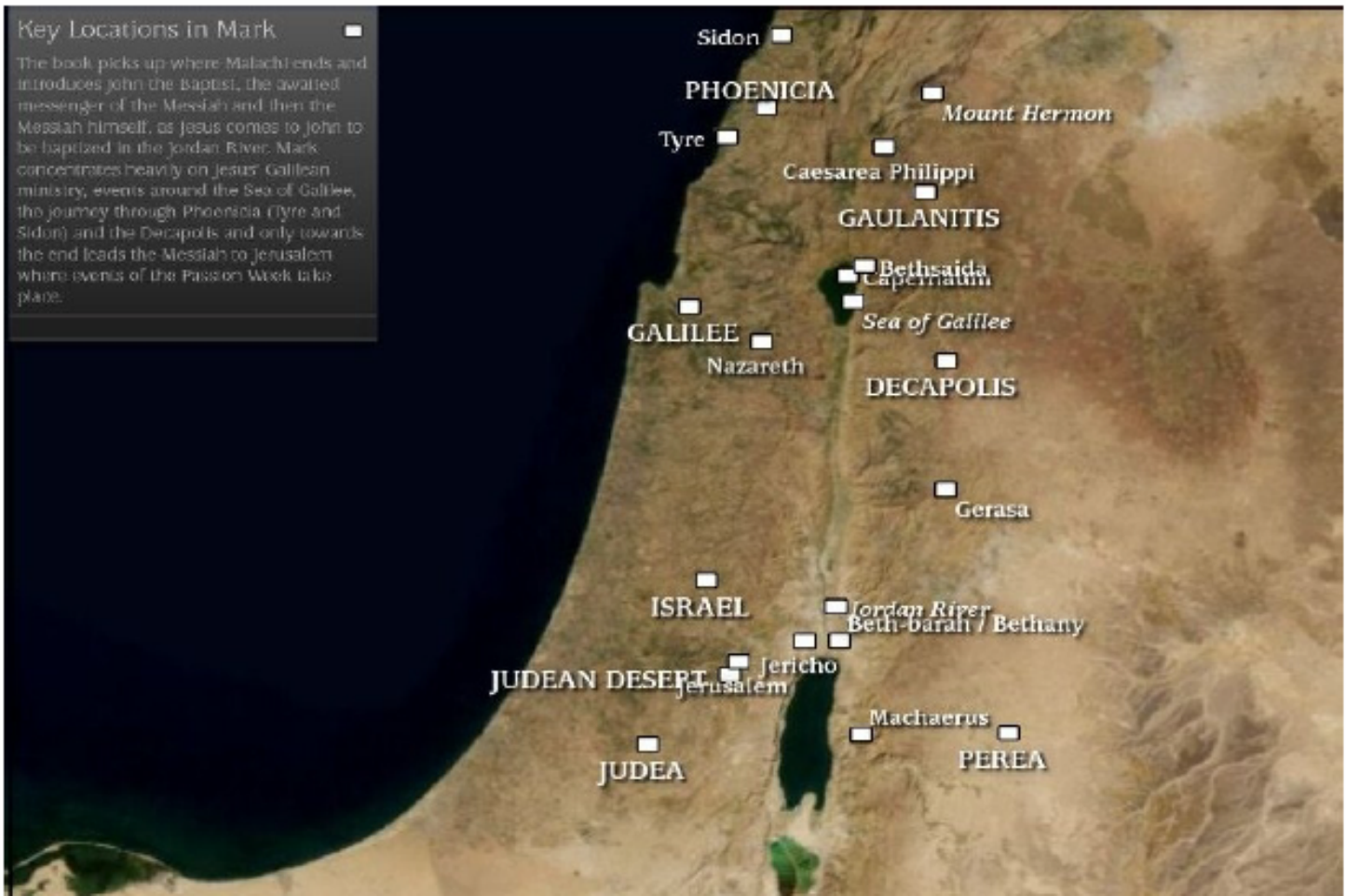
QUOTES

"Don't be afraid; just believe!"



Key Locations in Mark

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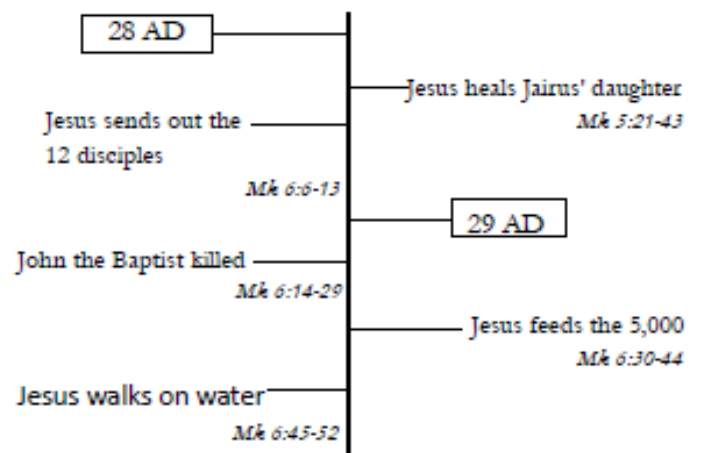
GEOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Region of the Geraseses and the Decapolis East of the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River the area was a mix of Jews and Greeks. the Decapolis was a league of 10 cities, consisting of Greeks who had come in the wake of Alexander's conquests; established before the Romans occupied the area, all but one were east of the sea and the river. When Jesus was in the area, many "crossed over" to hear him preach and teach.

"Ran on foot: and got there ahead of him." The Sea of Galilee really was the size of a lake only 13 mi. long and 8 mi. wide. On a clear day you can see all the land surrounding the sea; small size and strong winds made it possible for people to arrive on foot before the boat.

Gennesaret: Can refer to 1 of 2 locations. 1) four mi. long two mi. wide narrow plain on the west side of the sea of Galilee near the north end, 2) town in the plain. The plain was considered a garden spot, fertile and well watered.

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