

True^North

Mapping a new life in Christ according to a Biblical True^North

Disciple-Making in the Word

Dr. Dave Smith

True^North

Mapping a new life in Christ according to a Biblical True^North

Table of Contents

	Preface	What Is All The Fuss About Disciple-Making?.....	1
The "WHY" of Disciple-making in the Word	Chapter 1	I See You.....	11
	Chapter 2	Doing Nothing Is A Dangerous Decision	21
	Chapter 3	Your Pastor's Job Description: Developing A Culture of Disciple-Making.....	33
	Chapter 4	Developing A Wesleyan Culture of Disciple-Making	43
The "HOW" of Disciple-making in the Word	Chapter 5	Pray First And Always	61
	Chapter 6	Observation, Part I: Start With The Big Picture	79
	Chapter 7	Observation, Part II: Identifying Literary Structures.....	93
	Chapter 8	Observation, Part III: How The "Parts" Fit Into The "Whole"	103
	Chapter 9	Interpretation: What Did The Text Mean?.....	117
	Chapter 10	Application: What Does The Text Mean To Me?.....	137
Tools for Disciple-making in the Word	Appendices	154

PREFACE

WHAT IS ALL THE FUSS ABOUT DISCIPLE-MAKING?

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror.

James 1:22-23 ESV

In the winter of 2015, my wife Angie and I were on a cruise through the Caribbean. Our daily routine was wonderfully the same. When we returned from breakfast, lying on our bed was a list of the “places of interest” for the port-of-the-day, along with a city map to help us navigate our daily adventure. Each city map was on the same bright yellow paper with similar markings. It was a bit repetitive - especially since I have what I consider an “internal GPS.” If I can locate the main north-south route in a city center, I can take you to wherever you want to go.

On this particular day, we were touring the city of Cozumel. In preparation, Angie reached for the sheet titled “Cozumel Places of Interest” and I grabbed the “Cozumel City Map.” As I looked it over, I was not surprised to discover that this city was like the last few we had seen - everything flowed in and out from the city center. I located the city center on the map and visually placed the data in my “internal GPS.” Then, I wadded up the map, threw it into the trash can, and declared to Angie, “Your human compass is ready. Where would you like to go first?”

As we disembarked the boat, I noticed a steward’s cart in the hallway. On the cart was a stack of bright-colored maps like the one I’d just thrown away. Even though I was confident in my abilities, I grabbed a spare - in case I might need it.

We took a bus to the city center and began to enjoy places of interest that Angie wanted to visit. After experiencing all the places in the immediate vicinity, Angie told me she wanted to find a specialty jewelry shop. She read off the address. I took a moment to recalibrate according to my internal GPS, glanced down at the map to confirm, and soon, we were on our way. We briskly walked to the expected location, and as we approached our destination, I confidently told her it would be right around the corner. As we turned,

the shop was not there. We were right where we were supposed to be, but the shop was NOT. For the first time in our married life, Angie realized that I was lost.

I took out the map to double-check my location. Everything looked perfect as it related to the city center. Then, I glanced at the upper right-hand corner of the bright yellow paper. It was clearly labeled “San Juan, Puerto Rico.” In our haste off the boat that morning, I had grabbed a map for the next day’s stop. We were in Cozumel, not San Juan. I was setting our plans according to the wrong map.

Many of us unknowingly calibrate our internal life compasses according to the wrong mapping coordinates. We are constantly shaped and disciplined by the news feeds of culture and social media that subtly take root in our hearts and minds. This world’s values have slowly but surely taken over from God’s wisdom and His Kingdom principles.

Here is the fundamental presupposition of this book:

*We must re-calibrate our internal compasses according to the
True[^]North of the Word of God.*

I am a strong advocate of reading the Bible. We should read more than we currently do. But, if we want to genuinely live in accordance with Christ, merely reading the Bible is not enough. Disciples must learn to read AND understand AND apply the Word. This level of engagement with Scripture is not only the work of professional pastors and academics but rather Jesus’ primary teaching for each disciple. In Matthew, He says: “Anyone who hears the message of the Kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart” (Matt 13:18). This passage is clear: Jesus expects more from your devotional life than merely reading (hearing) the Word. You must live it; to live it, you must understand it.

**Disciples
must learn
to read AND
understand
AND apply
the Word.**

What Does It Mean to “Understand the Word”

I completed my Ph.D. in England. Each morning, I would pick up a newspaper to read. I could easily decipher the words on each page. However I did not grasp the social context because of our cultural differences. The way they used words was quite different from how I used the exact words back at home. Abbreviations, terms used to describe their political systems, and common phrases in that culture were unknown. I could *read*, but I could not *understand*. How did I solve this reading dilemma? Each morning I would have coffee with fellow students from England. I would continuously pepper them with questions

about what words meant in that particular context. I would ask for the cultural or political background to fill in the back story. In the end, I would ask them to “interpret” the story’s meaning for that day. It was only then that I fully understood what I was reading.

I could never have figured out what these newspaper articles meant alone. Without their knowledge of the culture in contemporary England, I would be left guessing what words meant, what acronyms stood for, and what social and political forces stood behind the meaning of the newspaper stories. These fellow students were my living dictionaries and my cultural compasses, pointing me in the right direction. It is within this story that we draw the two central presuppositions for this book:

First, you cannot just read the Bible. To engage fully with the Bible, you must also engage in the cross-cultural process of interpretation. We must read and understand.

Second, you cannot read and understand alone. You must do this in community. This community must include others who have access to the history and culture of the world you are reading. Disciple-making in the Word is always a team-sport. We should not read alone.

To fully engage in Scripture, we must read *and* understand it, and we cannot do it alone!

Let’s Define Discipleship

The simplest way to define biblical discipleship is “orient our lives according to Jesus’ Kingdom values and principles.” A disciple is one who has repented of their former way of life (turned around) and is now following the new orientation of Jesus. A disciple is a Christian in motion toward Christ. Again and again, the Gospels describe Jesus’ disciples as people who respond to the voice of Jesus when He says, “Come, follow me.” His invitation depicts the beginning and our ongoing recalibration of our *True^North* spiritual compass setting. He speaks, and we turn in the direction of His voice (Revelation 1:10-12).

Now, I have scores of books on my shelf which define the term “discipleship.” They cover a wide range of practices that help to form believers into followers of Christ. Each of them emphasizes the importance of reading the Word. But not one of them - Yes, I said *not one* - teaches us how to actually read-interpret-apply the Word to our contemporary setting. These resources assume that the Bible and its meaning is self evident. This is simply not true. The results are twofold: first, we have become a biblically illiterate church. Second, the church is composed of believers who do not live much differently from the rest of the secular world. Why? We read but do not *move forward* into understanding the voice of Jesus. All of us would acknowledge that Jesus is unlike anyone we have met.

If we read without pursuing understanding, we will find ourselves making moral and spiritual decisions by guessing “what Jesus meant.” The stakes are too high to live by mere conjecture.

Why is this happening? Is it a personal problem? A societal problem? While there are many contributing factors, I suggest that the Church herself is responsible for this illiteracy pandemic. The number of churches that teach believers “How to read the Bible” is negligible. It is this Church-wide deficiency that the *True^North* disciple-making process is attempting to correct.

In Luke 10, a teacher of the law comes to Jesus and asks Him, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus responds with a question: “What is written in the Law and

Reading without interpretation can lead to dangerous misunderstanding of the Word.

how do you read it?” (Luke 10:25-26). Did you catch the two-fold nature of Jesus’ question? First, what are the “contents of the Law?” He has connected the necessity of the second part of the question: “How do you *interpret* it?” We must fashion a Jesus approach that addresses both critical pieces: first, “*what to read*” and second, “*how to read it.*” For Jesus, reading

without interpretation can lead to dangerous misunderstanding of the Word. Knowing Bible content might win us Bible Trivia games, but it requires “understanding” for us to walk according to the Jesus-way of life.

Let’s Define Disciple-making in the Word

You may not have noticed, but up to this point, I have made the intentional decision not to use the noun “disciple” in our discussions. Instead, I chose to employ the verb “disciple-making.” The primary reason is that “disciple” can be seen as a static category, as if I have arrived at my destination! On the other hand, “disciple-making” suggests an ongoing activity: in progress, always moving forward. Disciple-making is both about your new identity and your chosen activity in a spiritually maturing relationship with another. Thus, here is a holistic definition of disciple-making:

Disciple-making is moving toward spiritual maturity through the reading AND understanding AND applying of the Word with Others.

With that in mind, I am asking you to read through this material prayerfully. Think of this book as causing you to think and plan proactively. The time will come when someone will ask you this question, “Can *you* help *me* become a disciple?” It may be your son or daughter. It may be a co-worker. It certainly will be someone who trusts your walk

because they have seen the Word flow into you and growth in grace emerge from you. Please keep in mind, you cannot give to them what you do not have .

Disciple-making Is Not An Optional Add-On

Many people define the matter of discipleship as the second step of a person's conversion experience. Initially, we "accept Jesus", commit our lives to Him, and are given the assurance

Discipleship should never be seen as a Kingdom accessory or upgrade.

of eternal life. Following that initial commitment, people are offered an opportunity to participate in a discipleship program. However, since we already have been promised heaven, discipleship can easily be understood as an optional add-on to my salvation. Sadly, this under-developed understanding of disciple-making permits us to say, "I am too busy. Plus, if I don't need more, I'm fine just as I am."

This false understanding has caused many in modern church to consider discipleship as the final step in a three tiered process:

1. Evangelism - My life *Before* Jesus
2. Salvation - New life in *Receiving* Jesus
3. Discipleship - Optional growth in holiness as I *Follow* Jesus

I no longer separate the three. I urge you to do the same. Evangelism, salvation, and discipleship are all part of one holistic understanding of salvation into a relationship with Christ. Discipleship should never be seen as a Kingdom accessory equipment. Instead, it is the opportunity to get to know more intimately the one who first loved us. The New Testament never talks about anyone being "saved" without pursuing Jesus with all their heart and for all of their life.

...

The Roadmap For Our Journey Together

Think of this book as an adventure in Kingdom cartography, map-making for your disciple-making in the Word. Part I of this book will help shape your perspective for "Why" disciple-making in the Word is so critical. I will also try to relieve any fears you might have about studying the Bible. I promise this will be a joy. (As a matter of full disclosure, since this may be new to you, it will ultimately BECOME a joy. I promise!)

In Chapter 1, I will describe several false assumptions which unknowingly we hold regarding the process of reading AND interpreting the Bible. Once we replace these false narratives, we will lean into a new level of commitment to grasping biblical truths and their implications to our spiritual lives.

In Chapter 2, I will answer the question, “What if you do nothing and just keep reading the Bible as you always have?” I sincerely believe that followers of Jesus maintaining a spiritual status quo are THE most significant problem facing the church today.

In Chapter 3, I will provide you with insight into the heart of your pastor. I will address two questions. First, “From a biblical perspective, what does my pastor have to do with my discipleship?” Second, “What is your pastor praying for to take place in your life?” You will be pleasantly surprised to discover that your pastor has more faith in you than you think.

In Chapter 4, I will describe disciple-making “in the Wesleyan tradition.” There are subtle (yet distinct) differences in how Wesleyans employ our disciple-making efforts compared to the general evangelical church. Yes, we all love the Word and want to grasp its truth. But what it means to be a Wesleyan has everything to do with how we make disciples in our community.

Part II of this book will help you understand “How” this disciple-making happens.

Note: If you so choose, you can skip directly to Chapter 5 and begin to learn “how to read the Word” as it was meant to be read. But I beg you not to shortcut the process. For my hope throughout this book is that you will become a disciple-maker yourself. The first 5 introductory chapters will construct the biblical and theological foundation upon which the True^North Bible Study process rests. To get a full Kingdom view, it is nice to know not just “what to do” but also “why we do it”.

Chapter 5 will be our starting point. We will focus on Prayer as the preparation to receive all insight that arises from our encounter in the Word.

In Chapters 6-8, I will introduce you to the process of Observation. Chapters 6 and 7 unlock the gift of learning to observe the Big Picture of Bible reading; “books as a whole.” Reading books chapter-by-chapter is one of the chief reasons we misunderstand Scripture. Simply put, if we only practice reading a chapter-a-day, it gives off the appearance that each chapter is a self-contained set of biblical teaching disconnected from the whole of the book. Chapter 8 will continue the observational process as we study smaller Scriptural units, all the while observing the “parts in light of the whole.” In the end, you will learn that Observation is “seeing what the text says” and then shaping what you have seen into the form of a question.

Chapter 9 introduces us to the concept of Interpretation. It is one of the keys for *True^North* Bible Study. Yet, at its core, it is simple. If Observation is about “seeing and asking questions,” Interpretation is focused on “answering the questions raised during your Observation” using the tools I will teach you. Think of this as a two step plan:.

Observation = Asking questions

Interpretation = Answering Questions

Finally, Chapter 10 is the goal of all Bible reading: Application. It is at this time that you are finally ready to address this question, “What does the passage mean to me today?” If you practice a rush-to-judgment by answering this application question too early, you will miss the vital step of addressing what the text meant to the original biblical audience. The Word’s transformational impact comes alive to us when we grasp its authority in its ancient context. They are what we might call the “First Readers” of the text. We are the “Second Readers.” Let’s keep the first things first!

Let’s Begin!

I have pondered three ways to proceed with this workbook.

The first option is for me to remain at a distance and for you to watch me disciple an imaginary person. You could passively sit back and discreetly overhear me making a disciple of someone else in a hypothetical situation. Yes, there is power in the overheard Word. I can give you information about reading AND understanding without you having to make a personal commitment.

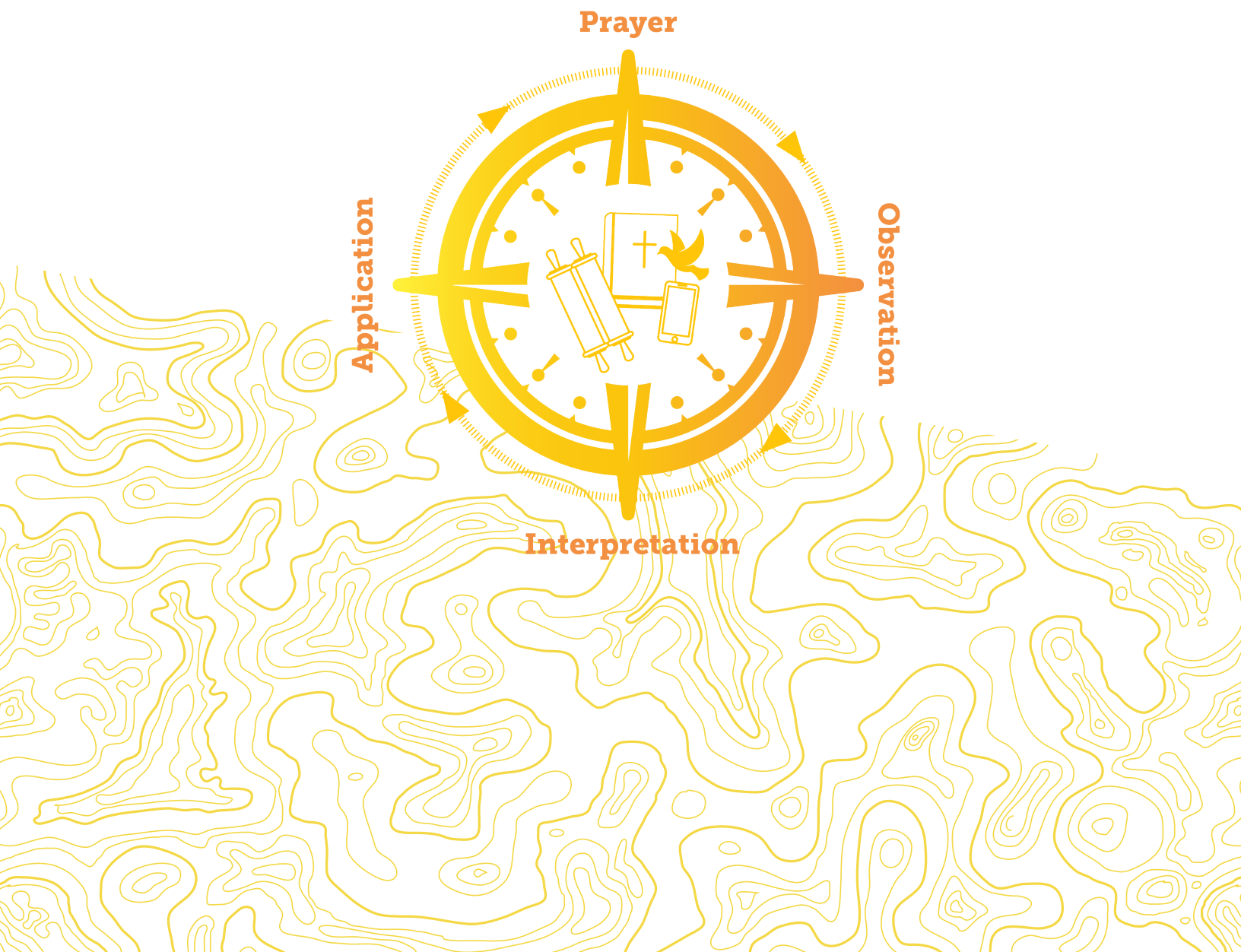
The second and better option is for you to take a step of active participation with me. As you read this book, imagine that *I am discipling you*. We are sitting in Starbucks, working together through a weekly disciple-making meeting. Each encounter in the Word can recalibrate your spiritual compass. You are leaning in from the very first moment.

Even still, I have a third way of approaching this material. You know how it goes: Good. Better. Best. Our third option is the “best” option. What if you invite someone else to walk with you through this material? As I said above (and as we will discover later), it is not suitable for someone to read AND understand alone. Who would you like to invite to learn these skills together in community? Thus, a disciple-making team has already come together.

Here we go!

True^North Part 1

The "WHY" of Disciple-making in the Word



CHAPTER 1

I See You.

When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path.

Matthew 13:19 NIV

Every author has an intended audience - a person or group of people he or she “sees” when writing. It is the same for you. When you sit down to hand-write a note to a loved one, you see that person sitting in front of you reading your message of devotion, all with the anticipation of a smile and a loving gaze in return. When you email your boss asking for vacation time, you picture your boss reading it and responding with an affirming response. I am no different, for I also have an intended audience. It’s you!

And I see you sitting in front of me.

As I write, I see that you are hungry to understand more of the Word. I believe you desire to read and fully grasp what the Lord is saying to you. I also assume that you frequently experience unanswered questions as you read the Bible. I see that you thirst for all He has for you, yet your soul is often unsatisfied. You read the Bible and set aside time each day to meet with Jesus. Yet, as He speaks, His words do not resonate with the clarity of meaning in the way you hope. You are often frustrated. May I assure you: you are not alone.

Frustration is not unusual as people encounter the Word. We read yet do not fully understand. Personally, I never read the Bible until I was age 25. When I did, I was completely enamored with the person of Jesus. But I confess to you that His words, more often than not, baffled me. There seemed to be a vast distance between us, as if He was talking in a foreign language. I *wanted* to understand, but I couldn’t. At that time, no one had explained the vast cultural divide separating the world of an ancient Jew from that of a modern North American. After all, there is a 2,000+ year chasm separating the people and events in the Bible from my living room devotional time! I naively read as if this two millennia-wide divide never existed.

This book will focus on this modern Bible-reading dilemma you and I both share. We read, and we know in our souls that Jesus “has the words of eternal life” (John 6:68 ESV). Yet, His words do not translate well from His ancient time to our contemporary world. At least not as effortlessly as we might like.

I see you. And I know that you desire more; personally for yourself, but also, for others that you directly impact. I sense that you want the certainty upon which you could stake your life since that is precisely the Gospel’s call to obedience: To die to self and fully live for Christ (Phil 1:21).

In this chapter, I will identify a few false yet often accepted Bible-reading assumptions. Yes, these are subtle. Maybe you’ve never heard them spoken this way in a Sunday service. However, they are significant in the implications they have regarding our definition of disciple-making.

False Assumption 1: *Reading The Bible Is Enough*

As we’ve already discussed, the Bible was never written merely to be read - at least not with a modern understanding of the word “read.” It has been entrusted to us to be *read*, *interpreted*, and *applied* within a loving Christian community. Your problem is not solely faulty-reading skills. It’s that someone somewhere handed you a Bible with this blessing attached to it, “Simply read this, and the Holy Spirit will tell you what it says.” This is true. *But only in part.*

Please, hear my heart on this matter. I fully believe that the purpose of reading the Word is to facilitate an encounter with the Triune Lord. Without the Holy Spirit joining together God’s thoughts with the minds of humanity in this reading process, spiritual awakening and transformation will never occur. However, the Holy Spirit’s work undergirds and even superintends our efforts to know God through His Word. But He never releases us from the necessity of sound Bible study and careful interpretation.

Let’s allow the words of Jesus to define the Holy Spirit’s work in the transmission of Biblical truth to us. In the book of John, Jesus says:

The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have told you. (John 14:26 CSB)

Stop and think about that for a moment. The phrase “remind you” implies that the apostles were not hearing this truth for the first time. The Holy Spirit would “remind them” of the actual words spoken by Jesus, which took place in a precise historical location. The term “remind” is an emphatic form of the word, used several times in John’s Gospel. It occurs first in John 2:17 (NIV), as the disciples connected (“remembered”) Jesus’ temple cleansing action with an Old Testament quotation from Psalm 69:9, “His disciples *remembered* that it is written: “Zeal for your house will consume me.” Thus, *remembering* is to be seen as the disciples actually interpreting Jesus’ words and deeds as a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Just a few verses later, John helps us with his own act of interpretation when he writes, “After He [Jesus] was raised from the dead, His disciples recalled [*remembered*] what He said. Then they believed the Scriptures and the words that Jesus had spoken (John 2:22).” The Gospel writer John tells us that even the effects of this momentous event did not cause faith to take deep root in the disciples. It’s not until AFTER the resurrection. Thus, they did not grasp the implications of the events in the temple as they were unfolding. They needed to interpret that temple event once again and much later, in light of the resurrection.

Pause for just a moment. Jesus spoke the words and the disciples heard them. But it took *three years* for His teachings to impact His disciples. At that initial encounter, they simply had no place in their minds to integrate all that Jesus was teaching. Without knowing Jesus’ earlier words, the Spirit had nothing to work with to create this extraordinary post-resurrection transformation. They needed to hear first before remembering later, resulting in faith taking hold in their lives.

According to Jesus, the role of the Holy Spirit is not to place unlearned facts into your mind in the absence of your work of “searching the scriptures.” As you learn to read-interpret-apply God’s Word, He will “remind you” of the things you have read to create genuinely transformational moments in your life.

I still see you.

I can also see a slight wince in your face as you struggle to integrate what I just said to you (really, what the Holy Spirit spoke to you). As a side note, in our attempts to process these words, we learn a critical first step when seeking to grasp the Scriptures’ meaning: Read them out loud. In biblical times, the Scriptures were consistently *read aloud*. So, whenever you encounter the word “read” in the Bible (or in this book), I encourage you to replace it with the words “read out loud.” To practice this concept, go back a few paragraphs, locate John 14:26, and read it aloud. See if this ancient practice helps you grasp the profound truth that Jesus says will be the Holy Spirit’s role.

False Assumption 2: *Interpretation is Not Necessary*

Now that you have returned from your reading-aloud practice, would you allow me to take this one step farther? The purpose of the Scriptures is not to help you gather isolated facts about Jesus. Luke's Resurrection narrative in Luke 24 confirms it.

He [Jesus] said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. (Luke 24:25-27 NIV)

Did you see it? And if you just read this aloud, did you hear it? At this point in Luke's Gospel, the disciples had all the facts about Jesus. They simply had not been able to put it all together into a coherent biblical whole. Then Jesus, "beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, *'explained'* to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself." For us, the key word is "*explained*." Luke is telling us that understanding Jesus requires an act of interpretation to construct the separate stories about Him into a meta-narrative. Otherwise, we are prone to misunderstanding both Jesus' person (who He is) and His mission (why He has come). Reading is not enough as it only provides us with the contents of a story. We must also interpret because that is what puts the pieces together into the Jesus way.

**Reading is
not enough.
We must also
interpret.**

Interpretation = Understanding the meaning of another person's thoughts *as they understand them*.

Interpretation in its simplest form is answering the question, "What does something mean?" For example, during a conversation I have with my wife today, I might say, "Let me make sure I understand you correctly..." Then, I rephrase her thoughts into my own words. I cannot think of anything more spiritual than being a careful interpreter of another person's thoughts. Guessing what my wife means without conferring with her and then acting on "my unverified assumptions" has disaster written all over it! Interpretation at its very core is "other-centered."

The urgency for interpretation also comes from Jesus' Parable of the Sower in Matthew 13. This passage has a two-fold impact regarding interpretation. It's both what He does for us and what we must reciprocally do as well. In Matthew 13:3-9, Jesus tells a farming story about a sower and the four soils upon which He plants a seed. Most listeners would

consider this a straightforward narrative with clear meaning. Yet, the disciples' immediate response to Jesus is not clarity, but rather they ask: "Why do you speak to the people in parables?" (13:10 NIV). By implication, we see that the disciples misunderstand Jesus' intention. Furthermore, the dullness of the disciples requires that Jesus must interpret the parable for them:

When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. (Matthew 13:19 NIV)

Pay attention to Jesus as He defines the critical interpretative insight from this parable: "anyone hears the message about the kingdom and *does not understand it*, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart." Jesus is telling them that merely sowing the Word is not enough because it will only lay dormant, and the reader-listener will remain under-developed. When the Word is "sown" by Jesus but is not *understood* or fully grasped by the reader, the devil can gain a foothold. Jesus Himself invites us to read and interpret as our key act of defiance against the enemy of our soul.

I still see you! And was that an aha-moment I just saw on your face? Is the spiritual nature of interpretation taking root?

False Assumption 3: *Interpretation is for Trained Clergy*

Allow me to share some reassuring news: *You interpret all the time.*

You read that correctly - you are an interpretation expert! This is not a new skill you need to learn. In every conversation you have, whether through hand-written letters, phone calls, texts, emails, face to face, and even Zoom meetings, you are constantly interpreting. In milliseconds, you grasp the definition of words and the surrounding context, which gives them a more nuanced meaning. You instinctively know how a message is being communicated based on its medium. For example, a text message assumes a different reading style than a business letter. In a phone call, every voice inflection adds to the meaning you are forming in your mind. In a face-to-face conversation, the subtle wink of an eye will tell you to take someone seriously or if they are speaking in jest. Even the location of the discussion will also alter what is said and how you "interpret" it. A meeting in your boss's office will denote the use of formal language and a prescribed pattern of dialogue. Move that same exchange to a golf course, and the tone and content will completely change. You pick up on this instantly. *You are a skilled interpreter.*

Since you have already mastered this interpretive skill set, you simply need to begin to hone your gifts to be used with ancient conversations which arose in specific biblical places during extraordinary times.

Not only do *I see you* interpreting Scripture, but *I see you employing this gift of interpretation as a disciple-maker of others*. Now, I understand that you may shy away from this title, “disciple-maker.” It carries with it an implied responsibility, and you are only in the beginning stages of being disciplined yourself! You may prefer to describe yourself with the term “laity” or maybe a “volunteer”. But if you have ever referred to yourself as a Christian, Jesus Himself gives you the title “disciple-maker”. Let’s read and interpret Matthew 28:19 together:

“Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations...”

The call of Jesus on the local church is to be a community of disciple-makers. *Everyone* serves this role, and no one is exempt from this calling. When you read further in the passage, Jesus describes the process of how the church will do this: “by teaching them to obey all I have commanded you” (28:20 NIV). The work of the church is to teach others in a manner that results in their obedience. Ahhh. Jesus’ call is not just to “read” the Bible. Nor is it merely to “read-and-interpret.” The full call upon the church as disciple-makers is to instruct others to read, interpret, AND apply the commands Jesus has entrusted to us.

The call of Jesus on the local church is to be a community of disciple makers.

This might surprise you, but if you have ever associated yourself with the Church (a participant in a Christian community), you are a disciple-maker. Welcome to the club! Truthfully, we are all called as “disciple-makers” in a Christ-following community. Thus, disciple-making is a team sport. We can do this together!

Let me pause. You may feel a weight with this new designation of Disciple-maker and its responsibility. Do not worry - *I see you*. In actuality, I have just defined the term “ministry.” At its core, ministry takes place when you graciously assume the responsibility for the spiritual growth of another. It may sound like a weight. But I promise that as you watch someone that you love grow and develop into the Image of Jesus, there will be no regret. We will walk through this step by step together. *I see you*. And I see your hopeful smile.

False Assumption 4: *Disciple-Making Begins in the Church*

May I whisper to you a thought that may help reduce your anxiety: *biblical disciple-making begins at home, not in the local church*. This truth is illustrated excellently in the Book of Deuteronomy. We find these words of Moses in Deuteronomy 6.

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

These commandments that I give 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 doorframes of your houses and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:4-9 NIV)

As has been our practice, go back and read it aloud, emphasizing with your voice all the words which have family implications. If you have printed this chapter, feel free to circle or underline them as well. Did you catch them?

Interestingly, vital biblical insights are entrusted first and foremost to mothers and fathers, who were to teach their children *in the home*. They are to be carefully discussed in every possible household opportunity. When it comes to Bible reading, interpretation, and application, I am personally relieved that this practice begins on the most local level possible: family. Bible study is to be practiced together with those who love you the most deeply and in the very place you feel the most comfortable. What a great way to start.

Bible study is to be practiced together with those who love you the most deeply.

Can You See It?

Yes, I still see you. Are you starting to see the importance of this, too?

And I sincerely want to help you, the rest of your family, and your Christian community to become more proficient and confident in this calling to read-interpret-apply the Scriptures. This call originates in the very heart of Jesus. It is His loving voice that will continually whisper in your ear and probe your heart, reminding you of His will for your life. This is the essence of becoming a biblical disciple-maker - to have a full grasp

on reading, interpreting, *and* applying the Word.

Remember, the “best” option is to read and interpret with someone else. In the chapters ahead, do not be surprised that I will be asking you to read-interpret-apply the word within a loving and faithful community, with people who long to see you grow in grace and flourish in all your relationships. First, to grow vertically into your relationship with the Triune God. Simultaneously, you will grow horizontally as you love your neighbor as yourself.

If you have any fear surrounding the word “interpretation,” I hope I have set them aside. You interpret all the time, in every kind of situation imaginable. I will simply guide you through calibrating these already-acquired skills toward an ancient middle eastern culture and the inspired authors who write the literature which turned that world “upside-down” (Acts 17:6 ESV).

Let's do the hard work of Disciple-making and ***Integrate Learning into Life.***

In the end, Disciple-making is about life change. I want to give you room to move learning from your head down into your heart. If your Disciple-making plan is to simply read this workbook and consider your effort complete, allow me to correct this superficial assessment. We are called to be “doers of the word and not hearers only” (James 1:22 CSB). Let's begin this change of life NOW.

Most of us at some level are tactile-learners. One of the greatest disciple-making tools for you may be a pen or a pencil. When we circle important words, underline memorable sentences, or make notes in the margins, our depth of integration increases.

May I encourage you to grab the writing tool of your choice and scan back through this chapter as you set the learning tone for the rest of the workbook. Re-process this chapter with some of these questions in mind.

New Idea? List out new ideas or concepts that have been introduced to you. Short-term memory skills are greatly increased through the simple act of writing. I encourage you to write out summary statements in your own words to help you take ownership of an idea. Or, simply copy entire sentences to make my thoughts or God's words into your own. In this book, I will pledge to define words before I use them. Make sure you understand words and their meanings before we move on to the next chapter. If there is something that you are not quite getting, allow yourself the space to pause and understand this before moving on. Remember, words and their meanings have huge consequences on the way we think.

Re-Calibration? What new idea(s) have you encountered in this chapter that may hint you have been traveling down a wrong path in your spiritual development? Have these new truths called you to re-calibrate your life in a new compass direction to become more “like Jesus?” Maybe ask it this way, “Did you have any ‘aha’ moments?” If so, state them clearly. Maybe you had an “Oh No” moment, when you realized you were thinking or acting in a less-than-Christian way. Make this personally transformative. It might call for a time of verbal repentance and re-commitment. Please tell your accountability partner about this decision. This is both a confession of change AND a testimony to God's Spirit at work in your life

Refreshing? What biblical texts have refreshed your soul? Why not write them on an index card and tape them over your kitchen sink, on the refrigerator door, or a bathroom mirror? Let the Scriptures renew your mind permanently by memorizing them.

CHAPTER 2

Doing Nothing Is A Dangerous Decision

Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked. “How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?”

Acts 8:30-31 (NIV)

Let’s begin this chapter by taking a moment to self-reflect. We can only truly track our growth through this workbook if we first are honest about where we are starting. Ask yourself:

1. Are you satisfied where you are now with the results of your Bible reading plan?
2. Are you comfortable with the trajectory you are setting for your spiritual future?
3. Are you confident that you will be more biblically alive five years from now?
4. Are you regularly making Spirit-led changes that will manifest themselves in a more vibrant tomorrow?
5. Can you make a list of times when the Lord has directed you to make a life change based upon your Bible reading? Simply, can you testify to a time when the Spirit and the Word have called you to a new level of Christ-likeness.

Remember, these questions are not just about you. The answers also relate to those whom you impact: your family and friends. Maybe your answers might, influence the life choices of people you might currently call “enemies.” What would you say to Jesus if you discovered that His agenda was to have you engage with the Word and His Spirit and to also experience all of its hopefulness? Then, your enemies might graciously be transformed by their encounter with the “new” you. Remember, your answers to the questions above can be life-changing; for yourself and for others.

I still see you. While I cannot know your answers to the questions above, I believe you are “leaning in” to the Word with new found possibilities. That is good news to me.

Let's Start with Prayer

As will be our practice, let us pause to pray before moving forward. Hear the words of Paul to the church in Ephesus:

Since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, this is the reason that I don't stop giving thanks to God for you when I remember you in my prayers. I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, will give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation that makes God known to you. I pray that the eyes of your heart will have enough light to see what is the hope of God's call, what is the richness of God's glorious inheritance among believers, and what is the overwhelming greatness of God's power that is working among us believers. This power is conferred by the energy of God's powerful strength. God's power was at work in Christ when God raised him from the dead and sat him at God's right side in the heavens, far above every ruler and authority and power and angelic power, any power that might be named not only now but in the future. God put everything under Christ's feet and made him head of everything in the church, which is his body. His body, the church, is the fullness of Christ, who fills everything in every way. (Ephesians 1:15-23 CEB)

I always wanted to pray this way. Not until recently have I realized that I *could*. All I need to do is to “pray Scripture.” The 4th-century Church Father Athanasius said this about the Book of Psalms, “All Scripture speaks *to us*, but the Book of Psalms speaks *for us*.” Athanasius bases his argument on the presupposition that the Psalms were the ancient prayer book of the Church. In our day, we can add the inspired prayers of Jesus and Paul from the New Testament. With this in mind, I invite you to pause, go back, and read Paul's words aloud. May he open our hearts and minds to all God has for us.

In this prayer for Ephesus, Paul wants us to *see*, or better yet, *develop* a Christian perspective for the world in which we “live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28 NIV). Paul is asking that the Lord might “open the eyes of your heart” to envision the new Kingdom rule and the power which emanates from Christ's resurrection. Without this

Without this Word, we are declared spiritually blind by Jesus (Mark 8:17-21).

With this new perspective, let's get started.

We Are All Being Discipled - All The Time

Take a moment to read and ponder this statement:

Without the reading of the Word, there is no disciple-making.

You might be nodding your head in agreement. Surely this is true. Yet, sociologically and theologically, this is dead wrong. A person can and will be discipled *without ever opening the Bible in his or her life*.

Hear me clearly: We are ALL being discipled, ALL of the time. Discipleship is “calibrating our lives according to that ‘voice’ which influences our decisions.” We often assume this means through God’s Word. But that is not always the case.

Let’s take a look at the most common form of “disciple-making” in our modern culture. The average American home spends 4.5 hours per day watching TV. Of course, these numbers exponentially increase when we also consider the additional hours we spend on our smartphones, scrolling social media. Can you imagine the implications of this content streaming into your home and influencing the minds of your family? These incessant voices shape our underlying values. Equally, they subtly build a tolerance for non-Christian ways of life. We are continually being impacted or “discipled” by non-biblical voices.

Now, let’s reconsider “discipleship” in the context of God’s Word. How might your life be different if Jesus had the primary voice in your disciple-making process? Now, I am not asking for equal time. I am not proposing that you take a sledgehammer to your TV or crush your iPhone underfoot. No. I simply want to know: Which compass heading will determine the direction of your life? I pray it is True^North!

I intentionally write these words to set up a sense of urgency and a renewed call to action. Spiritual indifference (also known as “doing nothing”) is unquestionably the wrong action-plan. It will ensure that the voice of Jesus will be quieted and correspondingly you will be discipled by the world around you. You will follow the faulty compass and the wrong map - and consequently, you will end up in the wrong place. I want to make sure you are better equipped and make a smarter decision than I did with Angie in Cozumel.

Spiritual indifference is unquestionably the wrong action-plan.

A First Reading of Scripture: *Devotional Reading*

Devotional Reading is the act of setting aside time to meet with God through His Word to either start the day or to wrap it up. It comes with a whole assortment of titles: “Quiet time,” “Time Alone with God,” or the simple word, “devos.” You might be asking: “Will this new Bible reading replace my devotional reading?” The short answer is, “No.” Keep in mind that reading the Bible is a means to an end, not the end itself. The end is our encounter with the Presence of the Lord. Our devotional reading - or what we will call our *First Reading* of Scripture - is the vehicle that transports us into the Holy of Holies.

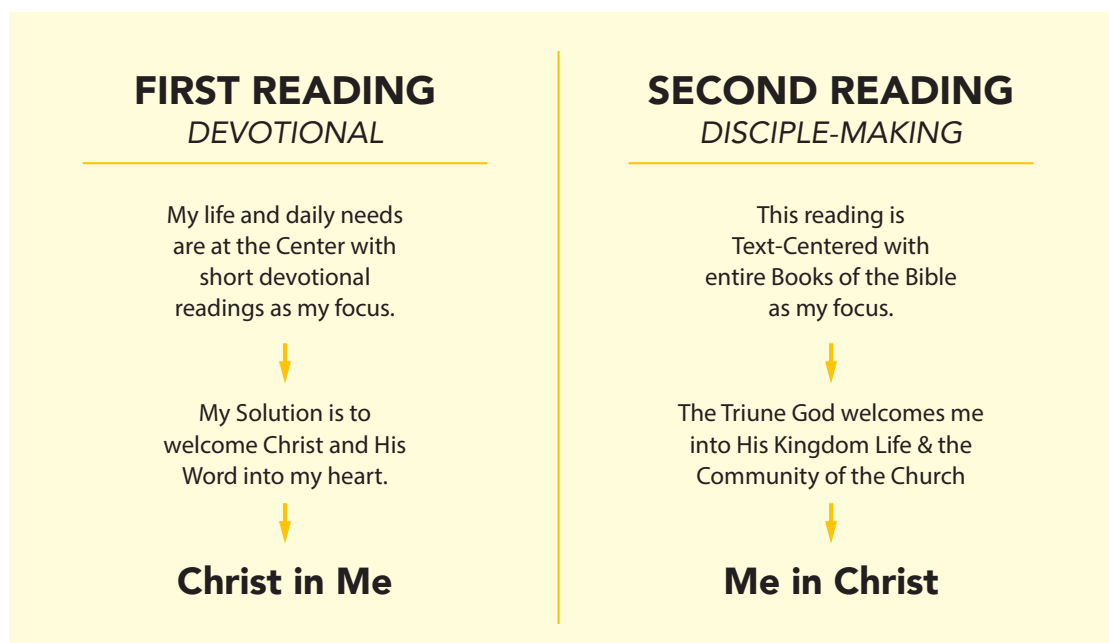
A *First Reading* is our initial encounter with the Word and the Lord who stands behind the Word. It comes to us in its most innocent and trusted state, as the Lord Himself speaks through His sacred Word. We are seeking His Presence to speak directly into our life situation. We might be looking to find a solution for life’s complexities, comfort for deep-seated pain, hope for a brighter future, or even wisdom for what might lie ahead. Scripture assumes this role. Read the Psalms, and they seem to give us the hallowed words to address the deep disappointments of our life. Job and Jeremiah provide permission to cry out to God, using harsher language than I might employ elsewhere in “Christian conversation.”

This practice of our *First Reading* has clear biblical support. In Paul’s New Testament letters, he employs the phrase “inviting Christ into our heart” a total of six times (Eph. 3:17, 2 Cor. 13:5, Rom. 8:10, Gal. 2:20, Gal. 4:19, Col. 1:27). This phrase resonates with our evangelical heritage. A First Reading can also be encountered amid a worship service when we hear the biblical text read or as a passage may be integrated in a sermon. Whenever you hear the Word read in a public worship service, it is your first opportunity to encounter this passage, principally as a worshipper.

Another way to grasp the meaning of a *First Reading* is to ask the question, “How am I impacted by the truth revealed?” For the most part, in a *First Reading*, we are positioned at the center of the conversation. We may wonderfully embrace the Scripture’s truth and sense both God’s presence and pleasure. Yet, if we are completely honest, there might be times when we draw back from the truth because the Word seems to be asking too much. Either way, our response to the Truth as we understand it is the driving force in this conversation. It is the “free will” that God bestows on us. Our *First Reading* is predominantly centered around my life, with my cry out to God for Him to participate powerfully.

Yet, there is another approach to our encounter with the Word that also comes from the Apostle Paul. It is much more God-centered than our *First Reading*. Paul says there is an invitation for his readers to “dwell in Christ” much more frequently - 165 times to be exact!

Biblically speaking, the overarching emphasis is not for us to dominate the conversation but to accept Jesus' invitation to participate "in Him." In this approach to Scripture, what we'll call a *Second Reading*, we do not talk nearly as much as we listen to the text. We do not invite Him into our world, but instead, we accept His invitation to participate with Him and with the Church universal in His coming Kingdom. The *Second Reading* of Scripture is all about Him and His agenda. We do not initiate the conversation. He does.



A *Second Reading* of Scripture: *Disciple-making in the Word*

A *Second Reading* is a more deeply engaged, text-centered approach. John Wesley called this the "Searching of Scripture." Allow me to explain the difference between these two readings. In a typical *First Reading*, we bring the text into our world. We come as 21st-century worshippers, either in a church service or in a private prayer closet. We set the agenda as we come before the Lord. Our devotional goal is to look for a place where the Biblical text intersects our lives today. Application is our immediate endgame as the sacred words on the page instantly traverse 2,000 years. When we attempt to read the Word in this way, there is a genuine possibility that we are "under-informed" about the

language, culture, and history of both the Old and New Testament world. Thus, if we only employ a *First Reading* of the text, we are limiting ourselves. A *First Reading* answers the question, “What does the text mean to me?” and if we are honest, our answer to this question is usually a guess at best.

A *Second Reading* has an entirely different purpose. Here, we enter the ancient world and ask the question, “What did the text mean to *them*?” We read the text as it was intended to be read. Not as modern devotional material, but as an ancient text. Additionally, we value that Jesus was a real historical person at a specific time and place designated by the Lord (“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman” Galatians 4:4 ESV). We read each book of the Bible as a whole, hearing and seeing the material housed in its unique literary context. We refrain from extracting devotional sound bites. In this *Second Reading*, the biblical text sets the agenda as revealed by the inspired author. We follow the directional markers they have placed in the text for us to discover and follow. We allow the text to (re)calibrate our spiritual compass according to the Biblical *True^North*.

Finally, we read the Bible with a group of people who will hold us accountable for the truths we discover together. The *Second Reading* of Scripture ends not with the acquisition of information but in life transformation. Another group of people we read alongside is the scholarly Christian Community. We should not rely upon our limited knowledge of the Bible. Instead, we seek help from believers who love the Word as we do. Moreover, they intimately know the ancient world, the ancient languages in which the Word was originally written, and will assist us in determining the theological implications of what we read. A *Second Reading* is always done within the faith community. More on this later.

A *Second Reading* Is For Everyone

Over the last twenty years, I have taught hundreds of people how to observe-interpret-apply the Scriptures. Some were Christian Ministry majors in academic settings. Other students were studying education, nursing, art, exercise science, or history. For the last decade, I have also traveled and taught lay leaders in local churches, many of whom had no more than a high school education. They have all learned how to read and interpret the Word. Please believe me when I say, “This is not rocket science.” Searching the Scriptures is for anyone who desires a deeper understanding of the Word.

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, there is a false assumption which inhabits the hearts and minds of many Bible readers:

The interpretation of the Bible is the work of professional clergy. Only someone who has a seminary degree can accurately interpret Scripture. The rest of us should stick to merely “reading” it.

Have you ever believed this statement? Do you believe it now? It is not entirely your fault. This false assumption flows from a common local church practice. After a new disciple reaches a certain level of maturity and competency, we send them to a Christian university or seminary. Following their course of study, we expect these men and women to return to engage the Scriptures with a higher competency level. Please hear me: I love and appreciate Christian Higher Education and her place in the work of the kingdom. Especially for training the “life of the mind” according to a Christian worldview. I’ve been engaged in this type of study as both a student or professor for the last 35 years. The downside of this plan is that academic institutions tend to detach sound Biblical interpretation from the context of the local church as the place for life application. Moreover, Bible scholars often talk more about the method (*how* to do something) than they do about how a text or theological truth applies to life in the local church (*why* to do something). Finally, academic institutions are simply NOT the Church. They are necessary agents, but *disciple-making through the Reading of the Word is the work of the Church*. Discipleship can and will best occur if the Church rises up and instructs her people to read-interpret-apply the Word. The Church cannot sit by and do nothing.

**Disciple-making
through the
Reading of the
Word is the work
of the Church.**

I long for the local church to be THE place of deep disciple-making through the reading AND interpreting of the Word. The real outcome is not merely an educated mind but the manifestation of holistic transformation to think and then act like Jesus. Most of all, I long to see local church leaders and laity become the very people who train one another.

...

Let’s Start With the Right Question: What *Did* The Text Mean?

When we only practice a *First Reading* of the Bible, we often fail to understand the text according to its own cultural context. Without employing the critical act of interpretation in our *Second Reading*, we are merely making our “best guess” of what Jesus meant.

A significant problem is that the New Testament reveals Jesus to us with a 2,000-

year historical gulf between His world and ours. His first-century culture was nothing like what we experience in the 21st-century. Thus, if we do not engage with the critical bridge-building act of interpretation, we treat the text as if Jesus' culture is identical to ours. If we disregard the vast cultural differences, we unknowingly will fill in the gaps of what we do not know of the ancient world with our modern assumptions. Unaware of the inherent dangers, the text means whatever comes into our minds as we read it. Certainly, the Holy Spirit is active and alive in the act of Reading; however, without interpretation, our modern worldview will, again and again, set the agenda for the meaning of the text. The Gospel writers portray Jesus' worldview as that of the 1st century. Moreover, He was a Jewish man in ancient Palestine while under the rule of a Roman provincial client-king named Herod. The world of Jesus has very little in common with 21st century North America. Over the years, I have tried to put this common default reading practice into a brief statement: We are reading the text "*as we are*" rather than "*as it was*."

Let me reframe this in a positive way. As we read the text, we usually ask this question: "What does the text mean to me?" Can you hear how we have inadvertently changed the question from the 1st century to the 21st century? As we read an ancient text, our default

Interpretation asks the right question: What did the text mean to them?

question is a modern one. Plus, we try to answer it without the act of interpretation. Can you imagine what might happen if you reorient your Bible-reading around this more culturally-aware question: "What was the meaning of the sacred events witnessed by the inspired authors and then transmitted in written form to a first-century worshipping community?" Please, go back and reread that sentence. Then, allow me to make the question simpler. Instead of asking, "What *does* the text mean to ME?" Our initial interpretive question should be, "What *did* the text mean to THEM?" This profound change will drive us back to the world and culture of Jesus. We will encounter Him as the Apostles did. We also will hear Paul's words as they must have echoed off the walls in the 1st century house churches of Corinth and Ephesus. The world of the Bible and the words of the Lord will come alive as never before.

Interpretation Is Biblically Done In Community

In Acts 8, Philip encounters the Ethiopian Eunuch, who is returning home after worship in Jerusalem. As the Holy Spirit directs Philip, he overhears the Eunuch reading the book of Isaiah. Philip asks, "Do you understand what you are reading?" Yes, a more than appropriate question for any of us who have read Isaiah recently. The response by the

Eunuch must be carefully understood and applied. He says, “How can I unless someone explains it to me?” (Acts 8:31 NIV).

In our modern western approach, we assume if someone simply gives us a clear explanation of Isaiah’s meaning, that will fix the problem. Just hand me a commentary on the book of Isaiah please. But in the community-oriented culture of Jesus’ day, that would never be assumed as the answer. The Greek word which stands behind our English “explain” would more accurately convey the meaning of “guide.” The Eunuch says he needs someone to take him by the hand and walk him through what the passage in Isaiah says and means and what it looks like lived out in everyday life. Relationship is often the missing element of our modern Bible reading programs. We provide answers about “Bible content” when what we truly desire is the practice of the ancient church, “Let me take you by the hand as we read-understand-apply this sacred material together.”

Thus, in a Bible-centered community, disciple-makers must enter into relationships with disciples-in-the-making as they learn to read-interpret-apply the Word with clarity and impact. The emphasis of this material is to train disciple-makers to faithfully “interpret” the Word and apply it themselves and take others with them on this journey.

Please read these following few words with care, for this is the crowning point of this entire workbook.

*You are being called, encouraged, and equipped to
observe, interpret, and apply the Scriptures
with others.*

I deeply desire for you to learn interpretation for the sake of others. The Lord is calling you to observe-interpret-apply the Word so you can pass these tools on to those around you. I beg you to seize this reality. Once you grasp the act of interpretation, you should take someone else by the hand and teach them precisely what you have learned. You will become a disciple-maker for someone in your life.

In this role, you will have one key agenda: to help someone else learn to interpret the Scriptures. Please remember, this is not the process of “knowing all the Bible.” It’s not primarily about the breadth of your Bible knowledge. Instead, you will stand between heaven and earth to help others understand the mind of God housed in the words of the Bible. Every disciple-in-the-making needs a disciple-maker. You might wholeheartedly agree with the need for disciple-makers and yet disagree with the truth that you could become one. Allow me to use Scripture to prove you wrong, humbly that is.

What happens if we place believers together to read the Scriptures without proper Bible Study tools? You’ve likely encountered the following in a small group experience. After someone reads a passage of Scripture, the leader turns to the group and asks this

question, “*What does that passage mean to you?*” Then, one after another, each person shares his or her opinion of what the passage means. There will likely be an equal number of views as there are people in the room. If my philosophy classes taught me anything: “If a text means *everything*, it also means *nothing!*” A small group Bible study built upon this kind of “sanctified guessing” regarding the meaning of a text can be counter-productive. For it detracts from the Word’s authority in our lives. If someone is not certain of a passage’s meaning, the potential for obedience and transformation immediately dissipates. We simply return to the same habit patterns we had before the study began. The shame of the Church today is that we encounter the Word and remain unchanged.

Remember, interpretation is understanding the meaning of another person’s thoughts *as they know them*. When it comes to biblical interpretation, the “other person” we seek to understand is the inspired author (Isaiah, Paul, John, etc.). In Bible study, it’s essential to keep in mind that personal opinions are not the primary outcomes of a Second Reading of Scripture. I want to know what Jesus, Paul, or John thinks since their words are inspired. My opinions are not. We need to discover what was on the authors’ minds as they experienced this truth embodied in Jesus and lived out in a first-century setting. Correct interpretation genuinely is a matter of life and death.

The urgency of this matter is one of the primary reasons for creating *True^North*. The evangelical church has often sanctioned a “The Bible says it. I believe it. That settles it” creed. We read and then jump to a personal application without asking the essential intervening question, “What did this text mean to Christ Himself or to the apostolic authors?” The proper reading-interpretation-application of the inspired Scriptures helps us calibrate our spiritual compasses towards a biblical *True^North*. Everything else is a rush to judgment, a reading without adequate understanding. As Jesus Himself says, “When anyone hears the message of the Kingdom *and does not understand it*, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart” (Matt 13:19 MOUNCE).

Let me close with a request and a promise. First, a request: Please take action. Doing nothing is assuredly the wrong decision. Do not allow yourself to be disciplined by our modern culture as the living Word collects dust on your shelf. Now, the promise: If you lean into this *True^North* Bible Study, you will never regret it. In the twenty-five years I have been teaching Bible Study, *everyone* has benefitted. Now, of course, some more than others. But just imagine the joy you would give to someone to take them by the hand and teach them how to interpret the words of Jesus or the inspired truth that Paul declares. Their life will never be the same, nor will yours. You will never regret doing something. I promise.

Let's do the hard work of Disciple-making and ***Integrate Learning into Life.***

In the end, Disciple-making is about life change. I want to give you room to move learning from your head down into your heart. If your Disciple-making plan is to simply read this workbook and consider your effort complete, allow me to correct this superficial assessment. We are called to be “doers of the word and not hearers only” (James 1:22 CSB). Let's begin this change of life NOW.

Most of us at some level are tactile-learners. One of the greatest disciple-making tools for you may be a pen or a pencil. When we circle important words, underline memorable sentences, or make notes in the margins, our depth of integration increases.

May I encourage you to grab the writing tool of your choice and scan back through this chapter as you set the learning tone for the rest of the workbook. Re-process this chapter with some of these questions in mind.

New Idea? List out new ideas or concepts that have been introduced to you. Short-term memory skills are greatly increased through the simple act of writing. I encourage you to write out summary statements in your own words to help you take ownership of an idea. Or, simply copy entire sentences to make my thoughts or God's words into your own. In this book, I will pledge to define words before I use them. Make sure you understand words and their meanings before we move on to the next chapter. If there is something that you are not quite getting, allow yourself the space to pause and understand this before moving on. Remember, words and their meanings have huge consequences on the way we think.

Re-Calibration? What new idea(s) have you encountered in this chapter that may hint you have been traveling down a wrong path in your spiritual development? Have these new truths called you to re-calibrate your life in a new compass direction to become more “like Jesus?” Maybe ask it this way, “Did you have any ‘aha’ moments?” If so, state them clearly. Maybe you had an “Oh No” moment, when you realized you were thinking or acting in a less-than-Christian way. Make this personally transformative. It might call for a time of verbal repentance and re-commitment. Please tell your accountability partner about this decision. This is both a confession of change AND a testimony to God's Spirit at work in your life

Refreshing? What biblical texts have refreshed your soul? Why not write them on an index card and tape them over your kitchen sink, on the refrigerator door, or a bathroom mirror? Let the Scriptures renew your mind permanently by memorizing them.

CHAPTER 3

Your Pastor's Job Description: Developing A Culture of Disciple-Making

...to prepare God's people for the work of service so that the Body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the full measure of the fullness of Christ.

EPHESIANS 4:12-13 (NIV)

Becoming aware of how someone else thinks is an intentional act of love. You cannot remain where you are and understand someone while standing at a distance. To act otherwise is what we call “judging.” To think like another person, you must temporarily embrace their values in order to determine their decisions and their consequences. We must intellectually and emotionally take up their cause as our own. It can be seen most prominently in the incarnation, as Jesus takes on the flesh of humanity to experience all of life as we do. Thus, it's an act of Christlike love if we endeavor to think as others think, to act as they act, and to feel with their very emotions.

May I ask you to do this for just a few moments as you seek to understand the thoughts of your pastor? Let me share how their hearts beat and the contents of their prayers for you and your church.

I spend many weekends teaching and preaching in local churches. During this time, I have long conversations with pastors about what they long for in the lives of the people they serve. One recurring theme resonates from the heart of each of these men and women: “May my people catch a glimpse of all that Christ has made available for them.” Each sermon a pastor preaches, every Bible Study they lead, and every prayer they offer has this same goal in mind: “that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of

Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” (Eph. 3:18-19 NRSV).

Yes, this was first Paul’s desire for the Church in Philippi. But it’s just as valid and relevant for your pastor and you today.

The greatest act of love you can offer to your pastor is not a monetary gift for Pastor Appreciation month. Nor to serve on a committee when asked. Instead, it is to put yourself in their place and to try to think as they do. When you lay aside your plan and take up theirs, even if for only a few minutes, you are committing an act of love.

Let me introduce you to the vision that your pastor longs to become a reality in your Church. The title of this chapter, “Developing a Culture of Disciple-making,” is principally your pastor’s biblical job description. Of course, many other items appear on a pastor’s formal or implied to-do list. Some of these things might seem a bit more practical, such as visiting the sick and elderly, balancing the church budget, or planning and preparing for a weekend youth retreat. These tangible activities are vital for a church to remain in good operating condition; however, Jesus’ Great Commission in Matthew 28 describes only *one* command: “Go into all the world and make disciples.” So, if you want to love your pastor in the deepest sense, ask this question to get into his/her mind, “What role do I play to help my pastor create a culture of disciple-making?”

Your Pastor’s Job Description *Part 1: Preparation of Others*

I may not personally know your pastor, but I can say with the utmost certainty that he or she wants to “present everyone fully mature in Christ” (Col 1:28). It’s the way his heart beats and the way her mind thinks. But biblically speaking, your pastor is not mandated to be the only disciple-maker in your church. At this point in our time together, this should not come as a surprise to you! Instead, it is his or her responsibility to establish your church’s culture for making disciples. Paul says it this way:

Your pastor’s job is to establish the church’s culture for making disciples.

Pastors are “to equip His people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:12-13)

You may say, “Paul, what are you thinking? Your description is too idealistic.” As I said above, maybe we are too fixated on things here on earth and have not explored enough the things of heaven. Every day, your pastor longs to help you recalibrate your values based upon the heartbeat of God. Thus, local church leadership’s primary role is to create a culture whereby Paul’s words to the Ephesian Church become not just “optional equipment” for a few zealous Christians. No. It is your pastor’s desire that these words will become a clarion call for every one of us to engage in this “work of service” - otherwise known as disciple-making.

Let’s do our own *True^North* Bible Study on this passage to get at God’s truth. We can do this with a few word studies (you will learn more about how to do your word studies later in Chapter 9 of this workbook). Paul says your pastor’s agenda is “to prepare God’s people” for their work of service. The word “prepare” in Paul’s original Greek has much more behind it than what our English may imply as a mere “starting point” in the process. Instead, it is proclaiming that God’s people are “completely sufficient for the task at hand.” You may not sense that yet, but it is your pastor’s goal to put you in a position where God’s sufficiency can become a reality.

When I was a baby-Christian (I had been a believer for less than a year), my pastor walked up to me and told me, “You have been gifted as a teacher. We have an adult Sunday School class, and the Church needs you to teach it.” I instantly went into panic mode. I offered up every excuse I could think of at the moment. Principally, “I am not experienced enough in the Bible to teach.” My pastor calmly said this back in return: Choose a Book of the New Testament. Study and prepare to teach one chapter from that book each week. Present the truth you uncover while you study. If someone asks you a question that comes from another passage of Scripture, simply say, ‘I’ll look into it and get back with you on that next week.’ Then, go right back to the chapter you prepared to teach. His logic was flawless and I felt “sufficient for the task.” That seemed simple enough! So, I said, “Yes.” I did this for five years. That meant I studied and taught 250 chapters of Scripture in those early years. I did not need all the answers to every Bible question. I simply needed to be able to teach one chapter of the Bible per week. That is what Paul means by “prepare God’s people.” I was entirely sufficient for that task for that class. Your pastor desires the same for you.

Another word worth studying in Ephesians 4 is Paul’s use of the term “God’s people” to describe us. Now, Paul is not identifying someone who is simply a member of the local house church in Ephesus. In Greek, “God’s people” is one word; “*hagios*.” It might equally be translated as “the holy ones” or “saints.” It would not be stretching Paul’s point to state that you are creating a holy bond when you come into contact with others as a disciple-

maker. He declares that when two or more believers gather to build one another up in the Word, *holiness happens*. Like it or not, you are a saint. Our churches can and should create disciple-making holy clubs.

Before we move on, I want to point out something critically important. As we walk through this passage in Ephesians 4, we are engaging in the profound act of Bible study. I long for you to do this as you come together in these disciple-making relationships. As we read-interpret-apply the Scriptures, our minds will be reshaped through the Word. We are not merely *informed* about the Scriptures, but rather we can be *transformed* by their truth. *True^North* Bible study is not about accumulating knowledge about the Bible. It is literally about the exchange of death for life. Paul says in Ephesians 2:

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you once walked, following the course of this world ... But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ. (Ephesians 2:1, 4-5 ESV)

Imagine that! Paul's teaching declares that God "made us alive together with Christ." But can you grasp that an act of God's mercy is to create us into a "holy community"? The Word calls us to be in the Word, *together*.

Your Pastor's Job Description *Part 2: Unity and Maturity*

Let's keep exploring this "preparing God's people" culture that Paul longs for us to create? Let's read it once again, together. And if you might prefer to read it aloud, I would celebrate that decision:

...to equip His people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ . (Ephesians 4:12-13 NIV)

Paul points out two things that your pastor prays for continually. *First*, that we might strive or reach out together to become "unified." Now, this does not mean that we all agree absolutely on every subject matter under the sun. No. We become unified with two qualifiers; "in faith" and "in the knowledge of the Son of God." Thus, Church unity has specific content at its core. Unity has a curriculum. The ancient church called this

discipleship training *catechism*. Its purpose was to shape a disciple into the Image of Christ. It was composed of a three-year period where the disciple learned and grew through core Christian values found in Scripture. This summary teaching came in the form of critical questions and answers with the Bible as the guide for calibrating new life in Christ.

Paul also highlights the second facet of your pastor's regular prayers for you and your church: that believers would also become "mature." Paul never equates one's numeric age with spiritual maturity. Many of us naturally grow old, but not all of us grow spiritually mature. His word "mature" might be translated with several English synonyms; "complete," "whole," and sometimes even "perfect." Ephesians 4:13 could also be worded, "grow into a mature human." Paul is telling us that the word "mature" is only measurable when embodied in human form. But according to what metrics? His larger context gives meaning to the phrase "a mature person" with our only true comparative marker - Jesus.

We are called to "unity in the faith *and* knowledge of the Son of God." Jesus, the Son of God, is the personification of a mature-complete-whole-perfect human being. Paul is defining that Christian maturity is not comparable with how we measure ourselves according to someone else. Never. That is a counter-productive act and easily creates a sense of unhealthy competition, envy, or even a judgmental attitude. We are only to view the trajectory of our maturity in light of the Son of God Himself. Being like Christ is our only goal - not being better than our neighbor, and certainly not merely mature enough "to get us to heaven." Paul climaxes his depiction of a disciple with these words, "attaining to the full measure of the fullness of Christ." I am confident this is what your pastor is praying to take place in your life. Might you be willing to ask for this as well?

Your Pastor's Job Description *Part 3: From "Saving" To "Sending"*

Let us return to our "culture of disciple-making" mission for our churches from Ephesians 4. Let's reread it. If it helps, try reading it aloud.

...to equip His people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ . (Ephesians 4:12-13 NIV)

We learned in the previous section that there are two outcomes which every pastor and every church leader desires for their "disciples-in-the-making." First, *unity* which finds

its bonding agent of oneness “in the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God.” Second, *maturity* which manifests itself in our reflection of the person of Jesus to a broken world. This is a fantastic picture that Christ desires to accomplish in your life and church.

Let’s ask a follow-up question that may be on your mind already: “Why is disciple-making such a huge priority to a local church?” Yes, the Great Commission in Matthew 28 commands us to “make disciples.” But is Jesus’ purpose for the church simply to have new people’s names to report to the local church board? Or is it so people will fill the pews of the church your building committee just remodeled? What do Jesus’ words in the Great Commission mean for the local church today?

Take a moment and think: Do you know your church’s Mission Statement? In recent years, there has been an incredible movement of churches to develop robust and biblically-based mission statements like these:

- Make more and better disciples
- To know Him and make Him known
- To Lead People in a Growing Relationship with Jesus Christ

A church mission statement tries to answer this question: “How can we bring the lost into the church so we can disciple them?” This may seem complete and undoubtedly well-intentioned. But that goal represents a truncated understanding of the Gospel. It

A pastor longs to get people out into their communities to represent Christ.

is primarily about getting people saved for discipleship. However, a fuller understanding of the Mission of God (Latin, *Missio Dei*) is to fully restore humans with His Image and to send these disciples out into our local and global communities empowered with His Spirit. Your pastor is not praying to get lost people *into* the church. It is just the opposite. Your pastor longs to get the church

people *out* into their community to represent Christ.

Imagine what might happen if your local church reimagined its partnership with the *Missio Dei* of the Lord Jesus. It might embody something like this: “To empower, equip and send Spirit-filled disciples out into the world, declaring and embodying the hope of the Resurrection (New Life) and the message of New Creation (Fullness in Christ).” Vibrant and passionate Christians are often the only Jesus that people in your community may experience daily. Sadly, we know that the lifestyle of many Christians is not significantly different from their non-Christian friends. The only means we have to change that from being a shameful statistic in our contemporary Christian age is to introduce the public to the Triune God revealed in the Word of God and housed in you and me. You and I are the

fulfillment of the Great Commission.

The endgame of the Great Commission is not primarily about saved people. It is about the saved living as transformed disciple-makers and *then* being sent. Allow me to lead you from Ephesians 4 to John 20 to understand this more fully.

In John 20, we find the descriptions of three Resurrection appearances. The middle of the three (John 20:19-23) narrates Jesus appearing to His disciples on that first Sunday evening. We find the disciples in a lock-down mode in the upper room because of their fear of the Jewish leaders. Jesus entered the room and spoke these paradigm-shaping words, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.” Two small words radically change our understanding of ministry; the words “*as*” and “*so*.” Throughout the Book of John, the most common title ascribed to Jesus is “the sent one.” More than forty times, Jesus is depicted as the Son sent to us from the Father. Jesus powerfully shifts the attention from His mission, “as the Father has sent me,” to the new commissioning of the disciples, “so, I am sending you.” As we combine the two words “*as*” and “*so*,” we come to a very profound summation of the entire Book of John. *Jesus’ mission becomes our ministry.* The methods He employed to accomplish His mission are to be our guidebook. To understand how to do ministry in the “sent-ness of the Son,” we can examine the previous nineteen chapters of the Gospel of John. We must be disciplined together in the Word. The *whole* Word.

Jesus’ closing words in John 20 are climactic for our discussion, “and with that, He breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’” (20:22). Please do not read into this an ill-mannered act of breathing on a person. The word “breathed on” only occurs four times in the entire Bible. This highly unusual word appears for the first time in the creation story of Genesis 2. Here, the Lord God fashions Adam from the dust of the earth. Next, God transforms this life-less claymation figure as He “breathes on” Adam, and he becomes a living being (Gen 2:7). Possessing the breath of God is what makes Adam a fully animated human being.

The second time this word occurs in the Bible is in one of the most memorable scenes in the Book of Ezekiel. After a spiritual tour of the Valley of Dry Bones, which gives readers a sense of hopelessness, the Lord asks his prophet Ezekiel, “Son of Man, can these bones live?” Ezekiel does not know the answer. Then the Lord declares, “I will make my breath enter, and they will come to life” (Ez. 37:5). Biblically speaking, this word is not a term describing the normal human breathing function. Rather it’s a word with profound transformational potential tied to the promise of God for its hope of turning death to life.

We can now return full circle to Jesus in our John 20 passage. He is serving as the “sent one” to function just as God the Father revealed Himself in the Old Testament. In the same way, the disciples are empowered by the Spirit and are being created like Adam

in the Garden and re-created like Ezekiel in the Valley of the Dry Bones. This simple word study radically changes our own “sending” by Jesus. The disciples in Jesus’ day, and correspondingly us today, are to be “sent” with Jesus as our perfect ministry model. We must accomplish our mission “as the Father sent Jesus.” A careful and insightful reading of the Gospel of John describes what Jesus’ sent-ness looked like and, therefore, what our imitative ministry patterns should entail. Thus, we are disciplined for a purpose; to be sent in the same way as Jesus.

In this chapter, I wanted to give you insight into what your pastor thinks about and works toward 24/7. May I also remind you, since all this comes directly out of the Bible, it’s also the expectation Christ has for you - to be animated and transformed by the life-giving breath of God. Is this too good to be true? Why not lean upon the promises and long for this yourself?

Let's do the hard work of Disciple-making and ***Integrate Learning into Life.***

In the end, Disciple-making is about life change. I want to give you room to move learning from your head down into your heart. If your Disciple-making plan is to simply read this workbook and consider your effort complete, allow me to correct this superficial assessment. We are called to be “doers of the word and not hearers only” (James 1:22 CSB). Let's begin this change of life NOW.

Most of us at some level are tactile-learners. One of the greatest disciple-making tools for you may be a pen or a pencil. When we circle important words, underline memorable sentences, or make notes in the margins, our depth of integration increases.

May I encourage you to grab the writing tool of your choice and scan back through this chapter as you set the learning tone for the rest of the workbook. Re-process this chapter with some of these questions in mind.

New Idea? List out new ideas or concepts that have been introduced to you. Short-term memory skills are greatly increased through the simple act of writing. I encourage you to write out summary statements in your own words to help you take ownership of an idea. Or, simply copy entire sentences to make my thoughts or God's words into your own. In this book, I will pledge to define words before I use them. Make sure you understand words and their meanings before we move on to the next chapter. If there is something that you are not quite getting, allow yourself the space to pause and understand this before moving on. Remember, words and their meanings have huge consequences on the way we think.

Re-Calibration? What new idea(s) have you encountered in this chapter that may hint you have been traveling down a wrong path in your spiritual development? Have these new truths called you to re-calibrate your life in a new compass direction to become more “like Jesus?” Maybe ask it this way, “Did you have any ‘aha’ moments?” If so, state them clearly. Maybe you had an “Oh No” moment, when you realized you were thinking or acting in a less-than-Christian way. Make this personally transformative. It might call for a time of verbal repentance and re-commitment. Please tell your accountability partner about this decision. This is both a confession of change AND a testimony to God's Spirit at work in your life

Refreshing? What biblical texts have refreshed your soul? Why not write them on an index card and tape them over your kitchen sink, on the refrigerator door, or a bathroom mirror? Let the Scriptures renew your mind permanently by memorizing them.

CHAPTER 4

Developing A Wesleyan Culture of Disciple-Making

I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death...

PHILIPPIANS 3:10 NIV

Chapter disclaimer: Forgive me in advance. Each of the previous chapters have been intentionally designed to be read in “one sitting.” This chapter, however, is a bit longer. Admittedly, it also will be more theologically dense. But there is a good reason for this. I will be presenting a theological framework for a Wesleyan perspective of disciple-making. I feel it will be quite helpful to house it in the language which explains both its origin and its effectiveness to transform a human soul. Finally, this is the pinnacle chapter of answering our question, “*Why* should I study the Bible and not simply read it?” Or better yet, let’s ask it this way, “What glorious outcomes will take place if I move beyond a mere devotional reading of the Scriptures and embrace the possibility of grasping a fuller revelation of Jesus and a fully restored image of me?”

...

Let’s take a brief look back before we move forward. In the last chapter, I wanted to give you a glimpse into your pastor’s prayer life. Above all else, your pastor desires for you to be able to engage with the sacred Scriptures in a transformational manner. He or she longs for you to engage in more than a First Reading of the text. They want you to be so captivated by the depth of the Jesus story that two things will happen. First, that you will embrace the spiritual fullness promised by Jesus and never turn back. Second, that you will be compelled to share this newly discovered truth with others. Remember that the Scriptures were initially intended to be read and interpreted “in community.” So together,

let's read and interpret together this passage from Acts 2:42-47 NIV:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Now, may I encourage you to go back and repeat this passage a few times, out loud. Do not rush through what the Lord wants to say to you. Then, we can discover several observations which arise through our *Second Reading* of this passage:

Did you notice all the *plural* pronouns? If you didn't, go back now and count. How many did you find? I found ten. Now, search for all the *singular* pronouns. How many did you find? There is only one: "anyone who had need." Often, "needs" can have an isolating result. This worshipping community sold property and possessions to give to "anyone who had need." Wow. I want to be a part of this kind of community! Luke, the author of Acts, is trying to tell us that people who have needs can have a profound sense of being alone, even invisible in their community. The early church saw them and drew them into the worshipping community by serving them. Inclusion was not a program they developed but was part of their core DNA.

My second observation about this passage is found in the larger context of Acts Chapter 2. Acts 2:42-47 is the first description of how the church operates together after the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13). Luke is identifying this as the climax of the entire passage of Acts 2. Often when I hear people talking about Acts 2, they focus on the *event* of Pentecost: the coming of the Holy Spirit upon His people. But Luke seems to be pointing us toward the *effects* of Pentecost: a Church devoted to the mutual sharing of resources and corporate worship. Acts 2 is less about the experience of the Holy Spirit and more about the Holy Spirit embodying us as we reflect His character and nature in the way we live our lives together.

Another observation. Given that Acts 2:42-47 is the climax of Acts 2, I am surprised at the absence of the word "Spirit" in Acts 2:42-47. This is literally the fulfillment of Jesus' words at the end of the Gospel of Luke, "I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city [Jerusalem] until you have been clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49 NIV). Moreover, this coming of the Holy Spirit is the sign of the New Covenant prophesied in Jeremiah 31:31-33, Ezekiel 36:24-28 and Joel 2:28-32. The Holy

Spirit is the promise of God that He will dwell both *with* His people and *in* them. Yet in Acts 2:42-47, the word “Spirit” never occurs. Nevertheless, His pervasive presence and its dramatic effect is seen everywhere in and through His people. Moreover, the Spirit will shape them (and us) to reflect His nature to all who are watching. Acts 2:42-47 is what a Christian community looks like as they practice holiness. Outsiders will see Him as they see us devoting ourselves to Christ’s teaching and to one another.

I pray that seeing this possibility housed in Scripture will energize you with hopeful anticipation for what a small group of Bible readers could become. Of course, I realize that this could sound intimidating, especially since we are early on our journey. Let’s look together at the very end of this Acts passage; to the summary statement that describes the source of this spiritual renewal:

And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:47).

Talk about taking the pressure off! The work is all the Lord’s - it is not our responsibility to carry the burden of salvation for others. A small group creates the opportunity to watch His Spirit infuse life into your community.

What Beliefs Stand Behind Our Program for Disciple-Making

Is there a difference between disciple-making in a generic evangelical church and disciple-making in the Wesleyan tradition? My answer is a definitive “Yes.” First, it would be helpful for us to take a look at the standard view of disciple-making in the evangelical church and define a few theological terms surrounding the topic. Then, we will investigate disciple-making in what might be called the Wesleyan way.

An Evangelical Way of Disciple-Making

Take a few minutes and answer this question: In your local congregation, *How does a newcomer move from “outside” the Body and officially become “insider”?*

Is there an accepted list of things someone is to say? For example, should they recite the sinner’s prayer shaped into words of confession? Is there a public statement during a worship service to the Church’s Book of Discipline? Should what they say be combined with things that they should do? Does your church require a church membership class or baptism? There must be something they do or believe that is beyond merely walking through your doors. With your church in mind, can you articulate, “How does someone

go from being ‘outside’ to being ‘inside’?”

Your church’s expectation for a newcomer’s “in-ness” is the best way to describe your theology of conversion. Once a person has prayed a prayer of repentance, stood and raised a hand, or knelt at an altar of confession, we welcome them into the family of God, declare their sins forgiven, and assure them that they are on their way to heaven.

Let’s try coming at it through a different scenario. Imagine this encounter next Sunday morning; a visitor asks you this question: “So, here in your church, what is the least I need to do to go to heaven?” This question might catch you off guard, for you would never minimize your commitment to Christ in such a trivial way. Yet many people are operating under this as their basic understanding of the Gospel. They wonder, “If I do *this* and then I do *that*, have I crossed the line and am I ‘in’? Am I considered a Christian and am I going to heaven?” Hear me carefully. I am not condemning a seeker’s level of sincerity. I believe they want to know God and to experience His forgiveness. But for the most part, they are receiving what we are offering. We are the one’s teaching the “lost” how to be “found.” Once again, I am asking, “How does your local church both define and practice conversion?”

Here is the inherent danger of reducing salvation to a list of human acts or mere doctrinal beliefs. When we define the Gospel this way, we are subtly approving of a separation between the initial act of repentance and the follow-up action of discipleship. Let me simplify it this way. Salvation has been divided into a two-part “choose your own level of Christian commitment” plan.

Option One: A person’s goal is to get as close to Jesus as possible all the while allowing Him to reshape their heart to beat in harmony with His. Nothing is held back.

Option Two: Following a sinner’s prayer, one might say “thanks for the forgiveness of my sins” and for leading me across the boundary line from “out” to “in”. But “no thanks” to further transformation. Conversion is enough.

Now, I realize that Option 2 might sound like a choice no one in your church would explicitly offer. However, our passion not only to get more people “in” but to get them in sooner rather than later often has us offering a Gospel-lite version of salvation. Functionally, it gives approval for a new believer to choose option 2 and to opt out of further discipleship. Let’s keep in mind, this new convert has not just rejected our offer of discipleship. They have also rejected the plain sense teaching of Jesus and Paul, who call us to consistently pursue Christian maturity. Defining conversion with such a low

bar (accepting Jesus as “fire insurance”) might be similar to the way we click a button on the licensing agreement for a software update on our smartphone. We click “yes” without understanding the implications of what the formal agreement said.

A.W. Tozer sounds prophetic even in our day as he wrote more than 75 years ago in the masterful book, “*I Call it Heresy*,”

I must be frank in my feeling that a notable heresy has come into being throughout our evangelical circles, the widely accepted concept that we humans can choose to accept Christ only because we need Him as Savior and that we have the right to postpone our obedience to him as Lord as long as we want to. This concept has sprung naturally from a misunderstanding of what the Bible says about Christian discipleship and obedience. The truth is that salvation apart from obedience is unknown in the sacred Scriptures.

Seeking salvation without the intention of obedience to the teachings of Jesus cannot be aligned with a biblical understanding of the Gospel. So, what if we tried a new paradigm for size? What if we erased the boundary line metaphor between being in-or-out of the kingdom of God. No longer will salvation be defined by stepping across some artificial line. Instead, imagine if we defined disciple-making in a more robust and holistic way? Rather than answering the question, “Am I in or am I out?” What if we focused on the following series of questions:

1. Am I on a life trajectory that takes me closer and closer to Christ each day?
2. Am I less concerned with being considered “in” and more focused on being more Christ-like?
3. Before I read the Word each morning, have I prayed to be obedient?
4. Am I willing to say “yes”, even before I know what He is asking of me?

Here are a few followup questions which might serve to check my level of obedience to His Word.

1. Can I cite a passage of Scripture to an accountability partner that I have recently obeyed?
2. If I have not been fully obedient, have I made my hesitancy to His Word my prayer for the day?
3. Have I also prayed for the Holy Spirit to empower my future obedience?

4. Can I testify that my life is continually being re-calibrated to the direction His compass is pointing as He says, “Come, follow me?” If not, what sin or fear is ruling my life?

A Wesleyan Way of Disciple-Making

Chapter Disclaimer #2: Please allow me to take you on a bit of a theological deep-dive. For this will help you see the subtle yet clear distinctives that Wesleyan theology has regarding salvation in general and Disciple-making in particular. I promise to define all the key terms carefully and practically.

What is the significant difference between the generic evangelical view of disciple-making and the Wesleyan way? Principally it comes down to our understanding of the character and nature of God. Our orienting characteristic of the Triune God is Love. Second, we see Him as Sovereign. Thus, we do not see God principally as “choosing us” (aka, sovereign election), but rather, Wesleyans say that God, through His grace, has enabled humans to have their minds opened so we can recognize His grace (see Luke 24:31, 45). This initial quickening of our hearts and minds is called “prevenient grace.” This is the grace that goes before salvation that enables us to respond by faith (aka, free will). The Lord empowers us, through this grace, to say “Yes” to His Love as well as to acknowledge the depth of our own inherent brokenness. In a memorable way, God’s prevenient grace allows us to be “Response-able” to His calling upon our lives. Yes, we are held responsible to obey. Plus, His Spirit makes us able to respond to His love.

Love, by its very nature, must include an option to be rejected. It cannot be demanded. Otherwise, it’s not love but some kind of forced behavior. In the end, Wesleyans believe that salvation entails encountering this God of Love and embracing all that He is. We do not believe it can or should be reduced to a mere gift of forgiveness that He gives. This leads us to this vital statement: when we articulate a salvation experience which can be disconnected from disciple-making, we reduce a Gospel message into a mere divine-human transactional model. Yes, I know that last sentence is dense in its meaning. I have tried to rewrite it several times. Let me break it down into its component parts. Wesleyans push back from a gospel defined as a “ticket to heaven.” We prefer to talk about wholehearted submission to the person and mission of Jesus. Shame on us if we ever affirm anything short of entering into a transforming relationship with Jesus.

Now, with this newly defined Wesleyan mindset, imagine what we might witness in the life of a Christ-seeker. When he/she initially responds to the Holy Spirit, we may not

be witnessing saving grace. Instead, we may be encountering someone being awakened by God's "prevenient grace." It just may be that God is opening up a person's heart to hear His voice housed in the Word and quickened by the Holy Spirit. It could be a rush to judgment if we declare it to be "justifying grace," where someone is truly made right with God. Additionally, is it possible that this soul-searching person has at best a minimal grasp upon the nature of God the Father, the love of the Son, and the gift of the Spirit. As A. W. Tozer indicated in the quote above, someone who repents yet does not also obey and love the Lord has not responded to the call of Christ as Lord and Savior (John 14:23-24; 1 John 5:3). Do you think it is just plausible that we might be witnessing the initial work of the Holy Spirit in a person's heart and too quickly declare Christ's saving work complete?

The Wesleyan way is more than leading someone through a sinner's prayer and affirming them "forgiven."

Historically, Wesleyans do not talk so much about "what can I do to make salvation happen?" That question does not correctly nuance us towards grace. It sounds much more like our own works. If the Lord does the transforming work, what is the best way to prepare our hearts and to welcome the arrival of the Spirit? Maybe a different question might be: "How can I actively participate in what God is doing and NOT short-cut the fullness of His desire for my life?" The best way to partner in God's saving work is through what John Wesley called the "Means of Grace."

Define Means of Grace

OK. Let's take one more deep-dive into Wesleyan theology and we will be done. True or false? God, through His Spirit, is present in every place. The answer is true. It is called *omnipresence*. Since this is part of His character and nature, the bigger question is "How can we become more aware of Him being with us?" In the Wesleyan tradition, this is best described through the term "Means of Grace." Simply, these are the five practices of the spiritual life through which God promises in Scripture to make Himself known MORE than He is at other times and in other places.

God is opposed to works to earn salvation. He is not opposed to effort to partner in the process.

1. Prayer
2. Searching of the Scriptures
3. Fasting
4. Lord's Supper – Communion
5. Christian Conferencing (what we today call small groups).

It is through these prescribed “means of grace” that we plow up the soil of our souls, thereby preparing our hearts and minds for the voice of Jesus to speak a transformational word. Someone said to me recently, “Hey, this sounds like work to me.” My response was this, “God is opposed to *works* as a means to earn our salvation. He is not opposed to *effort* through which we partner with God in the process.” Think of it this way: God is speaking all the time, through His Word and the Spirit. Employing these “means of grace” allows us to hear the divine conversation above all the constant white-noise that takes place in our daily lives.

For our *True^North* Bible Study discussion, we will focus our attention on the direct connection of two of the means of grace: (1) Christian Conferencing (small groups and accountability) and (2) the Searching of the Scriptures.

Means of Grace: Christian Conferencing (aka, Small Groups)

John Wesley may be best known for his itinerant preaching impact; 40,000 sermons preached and 250,000 miles traveled on horseback. However, Wesley’s lasting legacy upon the Church was his innovative vision of disciple-making through small group ministry. Everyone. I mean *everyone* who participated in his movement was required to participate in a society meeting (worship service) AND a small group for accountability. Make sure you read that as both/and not either/or.

For Wesley, small groups fell into two categories:

Class Meeting: a small group for the principal purpose of encouragement and evangelism

Band Meeting: single-gender accountability groups to seek holiness of heart and life.

You might be shocked to know that if you missed more than three of your weekly class meetings over the course of three months, you were dismissed from further attendance. The rule may sound harsh, even counterproductive from a church growth perspective. But Wesley did not want to grow a church *larger* but instead to move believers *deeper* in their relationship with Christ and one another. His own words of warning are insightful:

I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid, lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power. And this

undoubtedly will be the case, unless they hold fast the doctrine, spirit, and discipline with which they first set out.

Please read that quote again. As you do, realize that the modern church has fulfilled Wesley's prophetic warning. He feared that the church would be more impacted by the culture than by the words of Christ. He saw class and band meetings as ideal "means of grace" where Christians, in community, call one another into a deeper walk with Christ and obedience to His Word.

Wesley also said, "There is no holiness apart from social holiness." Now, you might hear the phrase "social holiness" and immediately equate it with today's understanding of social justice. That aspect of social change was certainly crucial to Wesley, but that is not what he was referring to here. To Wesley, social holiness is a call for us to journey together, locked arm in arm, as we pursue holiness through disciple-making in the Word. He knew discipleship had to happen in the context of community. This conviction profoundly influenced how he believed small groups should operate. These were not designed just to keep us in the flock. But to draw us closer to the Good Shepherd and to become just like Him.

During class or band meetings, participants would give an open invitation for others to ask the hard questions weekly, such as, "How is it with your soul?" and "What practice(s) are you engaged in that might be getting in the way of your spiritual maturity?" Yes, these could be seen as intrusive questions. But they should not be seen as offensive. More so, you should be offended if someone you call a friend allows you to remain stuck in your brokenness and sin. The hopeless cycle of "managing your sins" is a spiritual curse. Wesley addresses the question head-on with his basic premise: a believer could be set free both from the *guilt* of sin as well as the *power* of sin in this life. Thus, freedom from the bondage to sin is at the core of the Wesleyan way of disciple-making. Wesley knew that freedom from sin primarily takes place in and through the Christian community. Wesleyans believe that practicing the "means of grace" found in class and band meetings move us into a life of holiness through encouragement and accountability.

Means of Grace: Searching the Scriptures

Now that we have established the Wesleyan habit of accountability groups, let's look to another means of grace: the Searching of Scripture. This one should beautifully dovetail with a believer's passion for corporate accountability. In his General Rules for the Methodist Church, Wesley states the role Scripture should play in the transformation of a

person and the building of a Christian Community:

It is expected of all who desire to continue in these societies that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation by attending upon all the ordinances of God. Such are: (1) The public worship of God; (2) The Ministry of the Word; either read or expounded, (3) The Supper of the Lord; (4) Family and private prayer; (5) Searching the Scriptures; and (6) Fasting or abstinence.

Wesley charges his 18th-century church to be a people who first encounter the Word through the public reading and hearing the preached Word. In our day, the revelation that we encounter in our private devotional reading or the public reading of Scripture is a sacred event. This is where God takes something quite *ordinary* - words printed with ink on a page - and turns them into something *extraordinary*. As I have said several times, this *First Reading* of the text is the place where God, through His Spirit, breathes life into us. We must treat it with uncommon reverence and expectancy.

Just as emphatically, Wesleyans have a clear mandate to “search the Scriptures” as an essential factor in their disciple-making journey. In employing the word “search,” Wesley did not mean to flip through the Word to find a random verse for the day. The practice of “searching” implied intense study - observation, interpretation, and application of the Word itself. He was known as a man of “one book,” but for him, this was simply hyperbole to make a point. The Word was his *primary* source for setting his spiritual and moral compass, but it was not his *only* resource. He knew seven languages, including ancient Greek and Hebrew. He was also classically trained at Oxford University and served there as a professor on multiple occasions.

Wesley also knew that disciple-making could and will functionally break down if we only become *First Readers* of Scripture. If we do not add additional knowledge regarding the historical understanding of the days of Jesus and the Jewish and Greco-Roman culture, we will often misread, misunderstand, and misapply the Word. As we “search the Scriptures,” words, grammar, and sentence structure combine to form a larger literary context.

Moreover, if we fail to grasp the proper cultural and the historical context, we will fill in the “gaps in the story” with the known context of our own lives. We do this all the time in our world today. If you are married, I’m sure you have done this with your spouse. We assume they meant “this” when they said “that.” We fill in the gaps of what went unsaid with our interpretation of the events in the conversation. Most “marriage disagreements” fit into the category of flawed interpretation of the words and meanings of the speaker’s intention. If you have ever traveled to another country, you know many accepted practices in our society are considered socially inappropriate in a different culture. In Malawi, Africa, a husband and wife should never walk hand-in-hand when

they are out together. However, two men can walk hand-in-hand as they talk, and it is considered entirely normal. You might find it unusual - but it all depends on your cultural perspective.

Almost always, misunderstandings are not malicious. They merely arise from a lack of “insider-information.” Here, once again, let me repeat a memorable way to say this: we do not read things “*as they are*” but “*as we are*.” Our modern western culture, our socio-historical context, and our accepted moral values are the lenses through which we see and interpret everything. Unfortunately, no matter how hard we try, it’s almost impossible to be objective.

If we find it challenging to interpret conversations in our own culture, it is not surprising that we might misunderstand the Bible. One of our critical shortcomings arises as we do our *First Reading*, we immediately leap into application mode. We ask “What does the passage mean to ME?” We must slow down to hear the passage speak to its own culture. “What did this passage mean to THEM?” Please Lord, make us other-centered as we engage Your Word.

It mystifies me that we publicly confess how challenging it is to read and understand Shakespeare’s 16th century Elizabethan English plays and poetry. Yet, we claim to read and apply a biblical text effortlessly. The Bible is written in three foreign languages and filled with hundreds of chapters situated in multiple social and historical contexts. Please, go back and re-read that last sentence. I am trying to not-so-gently persuade you that reading the Bible, especially the extensive poetry sections of the wisdom literature (Psalms, Job, Ecclesiastes) and most of the Old Testament prophets (Amos, Habakkuk, Malachi, etc.), requires study. Even the culture of Jesus and Paul’s day is nothing like our contemporary world.

The Danger of Ignorance

My apologies if you sense I have belabored the point that the “searching of Scripture” is a non-negotiable element in Wesleyan Disciple-making. But I am not entirely done. I feel a divine imperative to say this in as many ways as possible, so you will never go back to reading and guessing what the passage means. We must move forward and calibrate our spiritual compasses according to Reading-Interpreting-Appling the Word, all the while in a Christian community.

Allow me to lay out a few spiritual implications if we fail to move forward in searching the Scriptures.

First, if you continue to read the Bible in isolation, *you will only see the same things you have already seen*. Your understanding of God, His Son, and the Holy Spirit will become stagnant. The cultural world of Jesus and Paul will be overlooked become a non-issue. Sadly, you will never consider the powerful Greek word choices of Jesus as He speaks to His disciples. His winsome words will likely be “lost in translation.” The implication is not that you will be misinformed. Worse yet, you may become “de-formed.” You will be shaped into the limited Image of Christ *as you see Him* rather than the Glory as He reveals Himself in our first-century New Testament.

Specifically, we are prone to be formed into the Image of God as we experience Him. We are unashamedly a feelings-oriented Christian culture. We desire above all else to feel forgiven and to feel loved. This search for an experience of God can negatively impact our ability to read and carefully search the Scriptures. Our desire for “instant spiritual gratification” displaces the ancient practice of “study to show yourself approved by God” (2 Tim 2:15 MEV). Culture wants to experience God. Wesleyans should study “to know Christ - yes, to know the power of His resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like Him in His death” (Phil 3:10 NIV). Knowledge can and should lead to experience, but the reverse is not always true. For Wesley, one’s personal experience was a secondary basis for defining our understanding of God. Scripture’s truth as revealed through searching the Scriptures and community accountability was always primary for the disciple-making process.

We should graciously and intentionally take responsibility for the spiritual well-being and development of ourselves as well as others.

The second implication of not Searching the Scriptures together is we will make our spiritual interconnectedness with others optional. In Genesis 4, we are called to be “our brothers’ keepers.” We are saved into a community, not purely saved as an individual. We should graciously and intentionally take responsibility for the spiritual well-being and development of both ourselves and others. Thus, my learning Scripture is not to be seen for myself alone. Instead, I learn of Christ and strive with Christ for the sake of others.

At the beginning of all of Paul’s letters, he introduces himself as one who intercedes for others and “lives among them for their sake” (1 Thes. 1:5 NIV). He repeatedly tells his churches to “follow me as I follow Christ” (1 Cor 11:1 MEV; 1 Thes 1:6). If we fail to grow and develop, we will impact others with our spiritual lethargy.

Let’s remember Jesus himself calls believers to Read-Interpret-Apply the sacred Word on a deeper level. Jesus is asked by a Jewish scribe, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus replies with a multi-level answer, “What is written in the Law?” and “How do you read it?” (Luke 10:25-26 NIV). First, Jesus calls for the scribe to remember

the contents of the Old Testament law. Second, the scribe is asked to interpret and take hold of the Law's meaning. The scribe answers Jesus with a precise interpretative summary: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and, Love your neighbor as yourself" (10:27 NIV). The key step in the Jesus reading process is revealed, "You have answered correctly. *Do this*, and you will live" (10:28 NIV) Application of the text *after* observation and interpretation is Jesus' way to experience the Bible. This approach is what I have labeled as the *Second Reading* of the text.

Wesleyans, by our very nature, are holistic in our approach to life. We do not enter into the biblical interpretation process simply for the sake of gaining knowledge. We learn Scripture "in community" for the sake "of the community" so we can become one in our love of God and each other. As stated above, the Wesleyan "Means of Grace" wonderfully engages the disciple-making process. We learn the craft of a *Second Reading* of Scripture in a class or band meeting for the sake of growing in grace and holiness. Winning Bible trivia questions has never been a Wesleyan value. The sacred text is a means to an end, a vehicle to grow in a complete restoration of the Image of God damaged in the fall.

The End of the Beginning

Let's review what we've learned together over the last four chapters.

In Chapter 1, we learned that *all people are interpreters*—all the time. In every conversation, in every kind of communication. The subliminal question I left you with was this: "Will you settle for poor communication and interpretation skills?" For the most part, when we talk to people, especially people we know and love, we will do our very best to hear what they are saying from their perspective. We want to see the background of their story. We ask them questions which may help clarify possible misunderstandings. We all know the relational failures we have committed when we shortcut our listening process and jump to conclusions about someone's life situation. Our engagement is not truly about knowledge of an event - it is the value we place upon getting to know the person.

Imagine the relational value you would discover if you chose to linger like this in the Word. What might happen if we read with care, listening to every word as if it might unlock the meaning of the passage, revealing the Lord who stands right behind it? We should repeat the words, making sure we grasp each one's importance - not according to our internal dictionary but according to Jesus' meaning. We must carefully ask and get useful answers about what life was like in their world, just like we would ask in a conversation with a friend today. We must ask geographic questions, "Where was Jesus

when He performed that miracle?” What were the sociological value systems in place that created people’s responses to Him? If we ask those questions regarding friends and family today, why would we not equally invest ourselves when we read the Word?

In Chapter 2, I highlighted the danger of being shaped into culture’s mold instead of being transformed by the Word. Disciple-making takes place within all of us 24/7. We are never immune. Slowly, our world’s value system, the morals of Hollywood, and the continuous presence of social media will shape you into its mold. The choice is ours. As for me and my house... (Joshua 24:15)

In Chapter 3, I emphasized that all Scripture should be read-understood-applied in a Christian community. Neither its form nor its function was intended to be encountered as individuals. It was designed with clear outcomes to shape a people into the image of the communal Triune God. Jesus’ prayer for His church is this:

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one - ²³ I in them and you in me: so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. John 17:20-23 NIV

In rapid-fire succession, Jesus shows us four times that His desire for us is one-ness in community. The true bonding agent is the Word given by Jesus. Listen to an earlier portion of this same prayer:

I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. ⁷ Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. ⁸ For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. ¹⁴ I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. ¹⁷ Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified. John 17:6-19

May I humbly say: there is no problem whatsoever with your private First Reading of Scripture. I engage the text this way every morning. However, if that is the only way I encounter the text, I may sincerely neglect the primary purpose of His Word. It is to make us holy people and to fashion us into holy communities who share the same values which Jesus reveals.

Finally, in chapter 4, I described the Wesleyan doctrine regarding the “Means of Grace” and our teaching regarding “social holiness.” Specifically, how we can plow up the soil of our lives in preparation to make ourselves fertile ground to plant the Word. Social holiness is the declaration that we become holy in community, with those we love and affirm. We are *especially* called into the divine life as we humbly embark on the faith journey with people we may disagree with or even see as our enemies whom we may ultimately offer forgiveness.

All evangelical churches place high regard on the Word, both in preaching and in personal devotions. What sets Wesleyans apart is the additional value placed on the “means of grace.” Here, we search the scriptures and make ourselves mutually accountable to the voice of Jesus in small groups. It is essential to know what the Word means and then ask others to hold us responsible for our faith commitment. Otherwise, we may only be “best-guessing” at the meaning of Scripture. Even worse, committing our lives and those whom we love to a half-truth about the faith.

My most sincere prayer is that what you will learn in the chapters ahead will give you tools to read-understand-apply the Word with accuracy, insight, and transformation - both for you and for all those with whom you interact.

As I close this chapter, I might encourage you as an act of commitment, to pray aloud this prayer of Paul over yourself. It was his desire for the church in Ephesus. It is my hope for you as well.

For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. (Ephesians 1:15-19 NIV)

Let's do the hard work of Disciple-making and ***Integrate Learning into Life.***

In the end, Disciple-making is about life change. I want to give you room to move learning from your head down into your heart. If your Disciple-making plan is to simply read this workbook and consider your effort complete, allow me to correct this superficial assessment. We are called to be “doers of the word and not hearers only” (James 1:22 CSB). Let's begin this change of life NOW.

Most of us at some level are tactile-learners. One of the greatest disciple-making tools for you may be a pen or a pencil. When we circle important words, underline memorable sentences, or make notes in the margins, our depth of integration increases.

May I encourage you to grab the writing tool of your choice and scan back through this chapter as you set the learning tone for the rest of the workbook. Re-process this chapter with some of these questions in mind.

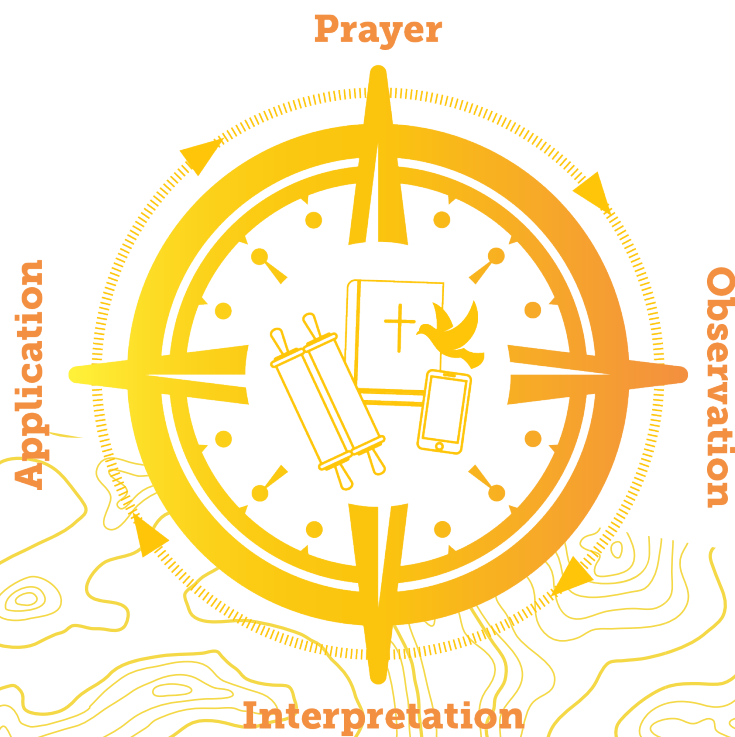
New Idea? List out new ideas or concepts that have been introduced to you. Short-term memory skills are greatly increased through the simple act of writing. I encourage you to write out summary statements in your own words to help you take ownership of an idea. Or, simply copy entire sentences to make my thoughts or God's words into your own. In this book, I will pledge to define words before I use them. Make sure you understand words and their meanings before we move on to the next chapter. If there is something that you are not quite getting, allow yourself the space to pause and understand this before moving on. Remember, words and their meanings have huge consequences on the way we think.

Re-Calibration? What new idea(s) have you encountered in this chapter that may hint you have been traveling down a wrong path in your spiritual development? Have these new truths called you to re-calibrate your life in a new compass direction to become more “like Jesus?” Maybe ask it this way, “Did you have any ‘aha’ moments?” If so, state them clearly. Maybe you had an “Oh No” moment, when you realized you were thinking or acting in a less-than-Christian way. Make this personally transformative. It might call for a time of verbal repentance and re-commitment. Please tell your accountability partner about this decision. This is both a confession of change AND a testimony to God's Spirit at work in your life

Refreshing? What biblical texts have refreshed your soul? Why not write them on an index card and tape them over your kitchen sink, on the refrigerator door, or a bathroom mirror? Let the Scriptures renew your mind permanently by memorizing them.

True^North Part 2

The "HOW" of Disciple-making in the Word



CHAPTER 5

Pray First and Always

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

Ephesians 1:18-19 NIV

In this chapter and the ones that follow, I will show you the “How” of disciple-making in the Word. I recognize that discussing something as personal as Scripture reading in a theory-based way is why I choose not to proceed in that manner. This ineffective method is precisely why computers no longer come with lengthy instruction manuals. Instead, new computers themselves and all their accessories are what we call “plug-and-play.” You learn BY DOING.

That is the *True^North* way. We learn the “practice of disciple-making” by actually “practicing disciple-making” ourselves. You will not be reading about the disciple-making process and viewing it in a second-hand kind of way. Instead, I will ask you to become personally engaged in the process. In the rest of the book, I will be your “Paul,” and you will become my “Timothy” (or my Pricilla), a disciple-in-the-making? Since I am asking you to lean into the possibility of becoming a disciple-maker in the future, should you not first be discipled using the process you will be utilizing? If you agree to this, *just say YES*. This simple yet profound phrase will come up again at the end of this chapter - and throughout your entire journey of Observe-Interpret-Apply the Word.

***True^North* Bible Study at a Glance**

As we begin this journey together, I want to put before you the overall “compass points” of *True^North* Bible Study that fit into a holistic Bible Study approach. Throughout the next several chapters, I will explain to you how each “part” operates individually. I will also keep reminding you of where each part fits into the whole process. You do not need

to memorize this list. Repetition will be your best teacher. Plus, there will be handouts and examples to help you grasp the overall flow and visualize the practice of *True^North* Bible Study.



1. Prayer: Ask God to reveal His words to you: “Lord, I need insight, knowledge, and discernment from You as I engage in the study of Your Word.”

2. Observation: Inspect the passage, see what is explicitly in the text, and shape your insights into text-driven questions.

3. Interpretation: Answer the text-driven questions discovered during your Observation with effective research tools.

4. Application: Carefully define and evaluate the practical Biblical truths which arose from your Interpretation. In the end, shape these truths into transformational prayers.

Everything Rests on Prayer

Everything we do in the interest of Bible study rests on our prayer life. If we disconnect the task of Bible study from the life of the Author of the Bible, we have already lost. You might be surprised to know that some of the most brilliant Bible scholars I have ever known never pray. I am not sure if they even believe in prayer. Keep in mind; they are studying the Bible to advance their academic pursuits and intellectual achievement. They have their self-interests in the forefront of their minds, not those of promoting the coming Kingdom. Let us be clear: that is *not* what you and I are doing.

We are observing-interpreting-applying the Bible to gain the wisdom of God, discover the nature and character of the Son, and experience the presence of the Holy Spirit - all for the sake of sharing this truth with others in this disciple-making process. I encourage you to re-read that list of outcomes, just to make sure we both agree on what we are doing together. We must be on the same page if we are going to embark on this journey together. If we happen to learn something about the contents of the Bible simultaneously, so be it!

If we disconnect the task of Bible study from the life of the Author of the Bible, we have already lost.

From this point forward, everything that will take place in you and through you rests on your dependence on God and His presence showing up amidst our journey together. Without Him breathing His life into our work and efforts, we will simply be employing theoretical methods to read words printed on a page. Without a literal anointing, our labor will be in vain, and we will be right back where we started.

True^North Bible Study Requires Prayer For Protection

The very act of taking up a Bible and reading is a frontal assault on the stronghold of the evil one in your life. Jesus Himself tells us this is a spiritual battle. In Mark 4, Jesus explains how the Kingdom will grow into existence through our receptivity to the Word. Listen to His explanation of the parable:

Then Jesus said to them, “Don’t you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? The farmer sows the word. Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. Mark 4:13-15 NIV

Jesus has already told the parable once before to the disciples in Mark 4:3-9. The point He is now reinforcing is that its meaning should have been self-evident (“Don’t you understand this parable? How will you understand any parable?”). Can you hear Jesus’ implication to the disciples? “You must do more than merely *hear* my words. You must also understand (aka, *interpret*) what I am saying.” I sense that He looked at them with penetrating eyes and a voice of disappointment. He implicitly conveys that they are failing miserably at interpreting His words.

Then Jesus interprets the parable for them. He reveals a truth that takes place just behind the natural world, yet it is just as real as the sensory world, which we can wrap our arms around. Listen to Jesus: “As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word” (v. 5). Satan himself immediately snatches up the Word of God if it comes to us without proper interpretation. The Word without the roots of understanding will soon be stolen. Jesus wants us to realize there is a spiritual battle every single time we open our Bible. This should cause us to offer regular and diligent prayers for protection and interpretation.

Jesus wants us to realize that a spiritual battle is fought every single time we open the Bible.

Let's do that right now as our initial steps forward. We will utilize Paul's prayer for the church at Ephesus:

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

Ephesians 1:17-19 NIV

We can also add Jesus' prayer for His disciples in John 17 to this current request:

Holy Father, protect them by the power of Your name, the name You gave Me, so that they may be one as We are one. While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name You gave Me. My prayer is not that You take them out of the world but that You protect them from the evil one.

John 17:11-12, 15 NIV

Finally, here is one prayer-centered text which depicts the visually unseen battle at work. It comes in the climactic passage in the Book of Ephesians:

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. Ephesians 6:10-18 NIV

Let's spend some time examining Paul's words to the church in Ephesus. Again, in our disciple-making role, allow me to be Paul, and you can be Timothy, the pastor appointed by Paul to this church in Ephesus. So, in these following few paragraphs, please imagine I am coaching you on how to Observe-Interpret-Apply Paul's prayer to your life. This prayer will be a model for what we will learn together in the chapters ahead. We can begin with a simple Observation of the overall context: Paul is preparing the church for battle.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Ephesians 6:10-12 NIV

Paul begins the passage with the general statement, "Put on the full armor of God." He progresses one by one through each part of your battle armor (1) Belt of Truth, (2) Breastplate of Righteousness, (3) Gospel of Peace, (4) Shield of Faith (5) Helmet of Salvation, (6) Sword of the Spirit = Word of God. Then, he closes out this list with "pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests." Interestingly, from a first-century perspective, the "Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God" is the only offensive weapon on the list. The first five protect the soldier from the enemy. But the Word, wonderfully laid alongside prayer, is taking the battle directly to the enemy.

Remember to keep in mind that in our discussion, I am asking you to read these words, listen to my interpretation, and then apply them to your own life. As we sit together, I can see the impact these words are making upon you as your eyes open, and you recognize the reality of the world Paul is declaring. For best practices, we will stroll through this passage. I will pray it out loud over you, plus interpret it as we go. I will take some time to explain how the entire Book of Ephesians comes to a climax in this very passage. (This big-picture view of an entire book like Ephesians will come in Chapters 6 and 7). As I take you through this material, I will emphasize the points which are essential to Paul; (1) how to "stand firm (said four times in this passage) in the Lord and His mighty power, (2) how to pray for both protection and for the rebuke of the schemes of the evil one, (3) and how to perceive the reality of the unseen Kingdom of God and the disguised realm of our great adversary. You are experiencing being disciplined in the Word as you Observe-Interpret-Apply the instructions of Paul. The best curriculum for learning to pray is the Word itself. Try to see some of our work together as a model for how you might disciple others in the future.

True^North Bible Study Requires Prayer For Healing

Psalm 40 is one of my favorites. It begins this way:

*I waited patiently for the Lord;
he turned to me and heard my cry.*

*He lifted me out of the slimy pit,
out of the mud and mire;
he set my feet on a rock
and gave me a firm place to stand.
He put a new song in my mouth,
a hymn of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear the Lord
and put their trust in him.*
Psalm 40:1-3 NIV

It is a beautiful declaration of Yahweh's gracious response to my prayers. We often miss a significant revelation if we do not read the entire context of the Psalm. For in 40:6 (NIV), we find:

*Sacrifice and offering you did not desire -
But my ears you have Opened -
burnt offerings and sin offerings You did not require.*

I find it strange that the Psalmist says, "sacrifice and offering you did not desire." Especially given that in Leviticus, especially chapters 1-7, we find a litany of sacrificial offerings that God not only desires but requires! But the poetic effect of hyperbole emphasizes there are things God longs for even more: "my ears you have pierced." Now, spiritual body piercings are not the point here. The word "pierced" is an unusual word throughout the Old Testament. In the sixteen times it occurs, the best translation is "dig out" or even "to excavate," with the object of the verb usually a cistern or a well for communal water. (You will learn how to do word studies in chapter 9). Let me explain the Psalmist's poetic thrust. Following the serpent's deception in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3, humans have listened to the wrong voice. We have tuned our ears to the whispers and lies of Satan. We have become hard of hearing when it comes to the voice of God and His word.

This hearing-dilemma is not the only way we lose our "senses" to the Lord. The Bible declares that people are not only deaf to the Lord, but they are also blind. This problem is powerfully displayed in the Gospel stories surrounding the failure of the disciples to recognize Jesus' person and His mission. The theme of sensory depravity undergirds Mark's entire Book. But it climaxes in chapters 8-10. These three chapters are referred to as Jesus' "discipleship training." In Mark 8, Jesus has just fed the multitude for a *second* time (see Mark 6:30-44 for the first miraculous feeding), yet the disciples seem to have no recollection of the first experience. Their response to the hunger of the people is, "Where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?" (8:4). Do not miss what Mark is conveying. Not only are the disciples spiritually deaf and blind, but their memories are equally dulled. Following this second feeding, the disciples get into a boat. There, Jesus instructs them on the meaning of what just happened and how they misread the situation.

Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: “Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don’t you remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?”

“Twelve,” they replied.

“And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?”

They answered, “Seven.”

He said to them, “Do you still not understand?”

Mark 8:17-21 NIV

Later in this book, we will deal directly with “Peter’s Confession of Jesus,” which occurs shortly after the passage above in Mark 8:27-33. In this later section, Peter declares to Jesus that “[He is] the Christ,” which is the correct term. However, Peter and the other disciples ascribe the wrong definition of how the Messiah’s role will manifest itself in the mission of Jesus. They assume that Jesus will rise as a Davidic-like warrior and drive out the Roman legions and re-establish Israel’s Kingship. Listen to the stern rebuke of Jesus immediately following Peter’s Confession. “Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about Him” (Mark 8:30 NIV). Peter has in mind for Jesus to overpower Rome with military might. Jesus then:

...began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. Mark 8:31 NIV

After this, Peter took Jesus aside and “rebuked Him.” Wow. Imagine someone rebuking Jesus! To His face! The word “rebuke” here is the same word that Jesus uses throughout the Book of Mark as He casts out unclean spirits (Mark 1:25; 3:12). Peter is forcefully telling Jesus His plan of suffering and death is utterly foolish. Jesus then authoritatively rebukes Peter and says these chilling words:

Get behind me Satan. You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns. Mark 8:33 NIV

You read that correctly. Jesus directly calls Peter by the name “Satan.” But listen to how He qualifies this characterization with the following sentence: “You do not have in mind the things of God but the things of man.” It’s the mindset or worldview of Peter - not Peter himself - that is satanic. Here it is: any perception of the kingdom that does not include suffering, rejection, and death does not originate in heaven. Peter is “seeing”

the world through the eyes of men. Jesus says this perspective is equal to the way Satan operates in the earthly realm. It is conceived and maintained by force and power. That is not the mind of God. The Kingdom of God is ordered by a whole other power dynamic; other-centered self-sacrifice.

Keep in mind. I am discipling you. So, I want to remind you that it is only in prayer that we can set our spiritual compass according to Jesus' proper interpretation. If you do not perceive the world through Jesus' vision as depicted in the Word, you are blind and deaf. Spiritual blindness means that you are said to be in league with the evil one. We must begin with prayer - especially prayer to the opening of your eyes and the healing of your ears. If you come to the text with your earthly thinking, you will interpret it from a worldly frame of reference, and you will indeed interpret it wrong. However, if you begin with prayer, begging the Lord to help us "set our hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God" (Col. 3:1 NIV), we just might catch a glimpse of Jesus as He is revealed in Scripture.

Consider this our introductory prayer as we sit before the Word.

*Lord, without the gracious touch of Your healing hand, we will never hear
from Your Mouth or from Your Word.*

*Please touch and heal our ears, making them receptive to the transformational
truth of Your voice.*

*Put Your healing salve on our eyes, so we can see the truth housed in Your
Word and in the end; see You as You are.*

True^North Bible Study Requires Us To Pray Biblically

Everyone ought to have reliable people who speak to their lives. These are people who speak God's word to you. Both those from the "land of the living" who speak face-to-face and those who have passed on and speak through their writings. Yes, authors whose books can refresh your mind and whose words effortlessly flow off the page of their books into your heart. For me, Eugene Peterson is one of those people. He loved the Word of God, and he wants everyone else to enjoy it with him. After reading a chapter in any of his books, I stop and reflect: "Wow, I can never think the same way again." Listen to what Peterson says about our failure as praying people, "The reason why our prayers so often fall flat or come out stale is that they are not rooted in the soil of the Word of God."

One of the best ways to keep intimately linked to the Triune God is to employ the “prayer language” found in the Word. The best way to be instructed in ways of prayer is to simply use the prayers of the Bible as they flow from the hearts and the lips of the Lord’s anointed children. The following are four sample prayers I will use to “disciple you in the word.”

Pray Like Samuel

May I encourage you to first pray like Samuel? In 1 Samuel 3, we encounter the young boy Samuel, sleeping in the house of the Lord, and then hears a voice:

The boy Samuel ministered before the Lord under Eli. In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions. ² One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. ³ The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the house of the Lord, where the ark of God was. ⁴ Then the Lord called Samuel. Samuel answered, “Here I am.” ⁵ And he ran to Eli and said, “Here I am, you called me.” But Eli said, “I did not call; go back and lie down.” So, he went and lay down. ⁶ Again, the Lord called, “Samuel!” And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, “Here I am; you called me.” “My son,” Eli said, “I did not call; go back and lie down.” ⁷ Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord: The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. ⁸ A third time the Lord called, “Samuel!” And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, “Here I am; you called me.” Then Eli realized that the Lord was calling the boy. ⁹ So Eli told Samuel, “Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, ‘Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.’” So Samuel went and lay down in his place. ¹⁰ The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, “Samuel! Samuel!” Then Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening” (1 Sam 3:1-10 NIV).

Oh, that you and I might have the openness to pray this prayer with regularity! Moreover, may we focus all our listening energies on the voice of the Almighty. Did you catch the beginning of 3:10? Or did you run past it to get to the Lord answering Samuel’s prayer? Let’s read again: “The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times” (v. 10). Biblical prayer teaches us something vital about our relationship to the Word and the Lord. The voice of the Lord is not detached from the presence of the Lord. When you hear from the Lord, it is Him who is there. The great I AM. Samuel teaches us that prayer is much more than merely wanting an answer to our questions. No. The deepest part of our heart longs for a real person and a true manifestation of Emmanuel: God with us (Matt 1:23; 18:20; 28:20).

In Bible reading for disciple-making, everything rests upon prayer. Even more so,

according to the passage we just read in 1 Samuel, recognizing the presence of God is our true outcome. Not a disconnected answer to our prayer but His very presence. Thus, praying biblically means saying “Yes to His Presence” and desiring Him more than a mere answer. I want the Gift-giver much more than the gift He can give.

You may also be reminded of Jesus’ promised presence when He teaches, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, *there I am among them*” (Matthew 18:20 NIV). The Lord can and will bring a refreshing upon your relationships with one another and with HIM. As you read the Word, try to keep focused less on demanding an answer to prayer and more on the person with whom you are praying.

I confess that I have never truly seen this observation before. I have read through the Bible annually for many years. So I must have read these words many times. But until I worked on this book, I never observed the opening phrase, “The Lord came and stood there.” I have never really seen the impact of God’s presence amid prayer. This thought only came into my mind NOW as I was working through this passage.

May I make another observation about prayer? As I was working on this chapter, I received an email from Nathan, a pastor friend. He sent me these words:

Dr. Smith,

I am lifting you to the Father right now.

Lord, I pray that you will give Dr. Smith the words and the tone to communicate what he needs to for the chapter he is working on right now. It is no surprise he senses the attack of the evil one as he writes about prayer. Lord, you desire to communicate with us through prayer...so many of your children have no idea what they have access to in prayer, and I know the enemy would love to derail what you want to communicate through Dave. I pray in Jesus’ name that you will give him clarity of thought and focus. Speak through him; I pray that the words in this chapter will have an eternal impact on many thousands of people. I pray for your perfect peace to be upon him and his wife, Angie.

In Jesus’ name, I pray this amen!

Wow. I thought that my battle with Observing-Interpreting-Appling the Word was mine alone. But Nathan reminded me that this is a community battle. “It is not good for man to be alone.”

Let’s take one more look at the theme of the Presence of God linked to our prayers, as illustrated in the Psalms. Would you mind if I ask you to read the Psalm out loud?

Read it slowly, with a focus on the grammatical “person” of the subject of each subject (Sorry to abruptly bring up high school grammar - but later in the Observation phase of Bible Study, you will see that grammar can be quite a good friend!). Note the subtle yet powerful shift from third person (23:1-3) to second person (23:4-5) (NIV):

*¹ The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
² He makes me lie down in green pastures,
He leads me beside quiet waters,
³ He refreshes my soul.
He guides me along the right paths
for his name's sake.
⁴ Even though I walk
through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil,

for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.
⁵ You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
⁶ Surely your goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*

As Psalm 23 begins, the writer talks about God in a quasi-distant manner. In Psalm 23:1-3, the writer is talking “about God” but not directly “to Him.” Yes, everything He does is for my best interest and spiritual well-being. Amazingly, in Psalm 23:4-6, the shift to the second person (*You* are with me) is the promise of His presence amid adversity. The Lord is described not only as the Shepherd who provides for us (23:1-3) but also the Table Host who eats with me amid uncertain hardship (23:4-6). The Shepherd provides, and the Host gives us His Presence. This is good news for us.

Let's keep praying biblically. We might begin to pray for precisely what the Lord wants to give us; *Himself*. This presence is what Adam and Eve had in the garden and gave it up for a piece of fruit (Genesis 3). It is what Israel had with His Presence in the Tabernacle in the wilderness and gave it up for a golden calf and some quail to eat (Exodus 40). It is what the first century Jews had with the person of Jesus, and they gave it up for the sake of their status quo (John 1:12-14). The Lord continually offers us the gift of His Presence,

and we repeatedly say, “Is that all?”

As we continue in these prayers, I certainly hope that you feel not just my presence as your disciple-maker; but the very tangible presence of the God of heaven who desires to be with you more than anything.

Pray Like Mary

Let’s move from the early days of the Hebrew nation as told in the Book of 1 Samuel to the incarnational story in Luke 1. The angel Gabriel has just related to Mary that God’s

We need to humbly lay ourselves down so His favor can be defined through His Word.

favor rests upon her (Luke 1:28, 30). Now, it’s easy to assume this will be great news, maybe even better than Good News. It’s Gospel News. But keep in mind that God’s favor rested upon Jesus, yet He went to the Cross. Moreover, if we are called to be like Jesus, the Lord’s favor may mean much more than we could accomplish in our strength, such as “to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us” (Matthew 5:44 NIV). He might ask us to “take up our Cross and follow Him” (Matthew 16:24 NIV). Perhaps the Lord’s favor can take the form of suffering for the sake of others (2 Corinthians 1:3-7), or maybe favor means for me to die so that

Christ might live in me (Galatians 2:20). We need to lay ourselves down humbly so His favor is defined through His Words.

May I digress for a moment? I hope you can envision yourself saying similar words to people you will be discipling in the future. Do not be intimidated by this. If you re-read what I just wrote above, you will see that I am simply repeating what the Bible says. I never want to disciple anyone based upon my own wisdom. Instead, I love to observe-interpret Scripture and then apply it first to myself and then to others, just like you. I encourage you to do the same. Sounding like the Bible takes off all the pressure. Speak the Word.

Back to Luke 1. The angel Gabriel continues,

“You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.” “How will this be, Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?” The angel answers, “The Holy Spirit will come on you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.” Luke 1:31-32; 34-35 NIV

As we read the Bible together, there are two questions you will hear me ask over and over again. First, “What did this text mean to its first-century readers?” Second, “What are the implications?” Mary knows without question that the Lord is with her in every

way imaginable (physically and spiritually). Yet, in her culture, a “virgin conceiving” is not just an oxymoron - it is a sin punishable by death. A woman betrothed in marriage was legally married. Thus, everyone would view her as an adulteress worthy of death (Deuteronomy 22:23). Even if she did not receive a death sentence, she would bear the burden of public shame for the rest of her life. And shame in the first century often carried a stigma worse than death.

What was Mary’s response to these words of the angel?

“I am the Lord’s servant. May everything you have said about me come true.” Luke 1:38 NIV

Her initial response sounds identical to Samuel’s response, but she immediately takes it to the next level: “May it be to me according to your word.” It’s one thing to identify yourself as a servant. It’s another thing altogether to *welcome* someone to treat you that way. Especially given the personal cost these words will place upon her life. Her trust in the Lord is tremendous.

May I speak to the implications of this for a minute? Mary heard, believed, and welcomed the Lord into her whole being. The early church fathers talked about the announcement to Mary and actual incarnation of Jesus as if it was one event. Mary’s organ of conception was her ears as well as her womb. Here, Luke suggests this is the beginning of the reversal of the curse from the garden. Eve, “the mother of all the living” (Genesis 3:20 NIV), listened to the evil one, and her hearing-the-voice-of-a-liar caused a death sentence for all. Conversely, Mary heard the words of the Lord’s representative. The baby Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, bringing life to all through her faith-filled-hearing.

Praying biblically means more than just saying “Yes” to His Presence, as we learned through Samuel. It equally means saying “Yes” to the fulfillment of His Words in my life. “Yes” to His will. *His will His way*. Praying that way means we imitate Jesus’ prayer life:

Abba, Father, Everything is possible for You. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will. Mark 14:36 NIV

Pray like Paul

Countless books examine the “theology” of the Apostle Paul. They explore what constitutes his Christology (the nature of Christ)? They address the question, “What is the best way to describe his ecclesiology (the study of the Church)?” Or, “How do we best explain his eschatology (the study of the End Times)?” For us, as disciples-in-the-making, the wisest approach would be to ask: “How can Paul teach us to pray?” Paul is the consummate pray-er. In almost all of his letters, he is not speaking as a theologian. Rather, he writes as

a pastor. Thus, most of his letters begin with a lengthy section of Praise to God (Ephesians 1:3-14, 2 Corinthians 1:3-7) or prayer for his churches (Ephesians 1:15-23; Philippians 1:3-6; Colossians 1:9-14).

Now, many of us have learned to simply “pray what is on our mind.” This rhythm is a time-honored practice - to share with God exactly how we feel and what might be holding our minds and souls captive. We can equally learn how to pray from the words of Paul. His words may help train and reshape the language you use in prayer. In essence, when you read Paul’s letters, you are hearing him as he prays for the Lord Jesus to dwell in his fledgling churches. He allows the readers to overhear what he is asking the Lord to do in and through them. Simply, these are his disciple-making prayers. Why not adopt them yourself? Why not imagine Paul asking the Lord to do the same thing for you? Why not pray one of these prayers out loud prior to reading and interpreting the Word? I have included a few of Paul’s prayers below.

Philippians 1:3-11 NIV

³ I thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴ In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, ⁶ being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

⁷ It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God’s grace with me.⁸ God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

⁹ And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, ¹⁰ so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

Colossians 1:9-14 NIV

⁹ For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, ¹⁰ so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God,¹¹ being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience,¹² and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people

in the kingdom of light. ¹³ For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Pray like Jesus

According to Luke's gospel, at every significant moment in Jesus' life, we "catch" Him in the midst of prayer. Nine times we overhear Jesus praying (e.g., Luke 3:21, 5:16, 6:12; 9:18, 9:28-29; 22:32; 22:41; 23:34; 23:46), climaxing with His two-fold prayer from the Cross: "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing" and "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." In His final acts of prayer, we overhear Jesus interceding for His executioners and His final committal into the hands of His Father, employing the words of Psalm 30:6. I encourage you to emulate Jesus and regularly use the Book of Psalms as a disciple-making tool to voice your prayers to the Lord. Eight times in the four Gospels, we find Jesus Himself quoting from the Book of Psalms - the most from any Old Testament Book.

Allow me to make a bold but essential statement: of all the spiritual disciplines, prayer even exceeds Bible reading with its transformational impact on your life. I say that because we know that the Son stands at the right hand of the Father. Paul says in Romans: "Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and *is also interceding for us*" (8:34 NIV). Tie that together with: "Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because *he always lives to intercede for them*" (Hebrews 7:25 NIV). If you want to know what Jesus is bringing to the Father, let's observe-interpret-apply Jesus' prayer in John 17. It is here that we find the content of Jesus' prayer for His disciples and all those future disciple-makers. And this includes you and me. If you want to know what Jesus is praying in heaven right now for you and me, simply read through this section of His prayer:

My prayer is not for them [the disciples] alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one - 23 I in them and you in me - So that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. 24 "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. 25 "Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. 26 I have made you known to them, and will

continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.” John 17:20-26 NIV

Through John 17, we learn that the Son and the Father focus on intercessory prayer for us, His children. I can find no more effective way to prepare our hearts to observe-interpret-apply the word than to recite these words out loud before we engage the text.

Our Prayer-filled Response: Just Say “Yes”

When I was a new Christian, the man who was discipling me, Rev. Joe Duvall, told me he firmly believed God wanted to fashion me into a teacher. In all honesty, I knew next to nothing about the Bible. But Pastor Joe saw within me a hunger for the Word. So, he told me that I would be leading an adult Sunday School class the following Sunday. I asked him where to begin. He told me to start with Romans chapter 12.. Pastor Joe handed me a Bible and said similar words that God said to the prophet Ezekiel, “Take and eat. Eat this scroll and then go and speak to the people.” (Ezra 3:1). I consumed Roman 12 like it was a full-course dinner. Listen to the words. Why not read them out loud. Be amazed by their call to transformation.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. 2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:1-2 NIV)

I made written notes of everything I saw. I was drawn to the end of 12:2 with the wording, “then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is.” Personally speaking, as a new believer, that was the essential thing in my life. I longed to know God’s will. For my marriage. For my children. For my work career at the time as a computer programmer. And, if my pastor was right, for my future teaching ministry.

My heartbeat was one prayer: “Lord, what must I do to know your will?”

Since I am discipling you, What about your desires? Is knowing God’s will at the top of your prayer list? If you say “yes,” let’s observe-interpret-apply this chapter with a laser focus to prayerfully consider God’s will in all we do from now on.

The initial thing Paul said to the Church at Roman Church, “offer our bodies as a living sacrifice.” I want you to connect the cause-and-effect relationship Paul builds into

this passage. First, we make a conscious decision to offer ourselves to God. Second, we refrain from being “conformed to the pattern of this world” and simultaneously permit the Lord to “transform us through the renewal of our minds.” *Then* we will know what His will is!

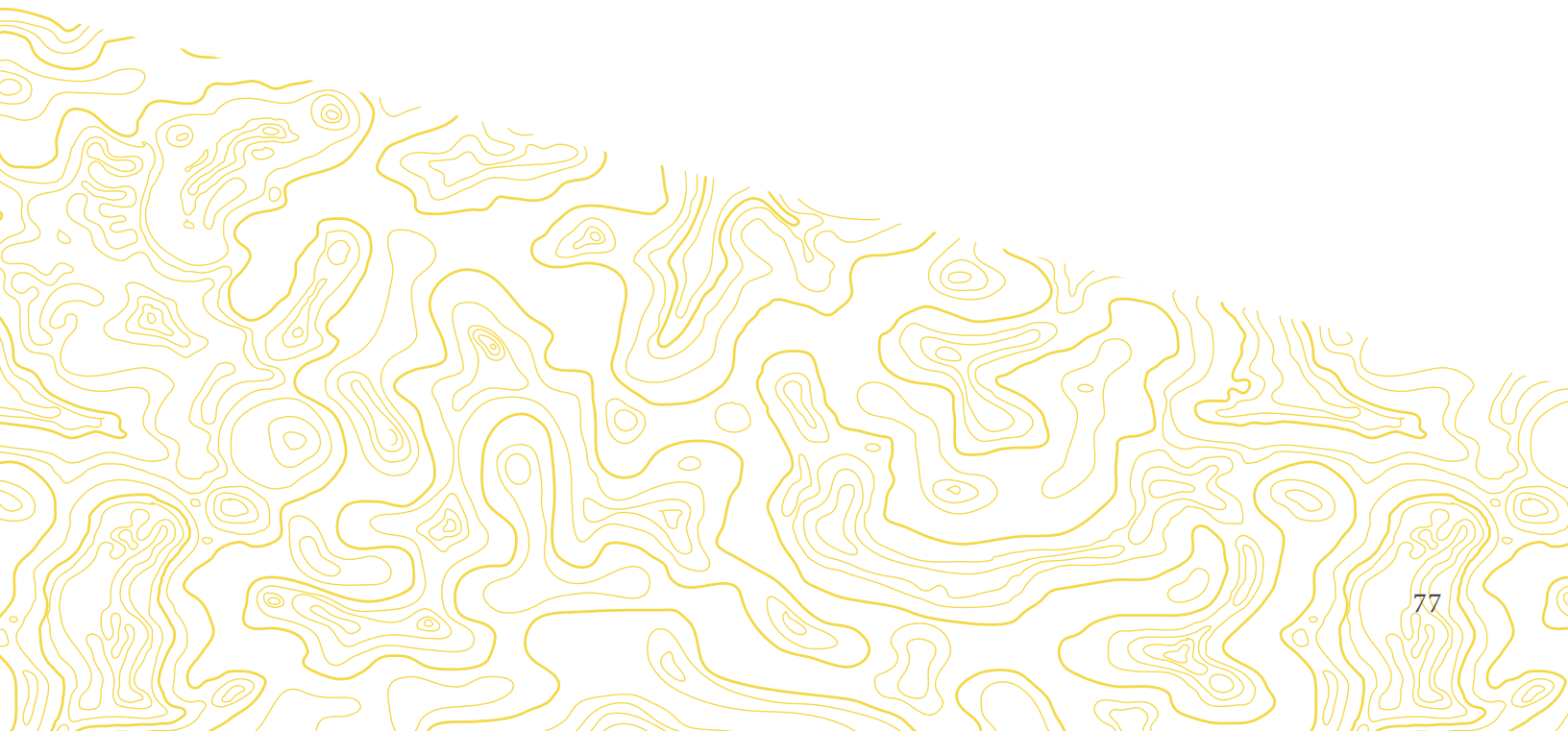
IF “we radically offer ourselves to God,” THEN we will know His will.

My disciple-in-the-making, we seem to have reversed our spiritual decision-making process. We shrewdly ask God to reveal His will to us first. Why? So that we decide how much of it we want to obey. As your disciple-maker, let me be honest with you: If you are pondering whether or not to obey God as He reveals His will to you, you are already in trouble. To make godly decisions, we must order our lives and our determination to obey His will according to His Kingdom and its values. Being a Christ-follower means that we must do this *in advance* of knowing what His will might be for us.

So, how do we prayerfully prepare ourselves to read-interpret-apply His word? We find the best starting point in three simple faith-filled words: **Just say YES.** Before we pray - before we read - before we interpret - before we apply. Just say YES. With this opening confession, we reveal He can trust us with the revelation of His Word. No matter what He reveals, we have chosen the path of obedience. We have decided to recalibrate according to the *True^North* of His voice and His Word.

Oh Lord, empower us to sound like Samuel, obey like Mary, disciple others like Paul, and imitate Jesus, as we ask for Your will to be manifest in our lives.

Pray First and Always. And remember, Just say YES.



Let's do the hard work of Disciple-making and ***Integrate Learning into Life.***

In the end, Disciple-making is about life change. I want to give you room to move learning from your head down into your heart. If your Disciple-making plan is to simply read this workbook and consider your effort complete, allow me to correct this superficial assessment. We are called to be “doers of the word and not hearers only” (James 1:22 CSB). Let's begin this change of life NOW.

Most of us at some level are tactile-learners. One of the greatest disciple-making tools for you may be a pen or a pencil. When we circle important words, underline memorable sentences, or make notes in the margins, our depth of integration increases.

May I encourage you to grab the writing tool of your choice and scan back through this chapter as you set the learning tone for the rest of the workbook. Re-process this chapter with some of these questions in mind.

New Idea? List out new ideas or concepts that have been introduced to you. Short-term memory skills are greatly increased through the simple act of writing. I encourage you to write out summary statements in your own words to help you take ownership of an idea. Or, simply copy entire sentences to make my thoughts or God's words into your own. In this book, I will pledge to define words before I use them. Make sure you understand words and their meanings before we move on to the next chapter. If there is something that you are not quite getting, allow yourself the space to pause and understand this before moving on. Remember, words and their meanings have huge consequences on the way we think.

Re-Calibration? What new idea(s) have you encountered in this chapter that may hint you have been traveling down a wrong path in your spiritual development? Have these new truths called you to re-calibrate your life in a new compass direction to become more “like Jesus?” Maybe ask it this way, “Did you have any ‘aha’ moments?” If so, state them clearly. Maybe you had an “Oh No” moment, when you realized you were thinking or acting in a less-than-Christian way. Make this personally transformative. It might call for a time of verbal repentance and re-commitment. Please tell your accountability partner about this decision. This is both a confession of change AND a testimony to God's Spirit at work in your life

Refreshing? What biblical texts have refreshed your soul? Why not write them on an index card and tape them over your kitchen sink, on the refrigerator door, or a bathroom mirror? Let the Scriptures renew your mind permanently by memorizing them.

CHAPTER 6

Observation, Part I: Start With The Big Picture

“Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.”

1 Samuel 3:10 (NCB)

My spiritual hope for you is twofold. First, through our time together, I hope you will be disciplined in the Word and that you might correspondingly grow and flourish in both the seen and unseen realities of faith. Second, and even more importantly, I hope you will take the very resources we share and guide someone else who is hungry to read and understand the Bible.

As you remember from our last chapter, it is wise to begin Bible study with a prayer for our mutual enlightenment, understanding, and transformation. Since we have discussed that God has fashioned you (yes, *you*) as a “disciple-maker,” I ask that you expand your prayer focus today. Listen to Paul’s charge to Timothy, his young disciple-in-the-making:

*And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses
entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others
(2 Tim. 2:2 NIV)*

Paul encourages us to “pay forward” the grace and knowledge we received: “What you have heard me say...entrust to reliable people...who will also be qualified to teach others.” Did you notice Paul describes three generations of disciples in this one verse: Paul, Timothy, and their *next* cohort of disciples? You and I do not learn for our biblical knowledge or even our piety. No, we observe-interpret-apply for others’ sake and the opportunity we have to share our lives and the Word with them. With this in mind, begin to ask the Lord to place upon your heart the names of one or two others whom you might invite into this multi-generational (Paul is an older disciple-maker training Timothy, a young disciple-in-the-making) disciple-making plan. Who do you know that might wonderfully benefit from learning the very same truths we have discussed thus far?

I will wait while you put together a list of all the “good” excuses that the evil one might be whispering into your ears at this very moment. Satan wants you to hesitate (or even back away) in prayer rather than lean into this opportunity. May I also remind you: the Holy Spirit is the only true disciple-maker. We simply serve as Bible guides. If we keep this disciple-making journey to ourselves, we act as spiritual hoarders, holding on to precisely what the Lord has entrusted to us to give away to others. So, consider names of those you know and love who would desire to be disciples-in-the-making. Start with this prayer:

“Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening” (1 Samuel 3:10 NCB).

In the last chapter, we started with the first *True^North* compass point: *prayer*. Now we move into the observational phase. This chapter and the next will teach you how to read entire books of the Bible and report the “Big Picture” themes which hold them together. Then, chapter 8 will focus on observing smaller units of Scripture and describing their details. Think of it this way, first we examine the panoramic view of the entire forest. Then and only then do we examine the individual trees.

Let’s once again review the whole *True^North* process. Begin implanting this material on your heart by rereading the compass points below to internalize the process as a whole. It will also keep you from a rush to judgment about what the text MEANS to us today before we know what the text MEANT to their original recipients in the ancient world.

***True^North* Bible Study at a Glance**

Let’s take a look at our *True^North* Bible Study:



1. Prayer: Ask God to reveal His words to you: “Lord, I need insight, knowledge, and discernment from You as I engage in the study of Your Word.”

2. Observation: Inspect the passage, see what is explicitly in the text, and shape your insights into text-driven questions.

3. Interpretation: Answer the text-driven questions discovered during your Observation with effective research tools.

4. Application: Carefully define and evaluate the practical Biblical truths which arose from your Interpretation. In the end, shape these truths into transformational prayers.

Observation – What Is It?

Observation is a two-part process, and it begins by simply *seeing what is in the text*. However, do not be mistaken...it is so much more than mere reading. To truly *see* what the biblical author has written requires slowing down, reading the text, and even writing it out by hand. I will teach you how to employ every means available so the Lord can “open your eyes.”

I was reminded recently of the simple teaching mantra, “*See, Say, Do.*” Read the text. Speak the text. Write the text. Each step creates an ever-increasing impact on your ability to read with precision. Reading with your eyes is a beautiful introduction to the Biblical text. *You see it.* Add to your reading the action of pronouncing the sacred words out loud. Imagine that you conform your speech to that of the Lord’s words. *You speak and hear it.* Finally, when you write the text out by hand, you will be harnessing every part of your body in this reading confrontation. *You feel it.* As you read, hear and write, you will be shutting off all distractions competing for your attention as you engage your entire body in the act of worship. Let’s turn Bible reading into a labor of love. This focus is the initial work of observation.

Now, we move onto the second part of observation. Once you have identified what is in the text (its basic form and contents), I will ask you to shape your observations into questions that will later serve as input into the next step in the overall process, interpretation. Here is a simple way to think about it:

Observation = Seeing the text and turning your insight(s) into questions.
Principle Observational Question: “What did the text say?”

Interpretation = Answering these questions.
Principle Interpretation Question: “What did the text mean?”

We will refer back to this concept many times throughout this book. As part of this workbook, I have created study guides to help you visualize the Bible study tools you will use to deepen your reading practice. I will also provide samples so you can actually “see” this in real-time. Finally, we will “do” some observational work together so that we might “develop the habit of observation.”

In this initial work of observation, I will be asking you to look over my shoulder. This is Jesus’ model for disciple-making. His disciples would watch Him do ministry *before* they could participate with Him. Then, He sent them out two-by-two to minister under the authority of His name. So, as we walk through the following chapters, I want you to read the biblical material carefully but then “watch me” as I model for you how to

observe-interpret-apply the Word. This modeling is what I will be praying you will do with many others!

Let's begin observing!

Start By Reading Books as a Whole

Did you know that the chapter divisions and the verse numbers in the Bible did not formally become part of our biblical text until the early 1500s? The gospel writer Mark did not write sixteen chapters. He simply wrote one unified story of Jesus. We have subdivided it into sixteen chapters for our reading convenience. The same is true with the books of Philippians, Ezra, and Acts. The text was written to be read as one coherent story and in one sitting. In our modern devotional reading, we often miss the author's flow and read the book as a list of rules to bring about proper Christian behavior. It is so much more than merely doing the right thing. Christian faith is about being the right person!

Let me employ an illustration to make my point just a bit deeper. Before the days of streaming services (Netflix, Hulu, etc.), we would record network shows to watch later with the ability to fast-forward through commercials. Imagine this: You sit down to catch up on the latest episode of your favorite show. As soon as the program hits the first commercial break, you stop the show and turn off the TV. The next day, you return to the place you stopped and resume watching until you reach the next commercial, and so on. You only watch one segment per day until the show is over. If we practiced this odd way of watching, we would forget many of the essential details in previous segments every time we restarted the program. Of course, this sounds silly. No one would watch this way. But that is precisely what we do in our contemporary Bible reading plans. We read "parts" of a book without any sense of the "whole." The Bible becomes a disconnected composition of proof-texts and hand-picked promises. We are eating bite-sized servings and cannot figure out why we are biblically malnourished.

Don't Rush - Take Your Time!

In our typical Bible reading, we read one book, usually chapter by chapter. Once we have finished the book, our Bible devotional plan takes us to another one. We are just getting acquainted with the first book and then we move on. It's like never having more than

a first date with someone. Just as we begin to become better acquainted and discover topics we have in common, we go our separate ways. Why not commit to spending a month or two with a single book? Personally, my practice has been to pick one Gospel and one Epistle *each year*. Yes, an entire year. This year, I've committed myself to linger over Mark and 2 Corinthians. Last year it was John and Ephesians. There is no hurry. We have the rest of our lives to become acquainted with the entire Bible.

We have the rest of our lives to become acquainted with the entire Bible.

It is my job to train you to see and hear the overall movement within each book of the Bible. So, let's spend the rest of our time together "being disciplined" in Mark's Gospel. Do not be concerned if it appears we will slow down here. It merely takes time to become acquainted with a book like Mark (or Romans or even 2 Peter). My ultimate goal is to help you calibrate your "compass" according to Mark's directional markers. Please believe me when I say that Mark wants you to see and understand what he knows about the person and the mission of Jesus. As you read and listen, Mark will give you "insider information" about how to observe-interpret-apply his book.

So, let's start our study together with you making some initial observations of the Gospel of Mark. Mark is the shortest of the four Gospels and should only take you between 90 and 120 minutes to read it.

Read Mark - Our Beginning Observation

Now that we have an initial understanding of observation, we can venture into practical steps to practice it. Here our initial plan for observation:

1. *Make some sacred time.* On a Sabbath or a day with ample time in your schedule, find a quiet place. Try to set aside enough time to read the Gospel of Mark in one sitting. I also beg you to remove as many distractions as possible. Turn off your cell phone and all social media notifications. Consider putting your phone in another room or a drawer! Make this a sacred time with God and His Word. If you are reading Mark and must take a break, try to read Mark 1-8 and then as soon as possible, re-engage with Mark 9-16.
2. *Make some sacred space.* If you are married and have children, the best gift your spouse can give to you is to take the kids out to create space for you to read the Gospel of Mark. Or maybe your spouse can stay home with the children and

allow you to find a place to get alone with the Word. Remember, as a married man, the best gift I can give to my wife is not to try and “fix things” that are not going well for her. No. The actions of a godly husband is primarily to point her to Jesus as He appears in the Word.

3. *Allow the Word to speak your language.* If you are more of a verbal learner rather than a visual learner, consider listening to the Gospel of Mark instead. Many Bible apps on smartphones and tablets do this for nearly every translation; and for free. You can listen on the YouVersion app, Dwell, Streetlights, or <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/audio> on your Mac or PC. Since our culture is not the best at purely listening, I *highly recommend* that you follow the same translation in a printed Bible. If you only listen, your mind is likely to wander, and you will get distracted, missing significant parts of the story.

As you embark on this observational adventure, you may feel the impulse to stop along the way and to make some notes. I beg you to simply “sit” in the Word for this initial reading. You might sense the compulsion to go back after reading a chapter to examine any study notes that may be at the bottom of the page in your Bible. You have questions, and you want answers. I get it! Patience is difficult. I encourage you to mimic the posture of Mary rather than Martha. Mary sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what He said. But Martha was distracted (Luke 10:38-42). In the end, Jesus said, “Mary has chosen what is better” (NIV).

Remember, this is your first encounter with Mark. Resist that sense of urgency to become a formal western-thinking student. That time will come. I promise. Here, you are simply practicing observation: seeing the text. Make this less about you and more about Mark’s agenda. Allow the text to raise the questions that appear to be on Mark’s heart and mind, so His words captivate your thoughts.

If you are reading it yourself:

Try reading every other chapter out loud. Yes, it will slow you down. But remember, this is not a race. It will cause your entire body to become involved in the reading process. Your eyes will see the words as you scan the page, your mouth and tongue will feel the text as you pronounce the words, your ears will hear the spoken words as you lean in, and even your fingers will touch the text as they follow along. Why not make it a total sensory event?

If you are listening to the book:

Let the words of the one reading the sacred text wash over you. Allow the words to flow over and around you as they enter your Spirit-enabled ears. If you are listening, please have the same translation open in front of you as you follow

along with your eyes. Western educated people are terrible listeners. We become easily distracted if we ONLY listen.

Now, go and read Mark. I'll wait here patiently until you finish.

Ninety minutes later...

Once you have completed the reading or listening of Mark, spend an additional 15-30 minutes reflecting on what you have seen, heard, noticed, and observed. Here, I encourage you to make some general observations. I do this in my prayer journal. Make notes about what you *saw* or *heard* in the text. I do not want you to focus too much on what you *expected* to see or your past experiences. To the best of your ability, simply report what you observed this time through the text. I might even suggest that you begin your observations with words such as, "I observed..." or "I heard Mark say..." Make certain to have the text of Mark at the core of your observations. It is also an excellent practice to go back to Mark's text and double-check to see if what you thought you saw was actually there. Consider questions that can be formed from your initial observations (you will see my example below). Remember, this brief observational reflection is only your *First Reading* of Mark - it is far from your "final answer."

Now that you have read Mark for yourself, here are some of my observations from the last time I read through the entire Gospel of Mark.

First, I noticed that Mark's disciples seem to be depicted as somewhat dull or dim-witted. This observation came to mind as I noticed several times when Jesus spoke, the disciples seemed to either misunderstand Him or even entirely reject His teaching. Contrastingly, I observed how other people entered the story and seemed to respond with wholehearted faith to Jesus' words of instruction. As a result, I asked the question, "Is it possible that the portrayal of these contrasting characters might indicate that in Mark, outsiders can become Kingdom insiders and insiders can find themselves on the outside?" This thought is one of my observations-turned-into-questions that I wrote down during my 15-30 minutes of reflection. Remember. Do not try to answer these observational questions. That will take place in chapter 9 - Interpretation.

Another observation that arose as I read the entire book was the words that Mark used repeatedly. For example, the word "immediately" is used 30+ times in the New International Version. As I read the text aloud, I even began to emphasize the word with a newfound force, which seemed to add a frenetic pace to the book's activities. This practice caused me to ask three observational questions. First, "If the word 'immediately' sets the narrative pace of Mark, what is the meaning of the word, and what is its significance?" Then, I asked, "When do Jesus and His followers find *rest* in this book?"

Another word that caught my eye was the frequent use of "fear" or a comparable

synonym, such as “afraid” or “terrified.” So, a fitting observational question is “What is the meaning of the word ‘fear’ and what is its significance to the larger book-level purpose of Mark?” Later, in my *Second Reading* of Mark, I will try to determine: Do the repeated words I observe occur throughout Mark, or is their location limited to just a few places? This question might create an area of future interest when we move to Bible study interpretation.

Now, as a minor digression to our observational discussion, there are many different types of people. But if I had to place us all into only two groups, there are “thinkers,” and there are “feelers.” Above, I have been forcing you to be a “thinker.” I’ve asked you to:

- Only report to me your initial Mark “sightings.”
- Asked you: What did you see?
- Asked you: What did you hear?

If you are more of a “feeler,” feel free to express your overall experience of Mark. In conjunction with the observation above regarding the word “immediately,” I included this thought, “By the time I got to the end of Mark, I was physically and emotionally exhausted! The book flows at breakneck speed, with no rest for anyone; except maybe Jesus, who is asleep on the back of a boat amid a frightening storm (Mark 4). I also sensed a deep empathy for Jesus. Group after group rejects or abandons Him as He draws closer and closer to the cross. Are there other insights you have that might help you “feel” the impact of reading the Gospel as a whole? I will wait as you reflect and make a few notes.

After you finish your thinker-and-feeler observations, you have officially completed your *First Reading* of Mark! You have seen the overarching landscape and witnessed as Mark constructed the flow of His entire book. It is my prayer that this has been impactful all by itself. My prayer is that you consider it not a formal study but a beautiful beginning for the next month. Yes, an entire month dedicated to Mark.

Next Step For Observation Your *Second Reading* of Mark

Do not feel rushed to reread Mark on the same day. When you do return to it, I want you to do it in the same way; *all at one time*. In the Appendix, you will find a helpful tool to make notes for this *Second Reading* of a whole book. The form is relatively

straightforward. Through this reading, I want you to begin to take ownership of the material in each chapter. So, after reading each one, simply give a title to describe the contents of the material. For example, Mark 1 might be: “Beginning of the Gospel” or “Preparation and First Miracles.” Please name each subsequent chapter. As you can tell, in this reading I am asking you to become a student of Mark. You are not simply reading or listening but actively observing.

On the right-hand side of the form will be several categories to place some observational notes about insights that come to mind while reading or listening during this *Second Reading* of Mark. These notes can be about the author of the book. What is Mark revealing about himself? The notes can focus on the make-up of the original audience who received the book. What is Mark revealing about the people he is writing to? Or, make observations about the original historical situation—what is the significance of this event taking place in this location? Finally, there is plenty of room to make other notes. Remember, in this *Second Reading*, the observations I want you to focus on are about what the text meant to the *original* readers. Please try to see with the eyes and listen with the ears of a first century historian.

Now, reread Mark for the second time. I will patiently wait for you to get it done. This process will take a bit more time since you will often stop along the way, sit back, and reflect upon what you have read and how to shape your observations. No hurry. But try to do this in one sitting.

Some time later...

Now that you are done, let me give you just a few of my observations.

First, I noticed that Mark tells several miracles in the first eight chapters. There are twenty miracles in the first half of Mark. Yes. I counted this time through. However, this does not include the four summary statements of Jesus’ mighty acts that are not reported as individual miracle stories (example: Mark 1:32-34; 3:11). That’s an average of three miracles per chapter! This action dominates the literary landscape. Now, my observational question: “What is the meaning and significance of each one of the miracle stories?” Also, “What is Mark’s meaning and significance of this entire series of miracles?” Remember, do not answer these questions yet. That comes in the next step: interpretation. The purpose here is to gain an initial “big picture” flyover. So, let’s keep making more initial observations.

As I continued reading Mark, I noticed that Jesus’ miracles abruptly come to an end as you enter into the second half of Mark (Chapters 9-16). Mark ceases to tell miracle stories (except two, one in Chapter 9 and one in Chapter 10). I observed that in Mark 9-16, the Gospel writer focuses on Jesus as He teaches about His forthcoming suffering, death, and resurrection. The contents of His teaching take His disciples entirely by surprise. It is

only through this continuous reading that you see the dramatic contrast between the first half and the second half of the Gospel. As I observed this shift in the flow of the Book of Mark, I was drawn to ask the question driven by the text, “What elements of the flow of Mark’s story changed that caused this shift from the first half to the second half?” Mark highlights this turning point as Mark 8:31-33 (NIV). Listen closely. I even encourage you to read the passage out loud:

He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. “Get behind me, Satan!” he said. “You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”

You can feel the tension in the air. Jesus teaches the disciples about both His person (with the title “Son of Man”) and His Mission (rejection, suffering, and death). Yet, Peter vehemently disagrees with Jesus. Peter would have nothing to do with the reality that Jesus was announcing. The haunting words of Mark are these: “he [Peter] rebuked Jesus.” At this point, I do not know what all this means without historical research. That will come later in Chapter 9, interpretation. However, there are two contrasting worldviews in Mark: the Kingdom of God (held by Jesus) and the Kingdom of the world (held by Peter). These cannot mutually coexist. You either think and respond like Jesus or function according to the power structure of Peter’s worldview. There is no in-between.

The rest of the book will define these opposing ways: the will of God vs. the will of men. The observations about the ceasing miracles and the contrasting understandings of the Messiah’s role show us the Book of Mark divides in half: Mark 1-8 and Mark 9-16. It also clearly indicates that the first half is in contrast with the second, with the significant swing in the plot found in Mark 8:31-33. This kind of insight only comes to light when you read the whole book and witness the disciples holding unwaveringly to their human compass-setting rather than calibrating their life-journey according to the one who set the navigational stars in the sky. Technically, the disciples are “following Jesus,” but they are in no way being obedient to His words. He is speaking, but they are not listening.

Allow me to make one final observation that takes into consideration the bulk of the material in Mark. I observe another major transition between the end of Chapter 10 and Chapter 11, with Jesus’ arrival in Jerusalem. In the first ten chapters, Mark is depicting 38 months of Jesus’ life. Chapters 11-16 describe only one week. The story of Jesus has taken place at breakneck speed in Chapters 1-10 (especially with the repetition of the word “immediately”). Now, it slows down to a daily or even to an hour-by-hour pace as we approach the crucifixion. I can shape my observations into questions and ask two questions.

First, “What is Mark’s meaning, and what is the significance of moving from three years down to one week?” Second, “What does Mark’s focus on this one week (Passover) reveal regarding his agenda, especially given that it closes with Jesus’ death on a cross?”

Visualizing and Drawing the Big Picture of Mark

Now, the most crucial question is this: How can I help you take all these observations and use them to discover Mark’s overall flow? This is often the most challenging part of observation. We see so many details. And since it’s all inspired, it’s all important. But how do we tie together all this material into a “book-level” observation? For me, the best way not to get lost in the details flow is to make a diagram of the whole book. I try to fly at 10,000 feet discovering how it all fits together. This process will also help those of us that are visual learners. Once we draw it, Mark’s purpose begins to take root in our minds. The best way to implement this is to define where there have been significant transition points in the narrative. Transition points are major shifts in the overall storyline or substantial changes in the book’s location or time elements.

For example, most of this will come directly out of my observational insights from Mark’s first two readings. Here was one of my statements to you above:

“Thus, the observations about the ceasing miracles and the contrasting understandings of the Messiah’s role show us the Book of Mark divides in half: Mark 1-8 and Mark 9-16. And the first half is in contrast with the second, with the major swing in the plot found in Mark 8:31-33.”

So, here is my simple drawing based upon what I observed thus far in this chapter.



Let's do the hard work of Disciple-making and ***Integrate Learning into Life.***

In the end, Disciple-making is about life change. I want to give you room to move learning from your head down into your heart. If your Disciple-making plan is to simply read this workbook and consider your effort complete, allow me to correct this superficial assessment. We are called to be “doers of the word and not hearers only” (James 1:22 CSB). Let's begin this change of life NOW.

Most of us at some level are tactile-learners. One of the greatest disciple-making tools for you may be a pen or a pencil. When we circle important words, underline memorable sentences, or make notes in the margins, our depth of integration increases.

May I encourage you to grab the writing tool of your choice and scan back through this chapter as you set the learning tone for the rest of the workbook. Re-process this chapter with some of these questions in mind.

New Idea? List out new ideas or concepts that have been introduced to you. Short-term memory skills are greatly increased through the simple act of writing. I encourage you to write out summary statements in your own words to help you take ownership of an idea. Or, simply copy entire sentences to make my thoughts or God's words into your own. In this book, I will pledge to define words before I use them. Make sure you understand words and their meanings before we move on to the next chapter. If there is something that you are not quite getting, allow yourself the space to pause and understand this before moving on. Remember, words and their meanings have huge consequences on the way we think.

Re-Calibration? What new idea(s) have you encountered in this chapter that may hint you have been traveling down a wrong path in your spiritual development? Have these new truths called you to re-calibrate your life in a new compass direction to become more “like Jesus?” Maybe ask it this way, “Did you have any ‘aha’ moments?” If so, state them clearly. Maybe you had an “Oh No” moment, when you realized you were thinking or acting in a less-than-Christian way. Make this personally transformative. It might call for a time of verbal repentance and re-commitment. Please tell your accountability partner about this decision. This is both a confession of change AND a testimony to God's Spirit at work in your life

Refreshing? What biblical texts have refreshed your soul? Why not write them on an index card and tape them over your kitchen sink, on the refrigerator door, or a bathroom mirror? Let the Scriptures renew your mind permanently by memorizing them.

CHAPTER 7

Observation, Part II: Identifying Literary Structures

*Let a righteous man strike me—that is a kindness; let him rebuke me—
that is oil on my head. My head will not refuse it.*

Psalm 141:5 NIV

Every Bible author leaves a trail of clues for us to pick up along the way. These clues provide clear insight into how to properly read the material. That is, to read the book as the author meant for it to be read. The more of these clues you pick up, the more the book's meaning will unfold. Amazingly, not only do biblical authors tell you how to read their book correctly, but they also correct you when you read the text wrong. Listen to these words from Psalm 141:5 (NIV):

*Let a righteous man strike me—that is a kindness; let him rebuke me—
that is oil on my head. My head will not refuse it.*

We not only need reading correction, but “disciples-in-the-making” actually welcome it! We want to read-rightly.

Earlier in the book, we discussed the danger of the small group Bible study beginning with this question, “What does the passage mean to you?” Especially when there has been a lack of sound biblical study. If there are four people in this study, there are more than likely four opinions about a text's meaning. I want you to reflect on the danger of allowing all four meanings to stand on equal footing. Which one is right and which one(s) are wrong? As I have said earlier, that is the equivalent of

**How will we
discover Jesus'
True^North if there
are four different
compass headings
to choose from?**

“spiritual guessing.” Can you see how this kind of Bible study process can essentially undermine the authority of the Word? If Jesus is calling us to “Come, follow me,” what direction do we go? How will we discover Jesus’ *True^North* if there are four different compass headings?

In our culture, personal opinions abound. It is the very definition of what it means to live in a post-modern, individualistic world. Opinions are fine (and sometimes entertaining) when selecting our favorite pizza toppings or your go-to Starbucks drinks. But in the study of Scripture, your personal opinion holds no value. *What matters is the authoritative voice of the inspired author.* In *True^North* Bible Study, I want to know what the author means. Thus, we must find ways to express precisely, and accurately, what the Gospel writer Mark has said. Moreover, it is vital to describe what he has taught in the book as a whole, not just in a verse or chapter.

In Chapter 6, we discovered the value of reading and observing books as a whole. Now, we will go one step further. In this chapter, I will help you acquire the language of literary structure to further learn from the Book of Mark. We want to grasp what was on Mark’s mind as he was writing about the Life of Jesus. Let’s discover how Mark works as a piece of literature.

How To Identify The Logic of the Book

I am sure you have had conversations with people that appear to be going nowhere fast. Bits and pieces of your discussion make sense. But you struggle to identify the overall direction of the discussion. Your conversation partner is piling up disconnected ideas that are not leading anywhere fast. It seems the more you listen, the more confused you become. This dilemma is undoubtedly due to faulty logic on the part of the speaker. Finally, you interrupt and ask kindly, “Where are we headed with this story?” When the person points out how their thoughts fit together, it all begins to make sense. The “parts” fit into the “whole.” Listening once again becomes a pleasure.

This process is equally true with each book of the Bible. There is an internal logic that holds them together as a coherent story. Once we identify this internal logic (or sometimes called “literary structure”), the book’s overall flow and subsequent meaning become self-evident. The author’s intent becomes clear and explicit. Moreover, each individual event or story in Mark fits into this overall flow. The Book of Mark ceases to be a set of isolated stories about Jesus piled up one after another. Instead, the internal logic of Mark helps us tie them all together into a coherent story commonly called a Gospel.

Let me address two common questions surrounding this idea:

First, “What is a literary structure? Simply, I am asking you to identify, “How did Mark logically put this book together to convey its meaning?” Second, “Will I know it when I see it?” The answer is a resounding, “YES.” Let me give you a contemporary illustration from Hollywood. I love to watch the *Avenger* movies. What I am about to say is somewhat of a spoiler alert. From a literary perspective, all of the *Avenger* movies are the same. In the first fifteen minutes of each movie, we learn the bad guy(s) are trying to take over the world/universe. This plotline is presented in the form of a world-threatening *problem*. The rest of the movie is all about how the Avengers find the *solution* to the problem. Each movie follows the same *problem-solution* structure. Problem-solution is the basic literary structure of every action-adventure movie. Yes, there may be some clever twists and turns. But when you discuss any *Avenger* movie with a friend, you already have an agreed-upon question driven by this structure, “What is the nature of the problem, what is the solution, and how is it implemented?” Moreover, the memorable scenes you discuss are not the most eye-catching or even the ones with the best special effects. No. The most discussed scenes are when the actual *problem* is revealed. Plus, when and how the real *solution* is achieved.

The logic of the book is also the way you identify the logic of any book in the Bible. Once you determine the literary structure, you will have a straightforward question to address, and the structure will point you to the key or strategic passages on which to focus your interpretive energies. This idea may seem complex. But I promise it will make sense in just a few minutes. We often talk about Bible material in terms of contents, “What is there?” But when we talk about literary structure, I want you to address the question: “How has Mark arranged the material?”

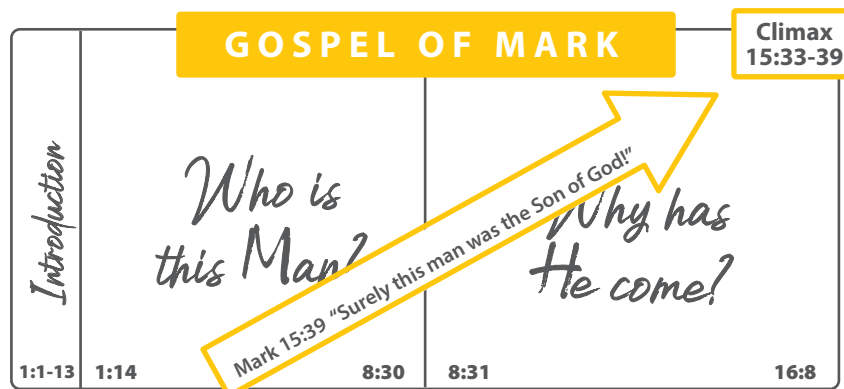
As you probably noticed from your first two readings of the whole book, the Gospel of Mark has a clear trajectory from start to finish. It is pointing you to the Cross. His death is hinted at as early as Mark 3:6 NIV, “Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.” Moreover, the Jewish teachers of the law accuse Him of blasphemy, “Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone” (Mark 2:7 NIV). For a first-century Jew, blasphemy deserved death according to Moses's Law (Lev 24:13-16). Surprisingly, the Cross is not explicitly identified until chapter 8.

Up to this point, the first eight chapters focus on the identification of the person of Jesus, with the prime question being, “Who is This Man?” Beginning in Chapter 9, the principal issue will become, “Why Has He Come?” Most of Mark's characters,

Once you identify the logic structure, the structure will point you to the key passages to interpret.

including the disciples, assume His ultimate call is to serve as the prophesied Messianic King. They understood He would personally replace Caesar and remove the gentile Roman occupation forces from the land. The book's profound surprise is that Jesus has no intention for this kind of mission. The only throne He will ascend takes the form of a Cross. From Chapter 9 on, the death of the Messiah is the central teaching of Jesus. Sadly, all His "listeners" reject this message.

Thus, as we read Mark as a whole, one book-level observation will involve the literary structure of climax, specifically the climax as found in the events which lead to the Cross. Other conversations about Mark are essential, but they should be referred to as secondary ones. Let me be clear. The climax in the Cross is how Mark tells his story. Moreover, it is also how it should be re-told by all future generations, including our own. What you and I find personally interesting graciously should be set aside. Our Second Reading agenda should be to thoroughly examine Mark's climatic structure found in Jesus' crucifixion.



Let me tell you a story which will practically apply this reading method. Several years ago, I traveled and spoke to the Southern Africa District Superintendents of the Wesleyan Church. They asked me to speak on one specific topic: "How do we address the issue of the 'Prosperity Gospel' as it seems to overtake much of sub-Saharan Africa?" In short, the prosperity gospel is this: God wants you healthy and wealthy. If you are not healthy and wealthy, the problem must be a lack of faith on your part. When addressing this problem, I used this very same big-picture observation of Mark as my guide. I went to my hotel room and typed out ten pages in rapid-fire succession based upon the structure of Mark's Gospel. Here is a summary.

The churches of the 'Health and Wealth Gospel' are only preaching half a gospel. They are only focusing their attention to the material in Mark 1-8; filled with over 20 miracles. Conversely, they are ignoring the second half of Mark which contains no miracles but rather reveals Jesus' mission climaxing in his suffering, rejection and death. Yes, miracles are just as real today as yesterday. But the focus of the

Gospel of Mark can be stated clearly: Will you continue to ‘Come and follow Jesus’ even if the miracles cease and the promise of suffering and a shameful death loom in the air? Will you go where He goes? Are you following Jesus for the gifts that He gives or will you follow the Giver of the gifts according to His Mission? Jesus’ death is clearly seen as Mark’s climax, not the healings, and not the unlimited miracles in the early portions of Mark’s Gospel. The preaching of the whole Gospel of Mark arises from grasping the logic or structure of the whole book. Without rejection, suffering, and death, we have no gospel to preach.

We do not focus our attention on our own wants, needs, or desires as we read.

Logic drives the overall flow of each book of the Bible. Observing this literary structure helps us to grasp the author’s agenda as revealed in the text. As we read, we do not focus our attention on our wants, needs, or desires. Instead, by looking at the whole Gospel, we discuss what is on Mark’s heart and mind. Once again, I lovingly say: I do not want you to study what is of interest to you. I want you to focus your attention on Mark’s agenda for Jesus. You may like the miracles just as I do. But a miracle without the Cross of Christ is only a one-and-done event without the hope of continued wholeness.

Let’s continue to dig into how book-level observation functions in the overall process of observation-interpretation-application. Remember, observation begins with reading an entire book and observing the overall logic or structure which holds it together. Once you have identified a logical relationship, such as we did above with *climax*, you can link a corresponding text-driven question to each structure. For example, the text-driven question related to *climax* is: “What specifically is the meaning of the climax as found in the Cross, and how does the whole book flow in that direction?”

Let’s review what we already know: Observation is seeing what is explicitly stated by the inspired writer. Then, we shape the book-level observation into the form of a question. The next step, interpretation, is simply answering the question using the proper research tools I will explain later.

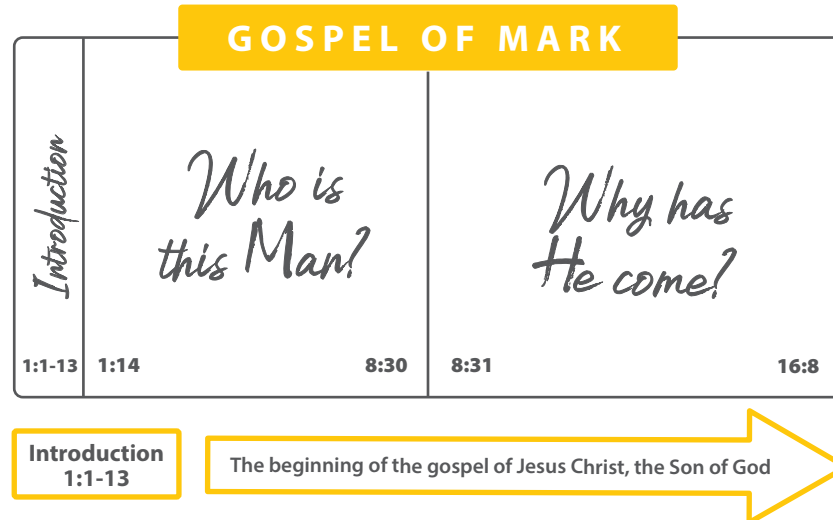
More Than One Way to Read a Book

Now, in most books of the Bible, you should identify 3-4 book-level structures that logically unite the book into a comprehensive unit. This process will give you multiple ways to engage Mark (or any other text) as you study it. Allow me to show you the rest of my book-level observations of Mark and the corresponding questions that flow directly

from each structure. Then, I will explain the overall process and how you can practice your book-level observational skills.

1. **Climax** - Mark flows towards the revelation of both Jesus' identity and His mission (as found in the climax of the Cross).
 - **Text-driven question:** What precisely is the climax's meaning as found in the Cross, and how does the whole book flow in that direction?
 - **Strategic passage to Interpret:** Mark 15:21-39 – Jesus' Crucifixion

2. **Introduction** – Mark begins with a short yet powerful overview which introduces the reader to the central characters of the book (John the Baptist, Jesus, Father, Spirit, and the evil one). Moreover, with the Old Testament reference in Mark 1:2-3 (quotes from Isaiah, Exodus, and Malachi) we see the design of this Gospel as the fulfillment of the history of God's walk with Israel.
 - **Text-driven question:** What is the precise meaning of the introductory material in Mark 1:1-13, and how does the rest of the book fill it out in detail?
 - **Strategic Passage to Interpret:** Mark 1:1-13



3. **Pivot** – There is a significant shift in Mark's story at the end of Mark 8. In the first half of the book (Mark 1-8), Jesus reveals His identity through numerous miracles. In the second half (Mark 9-16), Jesus focuses on the revelation of His

Mission to suffer and die on a cross. The first half takes place in Galilee. The second half is principally a journey to His death in Jerusalem.

- **Text-Driven Question:** What is the precise meaning of the central pivot in Mark 8, and what are the significant elements in Mark 1-8 that are contrasted with Mark 9-16?
- **Strategic Passage to Interpret:** Mark 8:27-38



Now, you just might ask me a powerful question, “So, can you remind me of the value of this? It seems to be much more complex and time-consuming than simply reading?” *You would be right.* Is this worth the investment of my time and energy? You will have to be the judge. Yes, it will take time to grasp the overall book-level structures. It also may include a reasonably steep learning curve. But, so does just about every worthwhile activity, even a new hobby. Learning golf, tennis, water-skiing, computer coding, and gardening all take time to develop any level of competence. In the end, the mastery of even one of those hobbies does come close to the eternal significance that learning to observe-interpret-apply the Scriptures will have on your life.

So, Let's (Re)Calibrate our True^North Compass

First, keep in mind that as you observe the Book of Mark and identify the 3-4 book-level structures that hold it together, you are actually identifying the overall trajectory of Mark. It is not about what you like or what you find interesting in the book. It is

about discovering what Mark was communicating as he wrote it. These logical literary structures are the reading clues he has left for us to study his Gospel - his way.

Second, when you identify these structures, they will point you precisely to the places in Mark where you should spend significant time with our interpretation (Chapter 9 in this workbook). Since we have set out to study Mark for the next month, here is how we will invest our time together in the Word. We will spend the first week reading the whole book, probably more than once. After the second time through the entire book, we will draw a chart of Mark and observe the 3-4 literary structures which hold it together. This chart gives us our compass bearings for the next three weeks. Next, we will spend one week on each of the three structures we discovered; (1) climax, (2) introduction, and (3) pivot. Keep in mind, our identification of each structure also comes with a corresponding text-driven question, which I have identified above. Finally, each structure also points to one or more strategic passages; Climax - Mark 15:21-39; Introduction - Mark 1:1-13; Pivot - Mark 8:27-38. Thus, at the end of the month, we will have discovered and interpreted the high points of Mark's Gospel as laid out by Mark himself. This kind of study would wonderfully prepare you to lead a four-week Bible study of Mark-driven discussion. We leave opinions and feelings at the door, and an inspired (and inspiring) study will result. The Gospel of Mark and the Spirit would be the true disciple-makers, and we would all become the spiritual fruit.

Third, I do not want you to be overwhelmed with the thought of studying an entire Book of the Bible. As I look on my bookshelf, I have numerous commentaries on Mark. Several of them are between 500-600 pages long. When you think about the task's massiveness, you just might give up and go back to simply reading. Even worse, you may be tempted to give up on Bible reading altogether. Do not be discouraged. Learning how to study Mark prepares you well for even larger books of the Bible, like Exodus (40 chapters) and Isaiah (66 chapters).

When we leave opinions and feelings at the door, inspired and inspiring study of the Word is waiting for us.

A Few Notes & A Look Ahead

Let me bring up two topics as we head to our next step of interpretation. First, you have probably noticed that I did not go over all the different types of book-level observations outlined on the *True^North* Structural Relationships Handout (see Appendix). We only

talked about the three that related directly to Mark. In Appendix, I have included all thirteen structures with their corresponding text-driven question, plus a biblical example for you to see each structure at work. The more we study the Bible together, the more each of these structures will take on the shape of everyday language for you.

Second, I want you to keep in mind how you have typically read Mark or other books of the Bible—in the past. Your pattern has been to read chapter by chapter and calibrate your spiritual compass according to the agenda and topic *you choose*. In this chapter, my recommendation has been to invest your efforts in reading Mark the way the inspired author intended it to be read. If you choose to go back to the way you have always read books in the past, you will encounter what is called the curse of knowledge. The problem is that once you know something, you find it hard to imagine life *not* understanding it. Our understanding of returning to the innocence of the past has now been soundly rejected.

We must move forward to reading books as a whole. Then - and only then - will we be able to discern the importance of fitting Mark 1 (Introduction), Mark 8 (Pivot), and Mark 15 (Climax) into the overall flow of the second Gospel.

I hope that I have persuaded you to believe that discovering how Mark wrote his Gospel is both freeing and a spiritual blessing. It sets us free from having to study everything in the Book of Mark all at once. We are open to focus our attention on the things that we know for certain are deeply important to Mark. It is also a blessing, for now, we know for certain the reading clues that Mark left for us to find. It is inspired and thus stands authoritative in our lives as we step further into the *True^North* adventure. Previously, you were merely guessing at the meaning of Jesus' words. Now you are developing the skills to hear the voice of our redeeming Lord speak to you with precision. When you are certain it is Him, your allegiance to Him is unwavering. For me, this is not the curse of knowledge. It's a true blessing I will never relinquish. How about you?

Let's do the hard work of Disciple-making and ***Integrate Learning into Life.***

In the end, Disciple-making is about life change. I want to give you room to move learning from your head down into your heart. If your Disciple-making plan is to simply read this workbook and consider your effort complete, allow me to correct this superficial assessment. We are called to be “doers of the word and not hearers only” (James 1:22 CSB). Let's begin this change of life NOW.

Most of us at some level are tactile-learners. One of the greatest disciple-making tools for you may be a pen or a pencil. When we circle important words, underline memorable sentences, or make notes in the margins, our depth of integration increases.

May I encourage you to grab the writing tool of your choice and scan back through this chapter as you set the learning tone for the rest of the workbook. Re-process this chapter with some of these questions in mind.

New Idea? List out new ideas or concepts that have been introduced to you. Short-term memory skills are greatly increased through the simple act of writing. I encourage you to write out summary statements in your own words to help you take ownership of an idea. Or, simply copy entire sentences to make my thoughts or God's words into your own. In this book, I will pledge to define words before I use them. Make sure you understand words and their meanings before we move on to the next chapter. If there is something that you are not quite getting, allow yourself the space to pause and understand this before moving on. Remember, words and their meanings have huge consequences on the way we think.

Re-Calibration? What new idea(s) have you encountered in this chapter that may hint you have been traveling down a wrong path in your spiritual development? Have these new truths called you to re-calibrate your life in a new compass direction to become more “like Jesus?” Maybe ask it this way, “Did you have any ‘aha’ moments?” If so, state them clearly. Maybe you had an “Oh No” moment, when you realized you were thinking or acting in a less-than-Christian way. Make this personally transformative. It might call for a time of verbal repentance and re-commitment. Please tell your accountability partner about this decision. This is both a confession of change AND a testimony to God's Spirit at work in your life

Refreshing? What biblical texts have refreshed your soul? Why not write them on an index card and tape them over your kitchen sink, on the refrigerator door, or a bathroom mirror? Let the Scriptures renew your mind permanently by memorizing them.

CHAPTER 8

Observation, Part III: How The “Parts” Fit Into The “Whole”

“...above all, you must live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ”

Philippians 1:27 NLT

Take a moment and look back at how far we’ve come in the last few chapters. Since Chapter 6, together, we’ve discovered:

- How to identify the “Big Picture” of a book, in this case, the Book of Mark
- How to read and discover the 3-4 book-level structures and their corresponding text-driven questions
- How to find the strategic passage where each structure asks you to focus your attention

Wow! We are observing together. Now, we’re going to explore how the parts of a book fit into the whole. In other words, we’re going to identify the importance of context. You might be familiar with this phrase: Context is EVERYTHING. In this case, I am referring to the overall literary context.

Before we dive into this chapter, let’s look at the Bible study overview once again. This review is to make sure you have the whole picture in mind as we take our next step into observation.

True^North Bible Study at a Glance



1. Prayer: Ask God to reveal His words to you: “Lord, I need insight, knowledge, and discernment from You as I engage in the study of Your Word.”

2. Observation: Inspect the passage, see what is explicitly in the text, and shape your insights into text-driven questions.

3. Interpretation: Answer the text-driven questions discovered during your Observation with effective research tools.

4. Application: Carefully define and evaluate the practical Biblical truths which arose from your Interpretation. In the end, shape these truths into transformational prayers.

True^North Bible Study: Reading Less + Reading Slower = Reading Better

My first-grade teacher’s name was Mrs. Noon. I believed she was the anti-Christ. Let me tell you why. I was one of the poorest readers in our class. As I read, I silently moved my lips. I mouthed the words, trying with any means possible to grasp what was in each sentence. As she walked around the room watching us read, she carried an 18-inch metal ruler. In my case, she would take out my hand and slap it, saying, “David. Do not move your lips as you read. It will slow you down.” Although my time in her class still haunts me to this day, I know now that her words made sense. She knew that while reading out loud, you can only process 200 words a minute; however, if you read silently, you can double or triple that amount. Imagine that! Behind her science of reading was a modern theory of education, summarized below:

*The more you read, and the faster you read, the more learned you would be.
Thus, you will become more successful at work and in life.*

In the ancient world, reading less material and reading it slowly was the core of education. In the days of Jesus, no one read the material the way we do, silently to yourself. Everyone read aloud. Students not only read aloud - they also wrote it out over and over - so many

times that it became memorized. The principal material chosen to teach the science of reading was the most crucial cultural material of the day. For example, young Greek students would begin by reading and memorizing Homer's *Iliad* or the *Odyssey's* poetry. Another option would be to read classic Latin works about Rome's establishment through the poetry of Livy, Dionysius, or Plutarch. The ancient world's primary educational assumption was simple and beneficial in two ways: slowly reading and reciting the classics made you simultaneously a good student and a good citizen. It was a win-win!

In our Bible study together, I pray we will accomplish the same thing; to learn to slow down and read better as we observe-interpret-apply the Word. Most importantly, "above all you will live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ" (Philippians 1:27, NLT). In short, may the Lord empower us to read better, thus resulting in living more vibrant Christian lives.

The Big Picture Points Us to the "Parts" We Need To Study

During our book-level observation of Mark in chapters 6-7, we saw how identifying 3-4 structures would serve as the best input to study the "parts" of Mark. First, we noticed that the structure of climax, specifically Jesus' death on the Cross, served as a central focus for the entire book. Second, the literary structure of the climax has a corresponding text-driven question closely linked to it: What specifically is the meaning of the climax as found in the Cross, and how does the whole book flow in that direction? Third, the value of reading the whole book in this fashion is that the climax points us to a strategic passage that should become a primary focus for the rest of our observational work. As you can see, we did not choose a passage to observe-interpret-apply based upon personal interest or at random. Instead, Mark intends to point us to study the Crucifixion of Jesus (Mark 15:21-39) as one of his gospel's key passages. The inspired author has spoken, and we have both heard and seen it. What is our next step?

Now, we will look at the "parts" of Mark as we observe the strategic passages as essential parts of Mark's Gospel. A strategic passage will generally consist of a paragraph or two that the book-level structure is pointing the readers to examine in depth. Below you will find our checklist (also see Appendix) for this final portion of the observational process. It will consist of a series of observational tasks which will help you go beneath a surface-level understanding of Mark 15:21-39. When I teach this part in the classroom, students often cry out that this is tedious and time-consuming - and they would be

correct. However, it is quite unusual if they eventually do not repent of their old ways of reading and adopt this process wholeheartedly.

Our propensity for instant gratification has taught us to rush to the finish line with Bible study.

This method will accomplish two things. First, it will force you to slow down and work methodically through the Bible passage. Our propensity for instant gratification has taught us to rush to the finish line with Bible study. We want to know NOW how this passage applies to our lives. In the following observational exercise, I want your reading to slow down to a snail's pace. Unlike my first-grade teacher, I am not watching over you with a ruler in hand.

Second, a key to this level of detailed observation is for you to carefully inspect our strategic passage multiple times, each with a different purpose. Imagine you are examining a beautiful jewel in the sunlight. With each slight turn, the light bounces off a different facet, and you discover something new. I pray that this same epiphany will happen in your Bible reading. These truths have always been there in the text. They just remained hidden until you turn them multiple ways into the light.

The following six steps will be our guide as we continue the process of observation.

1. Examine Bible Translations

When studying any passage, please read at least two (2) translations. There are many print and electronic options to help you. The following websites are excellent resources:

- Bible Gateway (www.BibleGateway.com)
- Blue Letter Bible (www.BlueLetterBible.com)
- Bible Hub (www.BibleHub.com)

Each website has its own feel, so I encourage you to experiment and determine which one you like best. The first two sites give you listening options and the capability to employ interpretative tools (including Greek and Hebrew word studies), which will come later in chapter 9.

As you read and compare two or more translations, try to identify words or phrases that are slightly different in each one. Translation is never done on a word-for-word equivalency. Languages form thoughts or sentences by different grammatical rules. So, when you observe a meaningful variation of word choice, this might give rise to a revealing question, "What is the Greek or Hebrew word that stands behind this variation in my English translation?" This kind of insightful observational question will feed into your upcoming interpretation.

A short word on translations: As you probably know, the King James Version (KJV) was initially translated from Greek into Elizabethan English in 1611. If you like Shakespeare, you will love the KJV. Its tone has a sacred feel to it. The words “thee” and “thou” are coupled with some of the most memorable phrases in our culture. If that is your translation of choice, please make sure to read another one alongside it. However, many of our foundational Greek manuscripts were discovered by archeologists after the 1611 translation work was completed. Thus, we have dramatically improved the reliability of the Greek text in the post-KJV era by employing these new manuscripts. Hear me carefully: the KJV unquestionably has impacted our Western culture more than any other English translation. One final side note. I often hear people say: “The NIV has taken verses out of my KJV Bible.” That is simply not an accurate way to describe the translation process. Bible scholars agree that these verses never existed as the words spoken by Jesus or written by Paul. Thus, the Greek text, which stands behind all our modern translations, is now the closest to the original writing of the apostles we have ever had in the history of the Church.

As you observe Mark 15:21-39, lay two translations side-by-side for comparison. I like to cut-and-paste the actual text from two translations (from the websites above) into a Word document. Then, I print them out to compare “apples to apples.” By circling, highlighting, and underlining, I make a note of where tangible differences arise. Doing this with a pen in hand will help you engage more than merely using your eyes. You “tactile learners” will benefit from this exercise. Amazingly, “My hand often sees better than my eyes.”

2. Play “I Spy” with the Text

Anyone who has children or grandchildren knows the value of “I Spy” when driving in a car. It not only settles the travel shakes out of your children, but more importantly, it causes them to focus on what is right in front of them. You can do this by taking out the “Observations At A Glance” chart (Appendix) and slowly work through Mark 15: 21-39, identifying as many “observations” as you can. There is no need to rush. Take your time. A great starting point in the observation process of these strategic passages is to write out the text. Leave plenty of room in the margins and between each line for your notes. The physical act of writing out a text will cause you to begin to take ownership of its contents. Then, using pen or pencil as a reading companion, work your way through the passage several times. Process each of the observational options laid out in the checklist. Let your pen assist your eyes. There is no right-or-wrong way to do it. The more you do it, the more you will become insightful about what is in the passage.

Plus, if you compare your work with that of others in your Bible Study group, a new set of eyes will lead to collaborative insights. You may not be comfortable discussing the English grammar observations, but someone else in your Bible Study group may be an English teacher. Praise the Lord for His grace.

Next, I encourage you to note any concepts in the passage that may have cultural or historical nuances embedded in them. For example, in John 4 and the story of Jesus with the woman at the well, you might want to ask this type of question, “What was the accepted cultural norm regarding a man and a woman talking in public?” Now, this is not the time or the place to guess. Rather, I want you to shape your observation into a question driven by the text itself. Remember, part of observation is to make sure we inquire about the ancient world of Jesus or Paul.

Finally, can you identify emotional markers which help you discover the “tone” of the passage. For example, is the passage written with a hopeful or joyful tone? Maybe there is a sense of sadness or disappointment housed within the text? The more precisely you label a passage, the better you will be able to read it aloud. A significant part of reading accurately is determining how to use your voice inflections to communicate the tone with which they were originally written.

3. Turn “Seeing” into Questions

This next step in Observation builds upon the previous one. When you play “I SPY,” you are merely “seeing what is in the text.” Now, I want you to reshape your “I SPY” observation into the form of a question. Start with the most straightforward type: a *definitional* question. For example, from Mark 15:25, I noticed that the verse begins this way, “It was the third hour when they crucified [Jesus]...” (ESV). Try asking this definitional question: “What is the meaning of the ‘third hour’ in the first century?” Next, add to this an *implicational* element: “What are the implications of the third hour as a temporal element to the death of Jesus?” In other words, “Is there significance to the third hour?” These two questions will serve as input to the interpretation process as you examine the climax of Mark’s Gospel.

Now, for a moment I’m going to jump ahead to our next chapter on interpretation. But I want to show you the value of asking good questions and how their answers can add fuel to your Bible Study. First, your *definitional* question: “What is the meaning of the third hour in the ancient world?” The Romans began their daily timekeeping at 6am, so most translations will tell you it was 9am when Jesus was crucified. Thus, 7am was the first hour, 8am was the second hour, etc. Now that you know Jesus was crucified at 9am, we can ask our *implicational* question - “What was the significance of Jesus being crucified

at 9am? Once you ask that question, cultural background research will tell you that 9am was when the temple gates in Jerusalem were opened and morning prayers were offered to God. At the moment sacrifices are offered to God by the priests, His beloved Son was “handed over” by the Jewish leaders for the Romans to crucify. Never was humanity more blind to the ways of God than in the death of Jesus. Your observations will perfectly prepare you for the upcoming interpretation work in asking sound definitional and implicational questions. Remember:

Observation = Seeing the text and turning your insight(s) into questions.

Principle Observational Question: “What did the text say?”

Interpretation = Answering these questions.

Principle Interpretation Question: “What did the text mean?”

4. See Textual “Forms”

In my mind, there are two ways of looking at biblical material. We have been operating under these two ways for the last few chapters together:

First, there is the *content*: “What is in the material?”

Second, there is the *form*: “What is the shape of the material?”

Since we often read small portions of Scripture and take verses out of context, content is often our primary means of examining the Bible; however, the form (also referred to as genre) is our starting point for understanding any communication’s meaning for the rest of our lives. Let me say a few familiar lines, and you will know what I am referring to: “Knock, Knock?” You instantly respond, “Who’s there?” Your reflex-like response is due to your cultural awareness - you know this is the beginning of a riddle. In other non-western societies, say southern Africa, someone might respond, “Come in.” Now, that is not an incorrect response; it’s simply cultural differences at play. In other cultures, people write their stories with different reading strategies in mind. When we read the ancient biblical text, we must be deeply aware to ask both the content question, “What is in it?” and the underlying form question, “How is this being told?” Otherwise, we will read a parable or a miracle story in Mark’s Gospel the same way we read the visions of Daniel 7-12 or the wisdom literature in the Book of Proverbs. That would be equivalent to me standing up in church to give my testimony of Jesus prefaced with the words, “Once upon a time.” The two forms have entirely different functions in our culture.

The Bible has multiple genres or literary forms. Right now is not the time or place

When reading the ancient biblical text, we must ask "What is in it?" but also "How is it being told?"

to fully unpack the difference between narrative, law code material, Psalms, Prophecy, and Apocalyptic writings. However, it is essential to note that different genres will trigger different reading strategies. A joke ("Knock, Knock") or a fairytale ("Once Upon a Time") can both convey truths to us as readers. But they are not intended to be understood as conveying actual, historical events. Poetry, which comprises nearly one-quarter of the Bible, often functions similarly. It is not always telling us "literally as things are" but revealing to us a fresh way of conceptualizing truth through metaphors or other poetic expressions. We cannot read Paul's ancient letters the same way as you read a business letter you received yesterday. Just think about the difference between present-day snail mail communication, an email, and a text message. We read each with a different perspective. Various language forms trigger different reading strategies.

Let's keep in mind the question that is driving our observation and our future interpretation: "What did the text mean to its original audience in the ancient world?" By using the word "mean," I include both *form* and *content* as understood by the ancient recipients. If you begin with the question, "What does it mean to me?" you are bypassing both the observation and the interpretation and leaping directly into application. You are reading Paul's letters as if they are addressed personally to you. That places you in the center of the communication - God communicating through His apostle directly to you! In reality, you are to read Scripture as God authoritatively speaking to Paul through his letters explicitly written to Rome, Corinth, and Ephesus; with you overhearing this grace-filled divine-human conversation. In the Observation of a text, we do not need to have all the correct answers when someone asks us, "What does this text mean?" Instead, we need to back up and begin to ask the right series of observational questions:

1. What does the text say? (Play "I-SPY")
2. How does the text shape my observations into both definitional and Implicational questions?
3. What is the genre or form of the material, and how does that trigger proper reading strategies?

5. See Textual "Limits"

In our final point of observation, I want you to listen carefully to the passage, so you allow it to set the "literary boundary markers." Let me explain. Behind every modern translation of the Bible is an editorial team who put together the logical units of each passage and a

passage heading. You might remember that neither the text's subdivisions nor the editors' comments that introduce each section are original to Mark. It is the editors' attempts to be helpful to their English readers. For example, The New International Version (NIV) has placed five significant breaks in Mark Chapter 15; at 15:1, 16, 21, 33, 42. Since most of us are trained as "visual learners," it is hard for us to conceive any other logical structure to this chapter. Also, remember that the chapter division between the material of Chapter 14 and 15 was not added until the early 1500s. So, for heaven's sake and for Mark's sake – why not allow the text itself to set the literary boundary?

I have set the limits for our observational passage at Mark 15:21-39. I want to show you several reading clues that you can explore when determining any passage boundary. Let's just start with three. You are probably beginning or ending a new section of Scripture when one or more of these criteria are true:

First, *there is a change in characters, location, or topic*. Watching for these indicators will help you hold together material that Mark is trying to connect into a logical unit. With our passage of Mark 15:21-39, this is the key factor in determining a boundary marker. The trials are now over (Jesus before the Sanhedrin 14:53-65, Peter's Trial before Servant Girl 14:66-72, Jesus before Pilate 15:1-20). Mark introduces a man named Simon from Cyrene, and the location changes as they move outside the walls of Jerusalem to Golgotha. Finally, the time element is described three times (third hour 15:25, sixth hour 15:33, ninth hour 15:34).

Second, literary boundary markers can be found when *there is a change in verb tense or mood*. This pattern is typical in Paul's letters, which intentionally break each of his letters in half. In the first half, Paul characteristically employs the indicative mood with his verbs. The indicative mood is the mood of reality, or "the way things are." In his opening chapters, Paul describes his view of the church (Ephesians 1-3), the nature of Christ (Colossians 1-2), or the work of redemption through the Cross (Romans 1-10). Even if you cannot comprehend the full effect of what he is describing, *it is still real*. In the second half of these letters, Paul changes his verbs from the indicative mood (the way things are) to imperative mood (the way things ought to be). Another way of describing the form of Paul's letters is his shift from the world of theological truth (first half) to our call to enter the reality of spiritual and ethical transformation (second half).

**Notice changes
in characters,
location, or topic.**

Third, we can recognize textual boundaries when *there is a change in the form or genre of material*. For example, if you are reading the Book of Jonah, you would surely notice the difference between Jonah 1 (narrative) to Jonah 2 (prayer in the form of poetry) and then back to the narrative in Jonah 3-4. This change in form would cause you to focus your

Identify any changes in verb tense or mood.

observational work initially on Jonah 1. Then, the change to poetic prayer indicates that Jonah 2 is a stand-alone unit of Scripture worthy of observation. From there, you can spend the next study on the final unit, Jonah 3-4. All of this comes from observing the change in literary form.

Summary of Observation

We have now completed our observation work. Well done! Allow me to define the highlights of our last three chapters before we rush to our next step of interpretation.

First and foremost, in a *True^North* Bible Study, I am prayerfully asking that you set aside your own personal agenda and questions. Let Mark set the agenda. Then, you can read Mark (or any other book of the Bible) according to the author's intention for his original audience. Observation-Interpretation-Application is not about us (initially). It's about observing the apostle's teaching to the early church. If you can be patient, when we get to chapter 10 and Application, the questions and topics will focus upon us. I promise you - it will be worth the wait!

Second, we began the observational process through our *First Reading* of Mark in one sitting. This is to get the "lay of the land" and to see the entire landscape of Mark. Then, we come back for our Second Reading which is a bit more focused. There should be three significant outcomes:

Pay attention to changes in the form or genre of the material.

1. Identify the 3-4 **literary structures** which describe the book-level logic of Mark.
2. Ask the **text-driven question(s)** which are intimately linked to each one of the literary structures. This process will serve as input to our final part of observation.
3. Identify the **strategic passage**. The strategic passage is almost as if Mark himself is shining a flashlight on a small but highly significant part of the entire book. You might almost call this "a gospel within the Gospel." It is Mark's way of saying, "Study these passages first."

Third, we intentionally slow down as we do detailed observation on our strategic passage(s). I encouraged you to begin this part of the process by hand-writing or cutting-and-pasting the passage into a Word document and printing it out. Remember to make room for notetaking in the margins and between each line of Scripture. Then, dig into this passage with all the types of observations listed on the “Observations at a Glance” in Appendix. With precision, complete the following:

1. Identify the basic content (who, what, where, when)
2. Identify significant words to study
3. Locate the connectives which unite the material into a whole
4. Ponder the differences from their culture to ours
5. Make observations based on grammar
6. Identify the tone or overall atmosphere of the passage.

Now, you are just about ready to turn your observations into the form of questions. Of course, it makes perfect sense to form questions while you do your detailed observation in the step above. It's simply more manageable for me to try and explain them as separate stages. You will make countless observations and shape them into questions. Do not imagine your job is to answer them all. Instead, your key task in this effort is to identify the most significant ones which will help you answer your text-driven question, which we will do next in interpretation. Remember:

Observation = Seeing the text and turning your insight(s) into questions.

Principle Observational Question: “What did the text say?”

Interpretation = Answering these questions.

Principle Interpretation Question: “What did the text mean?”

A Look Ahead To Interpretation

I realize how long it has taken me to explain the process of observation. My fear (and I do mean my disciple-making fear) is that you will abandon all hope of ever learning this process and go back to merely “reading the Bible.” I want you to cry out just as Jesus did,

“Get behind me, Satan” (Mark 8:33 NIV) The Lord knows the complexity of His Word. Plus the fact that it is written in three foreign languages from a multicultural background. But there is no good Plan B upon which to retreat. We must push forward and develop the reading skills to help the Spirit reveal His Truth.

This practice goes beyond your own personal growth:

If you are married, developing Bible Study skills is the most beautiful gift you can give to your spouse. A Word-centered marriage is priceless.

If you have children, this will be a multi-generational model for their lives as well.

What if you began a new normal for your family?

In today’s Western society, we have become complacent to the reality of biblical illiteracy.

What if we reject that as the only option?

What if you set a new family value of “searching the Scriptures” and living out its truth?

What if observing-interpreting-applying was not the work of a few “heady saints” in the church, but the calling of everyone?

What if you decided today to put this Bible study tool into family practice?

What if you then taught them to your spouse and children?

What if you modeled this for your Sunday school class or small group Bible study?

What if you invited just one other person to walk along with you as you shared this with them? Maybe someone at work?

What if you began to envision Bible reading as a team sport?

What would happen?

If you desire any of that for yourself, your family, and others around you - read on.

Let's do the hard work of Disciple-making and ***Integrate Learning into Life.***

In the end, Disciple-making is about life change. I want to give you room to move learning from your head down into your heart. If your Disciple-making plan is to simply read this workbook and consider your effort complete, allow me to correct this superficial assessment. We are called to be “doers of the word and not hearers only” (James 1:22 CSB). Let's begin this change of life NOW.

Most of us at some level are tactile-learners. One of the greatest disciple-making tools for you may be a pen or a pencil. When we circle important words, underline memorable sentences, or make notes in the margins, our depth of integration increases.

May I encourage you to grab the writing tool of your choice and scan back through this chapter as you set the learning tone for the rest of the workbook. Re-process this chapter with some of these questions in mind.

New Idea? List out new ideas or concepts that have been introduced to you. Short-term memory skills are greatly increased through the simple act of writing. I encourage you to write out summary statements in your own words to help you take ownership of an idea. Or, simply copy entire sentences to make my thoughts or God's words into your own. In this book, I will pledge to define words before I use them. Make sure you understand words and their meanings before we move on to the next chapter. If there is something that you are not quite getting, allow yourself the space to pause and understand this before moving on. Remember, words and their meanings have huge consequences on the way we think.

Re-Calibration? What new idea(s) have you encountered in this chapter that may hint you have been traveling down a wrong path in your spiritual development? Have these new truths called you to re-calibrate your life in a new compass direction to become more “like Jesus?” Maybe ask it this way, “Did you have any ‘aha’ moments?” If so, state them clearly. Maybe you had an “Oh No” moment, when you realized you were thinking or acting in a less-than-Christian way. Make this personally transformative. It might call for a time of verbal repentance and re-commitment. Please tell your accountability partner about this decision. This is both a confession of change AND a testimony to God's Spirit at work in your life

Refreshing? What biblical texts have refreshed your soul? Why not write them on an index card and tape them over your kitchen sink, on the refrigerator door, or a bathroom mirror? Let the Scriptures renew your mind permanently by memorizing them.

CHAPTER 9

Interpretation: What Did The Text Mean?

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

Philippians 2:3-4 NIV

It's time to interpret! Let's jump right in with our True^North Bible Study overview:

True^North Bible Study at a Glance

1. **Prayer:** Ask God to reveal His words to you: “Lord, I need insight, knowledge, and discernment from You as I engage in the study of Your Word.”
2. **Observation:** Inspect the passage, see what is explicitly in the text, and shape your insights into text-driven questions.
3. **Interpretation:** Answer the text-driven questions discovered during your Observation with effective research tools.
4. **Application:** Carefully define and evaluate the practical Biblical truths which arose from your Interpretation. In the end, shape these truths into transformational prayers.



Interpretation: It Is Not About Us...At Least Not Yet.

In Chapter 2, we defined interpretation this way:

Interpretation is understanding the meaning of another person's thoughts as they know them. When it comes to biblical interpretation, the "other person" we seek to understand is the inspired author.

Bible study is always a historical adventure. We set ourselves up for success by shaping our observational questions with a historical focus. For example, in Chapter 6, we asked in our book-level, text-driven question, "What specifically is the meaning of the climax as found in the Cross, and how does the whole book of Mark flow in that direction?" This question drives us to investigate the meaning and the significance of the cross. We are not looking for the cross' relevance in our modern world. The goal of interpretation is to uncover its meaning and significance in the world of the first-century Jews and the first-century Roman culture.

The work of interpretation is to keep asking our observational questions with a historical focus.

In their time, the cross was a means of extreme punishment to control the masses. Its purpose was shock and awe. When a first century Jew walked past a person hanging on a cross, their immediate reaction was, "I will never speak out or attempt to undermine Rome." Thus, our work of interpretation is to answer our observational questions with the ancient world in mind. It's all about *them*, not about *us*. At least not yet. That will come in our final chapter: Application.

Interpretation: Answering Mark's Questions "By the Book"

I want to reinforce what we have already said on multiple occasions:

Observation = Seeing the text and turning your insight(s) into questions.
Principle Observational Question: "What did the text say?"

Interpretation = Answering these questions.
Principle Interpretation Question: "What did the text mean?"

In this chapter, we will be employing basic research tools to answer your questions developed during our observation of Mark. As I walk you through this interpretation process, I hope that I never sound cold, sterile, or mechanical. I pray that you will hear these words similar to the way Jesus calls “life out of a tomb” in John 11. “Lazarus, come forth.” Lazarus MUST obey, even though he is dead. Death itself must flee at the words of Jesus! May all your future efforts during Interpretation be a transformative process. May terms printed with ink on paper take on flesh and come to life. Though this entire process may seem to be moving slowly, some miracles happen over time and are well worth the wait. I read about some of these in Isaiah 35:5-7 NIV when the prophecy begins, “Your God will come ... He will come to save you ...

Then will the eyes of the blind be opened
and the ears of the deaf unstopped.
Then will the lame leap like a deer,
and the mute tongue shout for joy.
Water will gush forth in the wilderness
and streams in the desert.
The burning sand will become a pool,
the thirsty ground bubbling springs.”

In Matthew’s Gospel, John the Baptist sent his disciples to Jesus, inquiring, “Are you the one who was to come or are we to look for somebody else?” (Matthew 11:2 PHILLIPS). Jesus answers John’s disciples with this very passage from Isaiah 35. The miracle predicted around 740 B.C. did not come to fruition until centuries later in the time of Jesus. Trust me when I say: Jesus was a miracle worth the wait. This reality can also be true when it comes to observing-interpreting-applying. Although I pray it does not take centuries for your eyes to be open to the truth of the Word! You may want instant Bible application. What you need is the Gospel truth that arises from careful Bible Study. I hope you can see me smiling as I write those last two sentences.

Allow me now to take our text-driven question that was birthed out of our Observation and carefully walk through the process of interpretation. Let’s refresh ourselves on our text-driven question:

What specifically is the nature and meaning of climax as found in the cross, and how does Mark’s whole book flow in that direction?

CIE – Context is Everything First, Examine the *Literary Context*

Our best starting point is to focus upon Mark's context. It is the key factor in making sure we shift our thinking from "us" to "them" and from "present" to "ancient."

In the last three chapters, we gathered initial observations that Mark placed in the text for us to uncover. We described the 3-4 book-level structures, their corresponding text-driven questions and the strategic passage of the Cross. Now, in Interpretation, we seek to understand Mark's book-level flow to get to the pivotal moment in Mark 15:21-39.

There are some beautiful resources designed to gain some additional insight for your observational work on Mark. One free resource is www.TheBibleProject.com. Please take some time and become familiar with its contents. You will find a short video (usually 5-6 minutes) on each book of the Bible. Each one is a beautiful journey through the contents of the entire book. It's visually captivating and based on sound interpretation. However, I beg you not to watch this BEFORE you have completed your initial observational work. It is my utmost desire that you will take personal ownership of the material in Mark. That only takes place when you wrestle with Mark BEFORE you begin to interpret Mark.

A second resource, written by the evangelical scholar Dr. Gordon Fee, is called *How to Read the Bible: Book by Book* (2009). Here you will find a summary of each book of the Bible and how it holds together as a whole story. It is well worth the investment of buying and reading it as you begin your initial work on Mark's interpretation. Dr. Fee will assist you in grasping the big picture of Mark.

Finally, if you have a good study Bible—and you should—read the introductory material which comes right before Mark's Gospel. It should provide you with helpful background information on the book's writer, the recipients, the dating of the book, and its overall purpose. Most introductions will also give you an outline of the book, showing you another way to see the parts and how they fit into the whole.

At this point in the process, you know the book of Mark. You have become familiar with the overall storyline and its primary content. I hope that as we begin interpretation, you will remember the hard work you've done thus far. You have fashioned your observations into the form of questions, and now you are sitting with scholars (at least their books), asking them to help you unpack the agenda of the inspired author Mark. As you read their work, listen intently for their answer to the questions you have asked in your observational work. Imagine yourself sitting in a Starbucks or having lunch with one of these scholars and asking them our text-driven question:

What specifically is the nature and meaning of climax as found in the cross, and how does Mark's whole book flow in that direction?

Listen intently as you read for two things. First, for the scholars' answers to your questions. Since you are both focused on Mark's agenda, do not be surprised that you see the very same things in your study. Their answers to your observational questions is your goal. Second, it's possible that one of the sources you use will bring up something that you missed during your observation. This is the gift of working together as a community of faith; another set of eyes!

CIE – Context is Everything Second, Examine the Cultural Context

The Gospel of Mark is set in its first-century history and culture. Reading otherwise will be intentionally taking Mark out of context. Our task as students of the Word is to use every effort to hear and interpret Mark as it was written.

Study Bibles often contain notes at the bottom of each page. These notes are a good research tool to seek out the cultural matters which undergird the acts of Jesus or His disciples. What unstated social forces are driving them that are foreign to us? If you are not aware of these cultural norms of their day, you will unknowingly “fill in the gaps” with your own social rules or customs. Remember, it is not about us or our culture. It is about them and their culture.

I also recommend Dr. Craig Keener's work, entitled IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament. Below is his position regarding our passage. As you can see, Dr. Keener relates cultural insights, word meaning, and pertinent Old Testament passages.

True^North Bible study is not about us or our culture - it is about them and their culture.

15:33. The “sixth hour” began before noon, the “ninth hour” before 3pm Jesus dies around the time of the evening offering in the temple. Stories were told of catastrophes occurring at the deaths of pious rabbis, especially those whose intercession had been vital to the world; but the biggest point of these signs is that judgment is imminent. Darkness had signified judgment in the past (Ex 10:21–23) and would in the future (Isaiah 13:10; Ezekiel 32:7; Joel 2:2, 10, 31; 3:15; Amos 5:18; 8:9; Zechariah 14:6).

15:34. Jesus' cry is an Aramaic quotation of Psalm 22:1, which was sometimes recited at this time of day in prayer but receives special significance when Jesus prays it. The first line would evoke this whole psalm of the righteous sufferer—and its hope of divine vindication. (Jesus probably quoted the psalm in Hebrew, as in Matthew; Mark uses the Aramaic form because the saying was transmitted in an Aramaic milieu. “Eli” could be mistaken for “Elijah” much more easily than “Eloi”; cf. 15:35–36.)

15:35–36. Members of some circles of Jewish tradition believed that Elijah was sent like an angel to rescue famous teachers, in addition to his role in the time of the end.

15:37. Crucifixion generally killed by asphyxiation: one became too weary to keep pulling one's frame up on the crossbeam, the diaphragm was increasingly strained, and eventually one became unable to breathe. But death usually took a few days—much longer than the few hours Jesus suffered.

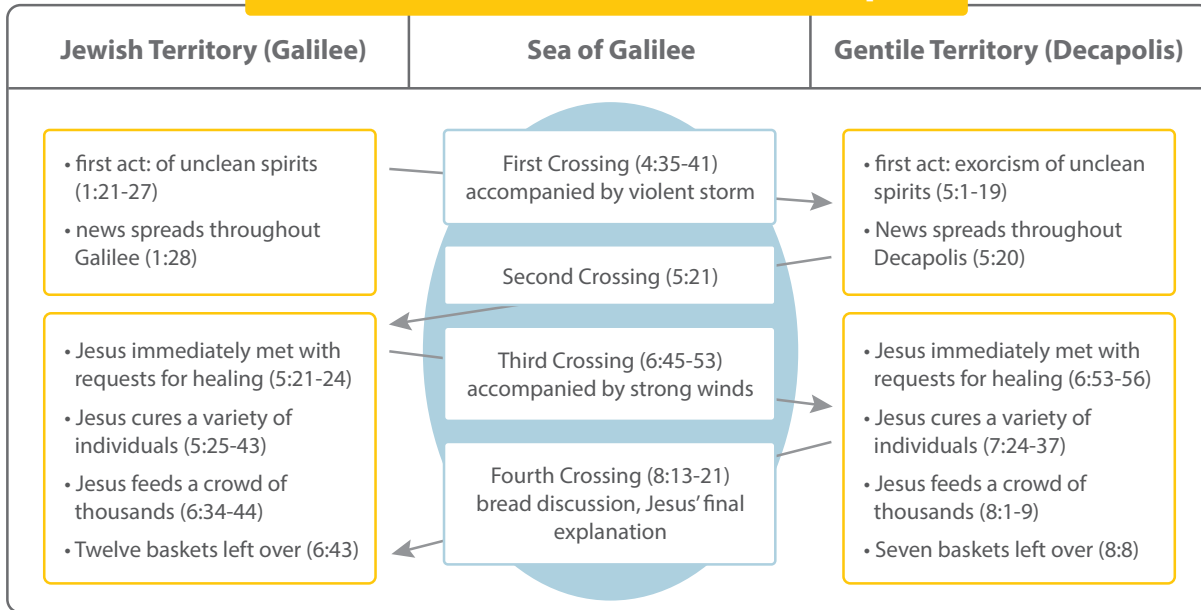
15:38. The holy of holies, which the priest could enter only once a year, was the ultimate symbol of God's dwelling place. God's rending the veil meant that he was now available apart from the temple system and that the old temple order stood judged and abolished.

15:39. A non-Jew might use a phrase like “son of God” with reference to a pious philosopher or, more commonly, a hero whose father was a deity; but in Mark's Gospel, “Son of God” means much more than that (14:61). Because Romans viewed the reigning emperor as a son of the deified Augustus, the centurion might be recognizing Jesus not only as “king of the Jews” (15:26) but also as a rival to the emperor. Whatever the specific nuance intended, Mark's irony (cf. 15:29–32) is plain: only a Gentile is impressed by Jesus' death.

The Old Testament companion volume is the IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament by John Walton. There are also study Bibles specifically designed to help with cultural insights or to clarify geographic issues. The NIV Cultural Background Study Bible combines the biblical text with an abbreviated set of notes from Keener and Walton's above two volumes. There is a 300-page sample of the [Study Bible](#) made available from the publisher, Zondervan. Consider putting these on your Amazon “wish list.”

Lastly, you can refer to the maps in a Study Bible (or sometimes at the back of standard Bibles) for geographic orientation. Often, significant observations or helpful interpretative answers will come as you familiarize yourself with the location or the

Boat Scenes in Mark's Gospel



terrain. For example, Mark informs us that Jesus is in a boat traversing across the Sea of Galilee four times in chapters 4-8. Initially, you might simply think that Jesus enjoys boating. But the insights which come from a geographic study indicate otherwise. As Jesus goes from one side of the lake to the other, He is doing similar miracles on both sides of the Sea of Galilee. A good Bible map will alert you that the western side of the Sea is Jewish territory. When he crosses to the Decapolis area (Mark 5), He is entering Gentile territory. Interestingly, Jesus does the same miracles in Jewish territory that He does on the Gentile side of the Sea of Galilee. Mark is teaching us that His mission is equally for the Gentiles as for the Jews.

Word Studies: Words Mean What an Author Wants Them to Mean

Everyone reading this workbook has grown up in an age of dictionaries. Some of us more mature folks learned word meanings with a laborious search through huge dictionaries. If your education is more recent, you still used a dictionary, but it was likely electronic, something akin to www.Dictionary.com. It may come as a surprise to you that in the ancient world, dictionaries simply did not exist. People would learn about word meanings through the text of Mark itself.

Practicing the art and science of word studies is the best way to have Mark speak to us through the ages as we seek to interpret the text. To begin this process, simply focus on the title of this subsection, “Words Mean What an Author Wants Them to Mean.” The biblical authors construct beautiful word-pictures with their use of language. In your observational work, you hold up these pictures and examine them from multiple perspectives. You do your very best to see them from the author’s viewpoint. As you ponder over a word, the questions begin to bubble to the surface. “What is the precise meaning of this word and what is its significance?”

I have placed resources you will need to answer this question in the Appendix. My desire is to provide you with a working template that might serve as a “fill in the blanks” guide for doing a word study yourself.

Let me reinforce the importance of our efforts here. Far too often, during a Bible Study, we discuss the meaning of a passage based on Webster’s definition of an English word. This effort is flawed from the start since the English language was not even in existence when Mark penned his Gospel. It is therefore vital to step back behind our translation to the actual Greek words in the inspired text. Accurate word studies are a must. But before I model one for you, allow me to demonstrate where and when a word study will fit into your Interpretation.

Let’s Practice Interpretation & Word Studies on Mark 8:27-33

As you remember from our Observational work in chapters 6-7, Mark 8:27-33 is the strategic passage linked to the book-level structure of pivot. Everything “hinges” as we move from the land of signs and wonders in Galilee (Mark 1-8) to the journey to Jerusalem, the land of rejection and death (Mark 9-16). Therefore, it will be insightful to fully understand how Peter’s perspective of reality stands in opposition to Jesus’ worldview. Specifically, how that contrast is housed in the phrase “have in mind?”

Before addressing the word study itself, allow me to refresh our Big Picture text-driven question about pivot: “What specifically is the meaning of the pivot in Mark 8:27-33”? What are the issues that lead to it? What is the radical shift in Mark 8, and how is the text reoriented in Chapters 9-16? We must dig deep into our strategic passage, 8:27-33:

²⁷ Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, “Who do people say I am?” ²⁸ They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.”

²⁹ “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Peter answered, “You are the Messiah. ³⁰ Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him. ³¹ He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. ³² He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. “Get behind me, Satan!” he said. “You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.” NIV

We know the passage’s tone denotes tension in the air between Jesus and His disciples from our initial observational work. The overall flow of this passage is structured by the question-answer, “Who do people say that I am?” This inquiry by Jesus is depicting for us both the person of Jesus and the worldview He holds. There are many Observations and their respective questions. Let me identify three.

First, there is the “where” question: “Where is Caesarea Philippi, and what is the significance of this location?” Our answer can arise from a simple map inquiry. This location is the farthest Jesus has ever been away from home during his adult life. The rest of Mark’s Gospel (Chapters 9:1-6) is Jesus and His disciples on a journey to Jerusalem, where He finds rejection and His Cross. During Mark Chapters 8-10, He does His most extensive teaching on the nature of His Kingdom and mission, and how He desires His disciples to conform to His revelation.

The second observation comes from probing into the “what” question: “What is the meaning of the people’s perception of Jesus, and where did they get these ideas?” Our answer comes from the larger context of Mark. In Chapter 6, we find someone describing John the Baptist - Jesus’ forerunner - in the very same words:

¹⁴ King Herod heard about this, for Jesus’ name had become well known. Some were saying, “John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him.” ¹⁵ Others said, “He is Elijah.” And still others claimed, “He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago.” ¹⁶ But when Herod heard this, he said, “John, whom I beheaded, has been raised from the dead!” Mark 6:14-16 NIV

Thus, it is Mark’s larger literary context that tells us it is King Herod who sets the interpretive framework for the people’s understanding of Jesus. When the disciples answer Jesus’ question, “Who do people say that I am?” – it is Herod’s understanding of the person of Jesus that comes flowing out of their mouths. The people have been conformed to the ideas of their current reigning King. He shaped the very culture that surrounded and impacted them all. Allow me to digress for a moment. Not much has

changed in our world today. We are shaped into the same image of the monarchs of our age: YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, T.V., movies, etc. Our language, values, and beliefs are powerfully shaped by the social forces to which we submit ourselves. Let's not be foolish, these forces are far from neutral. Like in the days of Herod, these cultural systems want to control our value system.

A third observation arises as we ask and answer another "what" question: "What is the meaning of the term 'Messiah' as employed by Peter, and what is its significance?" With just a little research, you will discover this is less of a word study on "Messiah" and more of an investigation into the cultural expectations that the first century Jews affixed to this term. In short, the name "Messiah" was synonymous with "Christ." The word meant "the anointed one." This term is not Jesus' last name, but the role His disciples expected Him to occupy as "His Kingdom comes." In the ancient world of the Jews, Jerusalem's destruction (586 BC) by the Babylonians and their 70+ year exile was a catastrophic event. They placed all of their hopes for restoration back to the promised land upon this coming Messiah. They thought of Him as a mortal man who would rise up as the arm of God and cast Israel's enemies out as occupiers of their land. So, when Peter said to Jesus, "You are the Messiah/Christ", this is a summary of what he meant:

"I anticipate you to rise up with all the miraculous forces we have witnessed (Mark 1-8). You will lead the Lord's armies to destroy the gentile Roman occupiers and cleanse the Land. You will assume the throne of David, and Jewish life and Law will be returned to its proper place. Things will be as they used to be under King David."

Always remember to focus on the text itself for assistance as you define the words. Look at Jesus' immediate response as told by Mark, "Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him" (Mark 8:30 NIV). The word "warned" is a robust authoritative word in the original Greek. It is not a suggestion but a command to silence: "Do not tell this story about me!" Then, Jesus reveals His true teaching of Messiah: a story of suffering, rejection, and death. Peter's emotional response to the teaching of Jesus is to "rebuke" Him. This word "rebuke" is one Mark employs over and over in his book, especially as Jesus rebukes the demons and natural elements who have tormented His followers (1: 25, 3:12, 4:39). Peter is equating Jesus' teaching about suffering, rejection, and death as utter foolishness.

Next, we have a return volley by Jesus as He rebukes Peter with these earth-shattering words,

"Get behind me Satan, he [Jesus] said. You do not have in mind the things of God but the things of man."

We have already done some initial observation above, along with some interpretive answering to some questions. But our word study question is this: “What specifically is the meaning of the word-phrase ‘have in mind,’ and what are the implications of it?” Now, if you start by reading the verse in several different translations, you will find the following options:

1. NIV – have in mind
2. ESV – setting your mind
3. NLT – seeing things
4. CEB – thinking God’s thoughts

A quick look at www.BlueLetterBible.com will inform us that the Greek word which stands behind our English rendering is φρονέω (transliterated into English lettering = *phroneo*). Further work with BlueLetterBible shows us that the word occurs twenty-six times in the New Testament. However, this is the only time this word appears in Mark’s Gospel (it does occur in the parallel passage in Matthew 16:23).

This example is a relatively unusual word study, so I want to model it for you. Trying to determine what a word means with only one occurrence in Mark does create quite a challenge. Since this word will help unlock Mark’s pivotal passage in Chapter 8, we will take a slightly different approach. We will look outside of our passage to find the word in other parts of the New Testament. The word φρονέω (*phroneo*) is powerful in Paul’s writings, which employs 23 of its 26 uses in the New Testament. As we examine all the Pauline texts, we find that 10 of these uses are located in the small book of Philippians. So, it is there that we will focus our attention.

The most intense cluster of the word occurs in Philippians 2-3, with a powerful application of this truth in Philippians 4:2. For the sake of clarity, I will cut-and-paste each occurrence from the NIV. There are five verses. After each one, I will make a few notes about what the word means in that specific context and then draw some conclusions. As you develop your word study skills, it is good to write out each New Testament verse in which a word occurs to employ your newly acquired observational skills. This practice will enable you to see and hear how the author uses the word in each context.

Writing out the verses helps to employ your observational skills and see how the author uses the word in each context.

Philippians 2:2 *Make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.*

The word occurs twice in this verse. The first occurrence is one of the causes of Paul's joy; "same corporate thinking." The sentence becomes more compelling as it describes his joy equated with the "same love," being one in spirit (quite an unusual word for "united in spirit," so Paul actually may be making it up). Paul is simply describing a life directed towards a mutually-agreed-upon goal.

Phil 2:5 *In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.*

This verse is the beginning of what is called "the Philippian Hymn" (Philippians 2:5-11). It's a beautiful description of the nature and mission of Jesus and his descent from earth to the cross. It then leads to the Resurrection and His raising up to ultimately be called Lord. In this introductory verse to the hymn, we are commanded to have this same mindset; to think and conceive of reality as Jesus does and to act accordingly.

Phil 3:15 *All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you.*

Here we see the two uses contrasted with one another. Some are "mature" (could be translated as "perfect" or "complete"), and there are folks that "think differently." God Himself will make clear where we disagree with Him.

Phil 3:19 *Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things.*

Now we find a mind in opposition to that of "thinking like Christ." It is a mindset on earthly things. This is a close analog to our passage in Mark 8:33, "Thinking like humans." Paul lays out for us that these people are headed for "destruction and shame." In the first century, shame was to be avoided at all costs.

Phil 4:2 *I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.*

This last occurrence in the book tells the tale of a surprising turn of events. These two women, Euodia and Syntyche, were said to "contend at Paul's side in the cause of the Gospel" and to be his "co-workers" (Phil 4:3). These are praise-worthy statements. However, in 4:2, Paul is saying they disagree.

There is something profoundly lacking in their inner person. Therefore, there is something profoundly lacking in both their relationship to one another and their ministry effectiveness.

These letters were not secretive correspondence to be read by a select few individual in the church. Upon its arrival in Philippi, this letter is to be read aloud for all the church to hear. It's a fair assumption that these two women will be in the church gathering as they are called out by name in Paul's letter. In this case, not having the "mind of Christ" is subject to public rebuke. In the modern church, we might say someone like them is merely a wee bit short of sainthood. But Paul has placed them as negative examples for this first-century church and every subsequent age. To Paul, it is a severe matter to fall short of the "mind of Christ." It requires at the very least an act of reconciliation and most probably public repentance.

Drawing Conclusions on the Meaning of a Word

First, let's summarize all that we have discovered. Now that we've seen "phroneo" in action in Paul's letter, we can return to our passage in Mark 8:33 and answer our question: "What is the meaning of the word 'phroneo' in Mark 8:33 (have in mind, setting your mind, thinking like) and what are the implications?" As we have seen, this is the only place in Mark where the word occurs. So, we turned our attention to Paul, who employs the word 23 of the 26 times in the New Testament. Philippians has 10 of the occurrences, so we focused there. Paul centers his attention in Philippians 2, in the famous Philippian Hymn. This section may be one of the key passages in the entire N.T. to simultaneously display Jesus as the crucified servant and the risen and ascended Lord.

Second, it seems clear that Paul employs this term to point us to a definition of both thinking and acting like Christ. It is a personal and relational call by Jesus. In Philippians 4:2-3, there is a clear example of Euodia and Syntyche and their falling short. Not having "Christ's mind" can result in communal discord and dishonor. This verse may have the most direct correlation to Mark 8:33, where there is a clear contrast between "thinking like God" and "thinking like humans."

Third, in our immediate context of Mark 8:33, we find Peter's "mind" in direct opposition to the "mind of God." Jesus' words are clear: opinions in opposition to God are in league with Jesus' chief rival, Satan. Additionally, Peter's words function in the same manner and force in Jesus' life as Satan's temptations in the wilderness in Mark 1. The

introduction to Mark (1:1-13) tells us that the evil one is the arch-enemy of Jesus and, correspondingly, to the disciples. However, Peter can only see the Romans as his adversary. Jesus has argued elsewhere in Mark that the disciples (and humanity in general) are both deaf to God's words and blind to the works of God. In the end, the disciples viewing the world through Satan's agenda means they are holding to the priorities of conquest and power as defined by the world (Mark 10:41-45, esp. 42).

On the other hand, Jesus is clinging to the Father's divine necessity; it is necessary for the Son of Man to suffer many things, be rejected and killed (Mark 8:31, 9:30-31; 10:33-34). The disciples are unknowingly entrenched in the social and political power structures of the evil one. Consequently, they are only dealing with surface-level symptoms which oppress them. Contrastingly, he is determined to eliminate their problem, Satan himself, and diminish the influence of their other enemies (evil and death). Jesus' solution can only be accomplished through the cross.

I hope you can see how a word study can feed directly into answering one of the text-driven questions raised in your observation: "What specifically is the meaning of the pivot in Mark 8:27-33? What are the issues that lead to it, what is the radical shift in Mark 8, and how is the text reoriented in 9-16?" We have just allowed Mark to define his words according to his culture, rather than a 21st-century dictionary doing the work.

Read with the "Community of Faith" – You Do Not Know What You Do Not Know

Thus far, your work in interpretation has been somewhat isolated. You have been answering your observational questions to study Mark's literary and cultural content. Further, your observational work identified a word or group of words that would help you further answer your questions. Our study has been quite fruitful, and you know much more about the climax of the cross and the pivot in the central portion of Mark. Still, *you do not know what you do not know*.

Now, you are ready to have a dialogue with others in the "Community of Faith." I am referring to consulting a few commentaries on Mark's Gospel. The Community of Faith is a group of authors (men and women) who have devoted their lives to unpacking the Word's truth. You have just spent a week trying to answer the questions: "What

**Community of Faith =
Commentaries written
by men and women
who desire to unpack
the truth of the Word.**

specifically is the meaning of the pivot in Mark 8:27-33? What are the issues that lead to it, what is the radical shift in Mark 8, and how is the text reoriented in 9-16?” Now that you are fully conversant on the whole book and the pivot’s meaning, wouldn’t you also like for a knowledgeable scholar to help alert you to some cultural and historical issues you may not have seen? Wouldn’t it equally be a gift to have someone help you with word meanings that you may have missed?

Let us not forget that our interaction with the “Community of Faith” should exist as a dialogue. If you do not put the time and effort into your observation and interpretation work, this conversation would only be a monologue. You would not have a single question to ask. You might sit there listening to this scholar tell you how much he or she knows about Mark. But you have not built a foundation upon which to build. Thus, reading a commentary without first observing and interpreting Mark simply accumulates disconnected pieces of biblical data. You are not finding answers to your questions. You are merely preparing to win a game of Bible Trivia. Without the heavy lifting of Observing-andInterpreting, no one moves forward in a life of disciple-making. One might get smarter. But no one’s mind and heart is transformed.

Commentaries - Which To Choose?

You might want to know, “What Commentaries are the best?” Let’s discuss a few factors in choosing the most appropriate commentaries for your study:

First, we must think about *price*. Are there any free online commentaries? Of course. Websites such as www.BlueLetterBible.org and www.BibleStudyTools.com have resources that can help with some of your initial work. However, many of these are older and no longer have copyright restrictions on them. I encourage you to use them somewhat sparingly, for often, a free resource is worth what you pay for it.

Second, we must think about *selection*. Should we dive into a comprehensive commentary on the entire Bible? One that focuses only on the Old or New Testament? What about a commentary series that has one volume per biblical book? The [Wesley One-Volume Commentary on the Bible](#) is a great place to start. In one volume, every book of the Old and New Testament has a separate chapter. Another option comes from the pen of scholar and churchman, NT Wright. He has written on every New Testament Book in his affordable “Everyone” series. If considering a commentary specifically for our study, [Mark for Everyone](#) might be a good starting point. Finally, the Tyndale Commentary has volumes on all the Old and New Testament books (here is the work on [Mark](#)). It is

important to note that a series like this with many authors will have some volumes that are better than others. If you live close to a theological library, you might examine a few samples to get a feel for each one. Perhaps your pastor might allow you to borrow a few books from his or her library.

Now, once you have chosen a few commentaries to use, I would encourage you to read specific places to inform the text-driven question you are trying to answer. First, scan through the introductory material at the beginning of the commentary. In this your goal is to examine how the commentary writer is placing the Book of Mark in its first century world. They might open up for you some new truths that you have not taken into consideration. Make notes on how these works help provide a more robust reading of Mark as a whole. Second, go to the place in the commentary that works directly with your strategic passage. For example, if you are asking the question about “what is the meaning of climax?” you will read the material related to Mark 15:21-39. Keep your eyes open for any additional insights that the commentary writer might give you that might have been missed in your observational work. Simply, what did they see that you overlooked? Also, keep your eyes open for comments they may make about insights into the meaning of Mark’s climactic account that you have already seen. There is nothing better than having a scholar who has spent their entire life with this Gospel affirming what you have personally observed. Count that as a spiritual pat on the back. Finally, be alert to the scholar defining words that are vitally important. There may be some words that he or she will find important that will help with your interpretation. Remember, you and the scholar are collaborating together to discover the truth of Mark’s cross. The same can be said about watching for information which will help you grasp the cultural and historical context in Mark 15. Every good commentary must deal with the topic of context. For Context is Everything!

Is That Your “Final Answer?”

At the end of your interpretation, make a summary of what you have discovered. Remember, you are trying to address this question: “What did the text mean to *them*?” Interpretation focuses on the worldview, culture, and literary context of the original recipients of the Book. Draw together as many of the answers to your text-driven question. By now, you have seen much and researched plenty of other issues. Thus, you will have:

- Textual evidence from the whole book level and from your strategic passage

- Cultural insights to help you situate the passage and the events in its social and historical setting
- Geographic information regarding “where” this is taking place
- Word studies about how the author is using words with their text-specific meanings
- Insight from the “Community of Faith” (Commentaries)

Integration of Observation-Interpretation

Allow me to integrate the critical practice of observation with our newly discovered efforts of interpretation. First, a prayer:

Lord, hear our prayers as we offer ourselves up to you. We desire as Paul prayed, for wisdom and insight to be graciously poured out upon us as we study Observe-Interpret-Apply Your Word. We want our agenda to be set aside to read Mark according to the inspired author’s intention for his original audience. Lord, hear our prayers.

As we discussed in the first chapter on observation, there is nothing like spending a month in a Bible book. Below was (1) our initial set of structures, (2) corresponding text-driven questions, and (3) the strategic passage that the structure points you toward as you interpret the Book of Mark.

1. **Climax** - The entire book of Mark flows in an ever-increasing manner towards the revelation of both Jesus’ identity and His mission as disclosed in the climax of the cross.
 - *Text-driven question:* What is explicitly the climax’s meaning found in the cross, and how does the whole book flow in that direction?
 - *Strategic passage to interpret:* Mark 15:21-39 – Jesus’ Crucifixion
2. **Introduction** – Mark begins with a short (yet powerful) overview that introduces the readers to the book’s central characters (John the Baptist, Jesus, Father, Spirit, and the evil one). Moreover, with the Old Testament reference in Mark 1:2-3 (quotes from Isaiah, Exodus, and Malachi), we see the design of this Gospel as fulfilling the history of God’s walk with Israel.

- *Text-driven question:* What is the precise meaning of the introductory material in Mark 1:1-13, and how does the rest of the book fill it out in detail?
 - *Strategic Passage to Interpret:* Mark 1:1-13
- 3. Pivot** – There is a significant shift in Mark's plot, which takes place in Mark 8. In the first half (Mark 1-8), Jesus reveals His identity through numerous miracles. In the second half (Mark 9-16), Jesus focuses on the revelation of His Mission to suffer and die on a cross. The first half takes place in Galilee. The second half is principally a journey to His death in Jerusalem.
- *Text-Driven Question:* What precisely is the meaning of the central pivot in Mark 8, and what are the significant elements in Mark 1-8 that contrast with Mark 9-16?
 - *Strategic Passage to Interpret:* Mark 8:27-38.

This outline then serves as the guide for each week of our month-long journey in Mark. It is an equally sound model for other books of the Bible: a week of book-level observations and then one week for each of the major structures which hold the book together.

Week 1 Read Mark and book-level observations.

Week 2 Interpret Climax and its text-driven question.

Week 3 Interpret Introduction and its text-driven question.

Week 4 Interpret Pivot and its text-driven question.

You know that observation and interpretation are not about us but about the audience to which the book was written. Once we get to the application in the next chapter finally the questions and topics will focus all their attention upon us.

Interpretation Post-Script

Since our efforts in interpretation are focused almost exclusively on the past, at this point, you may feel like Bible study is just an ancient history lesson. I beg you to re-calibrate your Bible reading according to the True^North Bible Study. Moreover, may you see this effort as a means to a perfect end. Radical transformation is just around the corner in our final step of application. Please take some encouragement from the Apostle Paul. Read his words aloud as if Paul is your very own disciple-maker. Why? Because he is!

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others (Philippians 2:3-4 NIV).

The text which follows immediately after this passage is the Philippian Hymn which we worked on above (2:5-11). Jesus is set forth as our ideal example for what it means to be “other-centered.” This is an example for us all. No one is excluded from the call. Before we look out for our interests, we first look out for “the interests of others.”

May we apply that to the work of observation and interpretation. It is your opportunity to be “other-centered” and “Christ-like” as you investigate what it was like for the first generation of believers to hear Jesus speak directly to them or to overhear Paul’s letters as someone reads them on a sabbath day in their local community setting. We begin with our orientation around the lives of others. In this case, the “others” are those of another age and diverse culture. It still demands that we focus outward and upward before we ever think of looking inward. The real work of re-creation and transformation will take place in the next chapter on application. For now, even in observation and interpretation, you are shaping your soul to think about others. This is a vital act of a disciple-in-the-making.

Let's do the hard work of Disciple-making and ***Integrate Learning into Life.***

In the end, Disciple-making is about life change. I want to give you room to move learning from your head down into your heart. If your Disciple-making plan is to simply read this workbook and consider your effort complete, allow me to correct this superficial assessment. We are called to be “doers of the word and not hearers only” (James 1:22 CSB). Let's begin this change of life NOW.

Most of us at some level are tactile-learners. One of the greatest disciple-making tools for you may be a pen or a pencil. When we circle important words, underline memorable sentences, or make notes in the margins, our depth of integration increases.

May I encourage you to grab the writing tool of your choice and scan back through this chapter as you set the learning tone for the rest of the workbook. Re-process this chapter with some of these questions in mind.

New Idea? List out new ideas or concepts that have been introduced to you. Short-term memory skills are greatly increased through the simple act of writing. I encourage you to write out summary statements in your own words to help you take ownership of an idea. Or, simply copy entire sentences to make my thoughts or God's words into your own. In this book, I will pledge to define words before I use them. Make sure you understand words and their meanings before we move on to the next chapter. If there is something that you are not quite getting, allow yourself the space to pause and understand this before moving on. Remember, words and their meanings have huge consequences on the way we think.

Re-Calibration? What new idea(s) have you encountered in this chapter that may hint you have been traveling down a wrong path in your spiritual development? Have these new truths called you to re-calibrate your life in a new compass direction to become more “like Jesus?” Maybe ask it this way, “Did you have any ‘aha’ moments?” If so, state them clearly. Maybe you had an “Oh No” moment, when you realized you were thinking or acting in a less-than-Christian way. Make this personally transformative. It might call for a time of verbal repentance and re-commitment. Please tell your accountability partner about this decision. This is both a confession of change AND a testimony to God's Spirit at work in your life

Refreshing? What biblical texts have refreshed your soul? Why not write them on an index card and tape them over your kitchen sink, on the refrigerator door, or a bathroom mirror? Let the Scriptures renew your mind permanently by memorizing them.

CHAPTER 10

Application: What Does The Text Mean To Me?

If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

John 15:7-8 NIV

As we end this journey together, let's start at the beginning - with our True^North Bible Study overview:

True^North Bible Study at a Glance

1. **Prayer:** Ask God to reveal His words to you:
“Lord, I need insight, knowledge, and discernment from You as I engage in the study of Your Word.”
2. **Observation:** Inspect the passage, see what is explicitly in the text, and shape your insights into text-driven questions.
3. **Interpretation:** Answer the text-driven questions discovered during your Observation with effective research tools.
4. **Application:** Carefully define and evaluate the practical Biblical truths which arose from your Interpretation. In the end, shape these truths into transformational prayers.



Let's Move From "Then" to "Now"

Do you remember the phrase, "The Bible says it. I believe it. That settles it!"? I hope you will now see this as a far too simplistic plan for observing, interpreting, and applying the Bible for two reasons.

First, it weakens the veracity that God's Word was initially given to other cultures vastly different from ours. Second, this belief has more than a hint of cultural arrogance. Here is the unstated core value: That was "then." This is "now," and "this" is certainly more important than "then." When we believe this, we lift the Word out of its historical moorings and transport it to our modern world for what we falsely consider a more prominent location. Thankfully, Paul reminds us that Jesus came into the world in "the fullness of time" (Galatians 4:4). Jesus was born into a Jewish family in rural Galilee within Greco-Roman culture. From that sentence, we know that what we read in Mark is nothing like the modern western society in which we live - and that is just one book of the Bible!

In the first step of True^North, we affirm together that all good and sound outcomes from Bible Study arise from a **prayer** focused beginning. Without the Spirit whispering insights and observations into our hearts and minds, we are merely groping in the dark. The next two steps as we traverse around the *True^North* compass are **observation** and

**Application =
What do the
truths revealed
in this ancient
world mean to
us today?**

interpretation. Here, we learned to travel *back* into Mark's cultural world. This exercise is good Bible study practice. But it is also our way of honoring the Lord's wisdom as He gave His Word to His chosen recipients in those ancient times. All through this process of Bible study, we determined together that our driving question in both observation and interpretation must remain: "What did the text mean to *them*?" Now we are ready to complete our final step of the

journey with **application.** We get to retrace our steps and move from *then* to *now* with this new question, "What do the truths revealed in that ancient world mean to us *today*?"

All Scripture is Written For Us, But Not All Scripture Is Written To Us

Let's start our time in application with a critical, relevant question:

Do you eat bacon?

You might wonder what that has to do with Bible study. Listen to Leviticus 11:7-8 NIV:

And the pig, though it has a divided hoof, does not chew the cud; it is unclean for you. You must not eat their meat or touch their carcasses; they are unclean for you.

According to this passage in the Old Testament, pork is unclean. So, what are we doing ordering a bacon cheeseburger or a BLT sandwich for lunch? Let me caution you not to take the easy way out by saying the Old Testament is outdated and that you are a “New Testament Christian.” This belief is one of the oldest heresies of the Church known as *Marcionism*. Marcion’s Bible included only eleven books, part of Luke’s Gospel and ten of Paul’s letters. In short, the God of the Old Testament was the God of Law and judgment, while the Jesus of the New Testament preached and embodied the Gospel of Grace. He excluded all of the Old Testament, and we must be careful not to do the same. How we answer these types of questions for the disciples-in-the-making that we read alongside must include our knowledge of the entirety of Scripture.

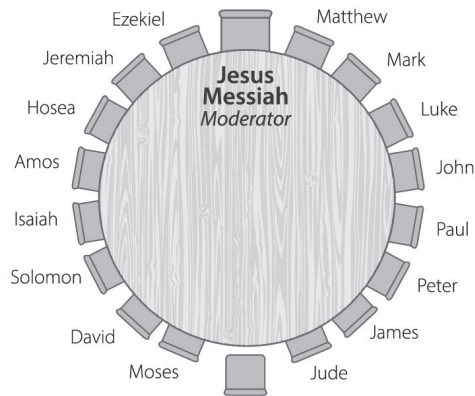
We should not be surprised that some of the observations-interpretations we discovered are only applicable to the ancient world’s people. They are culturally bound as Scriptural instructions for them, not for us. Simply stated, these laws no longer apply to us. For example, since Jesus died as the sacrifice for our sins “once for all” (Hebrews 9:26-28), we will no longer practice any of the sacrificial laws in the Old Testament. The Old Testament Laws are Scripture *for us* but not Scripture *to us*. They are for our edification but to be directly applied to our lives.

Let Jesus Be the Judge

Take a quick look at the Biblical “Round-Table” diagram below. You will see many of the writers of the Bible sitting in an informal Bible study format. Now imagine someone invites you to sit in the empty chair and participate in this discussion group. You bring up a specific biblical topic you are investigating in the course of prayer, observation, interpretation, and application. For example, what about Sabbath practices, sacrifices in the temple, clean and unclean food, or the treatment of women in the Bible. As you complete the observation-interpretation of your passage, you then graciously interject your topic to the writers at the table, asking them how they might approach it. These biblical writers surround Jesus

BIBLICAL "ROUND-TABLE"

Sponsored by The Father • Enabled by The Spirit



Bring your passage & its teaching into the dialogue

and present their findings on specific matters. These characters in the meta-narrative of the Bible are important as we try to define what elements in the Word are applicable for all times and all places.

How about if we go back to our earlier question about bacon? Assume we are observing-interpreting the Book of Leviticus. In studying the legal code surrounding what is clean and unclean for Israel's people, we discover the rule that pork is considered unclean. As any Bible Study should begin; you have

agreed to obey the truth as it reveals itself to you. But now you are stuck. How have generations of believers before you, all the way to the early church, decided that this code in Leviticus 11 is Scripture *to* them but not Scripture *for* them?

In this Biblical Round-Table meeting, you will hear the teachings given by Moses in Leviticus. You will also hear from some of the other prophets in the Old Testament who remind us that one of the principal reasons the children of Israel were exiled was their failure to obey all the laws of God. The evidence mounts up that obeying the law was the primary way to maintain moral purity. Finally, the Gospel writer Mark presents his input. We read through his discussion of clean and unclean as revealed in Mark 7. Mark gives us a powerful introduction to this serious matter:

The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus ² and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. ³ (The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. ⁴ When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles). Mark 7:1-4 NIV

On paper, the Pharisees follow the Laws found in Leviticus, but Mark shows us the motives that stand behind their behavior. They are going beyond the laws of God and creating a whole new list of "do's-and-don'ts," which Mark calls "the tradition of the elders" and obeying "many other traditions."

The problem is that the Jewish leaders are far too concerned with what is transpiring on the outside. Let's call that "*what we do*." In just a moment, Jesus will teach that these laws do not bring about cleansing and purity of a person's inside, which is His primary focus. Let's call that "*who we are*." Listen to Mark once again, following Jesus' dramatic exchange with the Pharisees:

¹⁴ Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. ¹⁵ Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them." Mark 7:14-15 NIV

Here, and in the passage below, Jesus is actually interpreting His own words. Both for the ancient disciples and for us today. There are limits to what the Law can accomplish. It cannot *cleanse* the *inner* person. Its purpose is to *purify* the *outer* person. Still, the Jewish leaders have added to the Laws of God with their traditions to make it do what it was never designed to accomplish. Jesus continues:

¹⁷ After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. ¹⁸ "Are you so dull?" he asked. "Don't you see that nothing that enters a person from the outside can defile them? ¹⁹ For it doesn't go into their heart but into their stomach, and then out of the body." (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean.) Mark 7:17-19 NIV

Mic drop! Case closed. Jesus plays His trump card, and all food laws are gone. Their time was limited. Jesus is preparing His people for the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will do the complete cleansing of the whole person, inside and out. Bacon is back on the menu!

Can you see the value of having this kind of Biblical Round Table meeting to help you shape the ultimate trajectory of the passage you are studying? It enables you to lift it out of your single book study and place it in the larger context of a whole bible understanding.

Let me make two concluding statements about this practice. First, I am sorry to say that you cannot have a sound "Biblical Round-Table" meeting without knowing the overall contents and flow of the whole Bible. This knowledge only comes with time and consistency in the Word. Please be patient with yourself and others. You and I have a lifetime to work on our Bible knowledge. Second, and perhaps on a more encouraging note, your experience will grow as your *True^North* Bible study practices grow. No one can grasp the contents of the Bible without some heavy lifting and sustained practice. We have already learned this takes hard work. But perhaps you are also starting to understand it is profoundly worth the effort.

Application in the “Wesleyan Way”

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, provides us with a good model for discussing Scripture’s application. He claimed to be a man of one Book, referring to “Scripture alone.” However, his understanding of the interpretive method showed us that he used many other tools in his study. This includes commentaries by numerous scholars and the study of biblical books in their original languages. His deep roots in the Anglican Church led him in practice to integrate three other resources in his

The Wesleyan Quadrilateral uses Scripture as the central element, but also uses reason, tradition, and experience as valid sources of truth.

appropriation of the Bible: tradition, reason, and experience. These four are commonly referred to as the “Wesleyan Quadrilateral” (Bible, tradition, reason, experience). Wesley himself did not come up with the term, but he employed it in Scriptural application practice. The idea was that Scripture is the central and determinative element in this equation. However, tradition, reason, and experience are also sound sources of truth. They are filters through which we pass the Bible’s

teaching. For example, some in the Wesleyan tradition have used this quadrilateral as a model for determining God’s will for their lives. You can discern if your course of action fits with Scripture (Bible), with what other Christians have said and are saying about it (traditions), with your experiences and the experiences of others (experience), and with common sense (reason).

Let’s ask an opening series of questions running parallel with the Wesleyan Quadrilateral to help our pre-application work.

1. **Scripture:** *What does Scripture teach?* This question comes directly out of observation-interpretation. This is precisely what we have worked on throughout this entire book together. What does this text reveal that helps us integrate biblical truths into our lives and that of our Christian community?
2. **Tradition:** *How does tradition help us with our application of a text?* Often, we hear the word “tradition” as it stands *against* “Scripture.” That is not what I am referring to here. Instead, I mean tradition as how an orthodox Christian views the application of a text throughout history. Another way of defining tradition is to ask, “What ‘glasses’ do you or I wear as we read and interpret Scripture?” For me, I confess to wearing bifocal lenses. The first part of my lens contains

the early Christian creeds. The Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed are core understanding that all Christians in all cultures throughout all time have believed. If you are not familiar with these creeds, I urge you to stop reading and seek them out. Using these Creeds as my first lens, I interpret the Word within the guardrails established by the early church's understanding of God's Triune nature. These reading guides help me not to step on any interpretive landmines. Moreover, this allows me to locate the more challenging parts of Scripture and read them in light of the clarity of the early church. My creedal-reading glasses come from the earliest affirmation of God's nature and character and His work in our redemption. Think of it this way, if your application of a biblical text does not align with the Nicene Creed, you just might want to re-think your position.

The second part of my bi-focal lens is my Wesleyan perspective. We can all make the noble claim that our theology arises purely out of our Bible Study. But practically, it's more like the push-me-pull-you animal in the Dr. Doolittle story. Two factors are often working at cross-purposes in our reading experiences. First, we try to honor what the text sincerely says in as objectively a fashion as we can. Secondly, we also integrate our textual findings with our reading presuppositions. So, we must be aware and confess that every person has a set of theological lenses which help and/or sometimes hinder our ability to interpret Scripture. Allow me to list a few parts of my Wesleyan lens.

Wesleyans are first and foremost *optimists* in what the Word declares can and will occur through the power of the Spirit. He not only is capable of setting me free from the *guilt* of sin, but He can also set me free from the *power* of sin. The death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus and our filling by the Holy Spirit diminishes the power of temptation and begins to reverse the curse from the garden. There are no limitations I assume upon God's ability to act in the power of His Grace. "I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

Wesleyans also focus on *holiness*. If I am optimistic about the work of God to reverse the curse, I equally lean into the direction of what the Lord can do "in me." Wesleyans believe that the move towards Christlikeness is not just possible but should be proclaimed as the "normal Christian life." Moreover, we assume that growth in grace will both *precede* the act of holiness and then wonderfully *proceed* from it. Holiness is not the final act of Christian formation but a catalyst to intensify the work of God in our lives and the love we have for one another.

Finally, my Wesleyan-lens filters my Bible reading and interpretation through the concept of *free will*. Wesley taught that God, in His love, provides

fallen humans with prevenient grace, which empowers us to make reasonable choices for Him. Thus, one might say we are *response-able* for these decisions. Through this divine grace and the power of the Spirit, we are “able” to respond, even in our fallen state. Moreover, free will informs us that we must respond. No one can passively be brought into the kingdom. We are responsible for our actions, as well as able to respond. Divine election may be God’s decision for the people of Israel and that He desires for “all people to be saved.” But each human must make a decision either for or against the revelation of Jesus.

With these two sets of lenses, creedal and Wesleyan, it is not a surprise that Wesleyans have what might be called a “Gospel within a Gospel.” These are verses or passages which help us interpret other passages with more certainty. Yes, Scripture interprets Scripture. For me, some of these passages are Mark 10:45, Philippians 2:5-11, Colossians 1:15-20, and Galatians 3:28. These are passages that re-orient our world to a New Creation Kingdom reality.

3. **Reason:** *Reason* should be seen as a matter of employing spiritual discernment, not merely weighing sheer mental evidence. We should not detach it from the quickening of the Spirit. Let’s shape a reason question this way: “*How does your reason help you discern the character and nature of God as being revealed in this text? Plus, how do you discern yourself recalibrating your life according to the trajectory of the Kingdom as we apply this text?*” Since all truth is God’s truth, reason is also a means of employing other disciplines to describe our text’s application. For example, our new way of perceiving and articulating the world around us can be enhanced by applying psychology, sociology, and anthropology. For many people these days, “science speaks our language.” Rejecting reason because it’s too heady may actually disconnect you from many hungry people who currently are seeking Jesus but have simply not yet acquired biblical language. Let’s learn to tell the Jesus story using their language.
4. **Experience:** *How does my life experience inform and assist my ability to apply this text?* Let’s clarify what I mean by experience. I do not mean to interject every feeling or desire as a valid path to apply Scripture. Our culture makes far too many decisions based principally upon an individual’s feelings alone. We read about this in our news-feeds every day. A Church has lowered the bar for the authority of Scripture and simultaneously elevated human experience. Somehow then, we are surprised when someone argues, “Do not tell me what is right. God made me this way.” A person’s desires or feelings has become the new interpretive lens through which love or faith is defined and practiced. We have seen how

dangerous this is in Bible study. So let's carefully shape the experience question this way: "What is the Holy Spirit saying to the church (that is our community of faith) and what is the Holy Spirit saying to me as a person?" Thus, I might limit experience to the term "spiritual awareness." Of course, experience also must be in line with the earlier elements of the quadrilateral, especially the primary revelation of Scripture.

Questions Which Trigger Application Answers

As you may have picked up throughout this workbook, I am much more concerned with asking the right text-driven question than anything else. If we ask a question focused on "us" rather than on "them," we unknowingly can box ourselves into a corner and find a "Bible study dead-end." So, as we take all the material we discovered in our observation-interpretation and then move into application, let's do it by pursuing some good questions. You will see that I have tried to create a series of questions that will cause you to look at every facet of your text's beauty and truth.

If we ask a question focused on "us" rather than on "them", we can find a "Bible study dead-end."

1. *What is new to me/us that we did not know before?*
This question is referring to a new revelation. Can you be specific? What has this biblical text taught you that is new and fresh? Also, how will you recalibrate your life according to this new understanding?
2. *What does the text teach me/us about the nature and character of God?* This question pursues a theological question as well as its ethical component. You should ponder the nature of God but equally ask, "What are the personal changes and actions that flow out of the character of His heart?"
3. *What does the text teach me about how I/we are now different and become more like Jesus?* This question is pushing towards what we call "redemption," coupled with "transformation." Be specific about life change with your biblical text in mind.
4. *What does the text teach me about the new relationship we have "in Christ"?* How am I included in a new relationship with God Himself? What happens to sin and shame when I am "in God" and He is "in me?" Through these questions, we can

ponder the reality of biblical reconciliation. This question relates to our vertical relationship with God. The first commandment is this, “Love the Lord you God with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength” (Matthew 22:37).

5. *What does this text teach me about how I/We should relate to one another?* Let’s call this true community as we practice living in a new family with shared values discovered in the Word. This question is focused on our horizontal relationship with one another. The second commandment is this, “love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39).
6. *What does the text teach me/us about this new “me-ness” or “we-ness” as it is embodied in me/us?* This question is closely related to the prior one, but it is still worth considering on its own. In part, we find this in the Body of Christ imagery. This idea is leaning into the Spirit-enabled nature of our relationships together. Another way of stating it is this: What does it look like that Jesus is calling us to be “one?” (John 17:11, 20:22-23; Ephesians 4:1-5).
7. *What about the divine-human problem is solved?* This question asks you to be aware of a robust Gospel definition of salvation. Salvation is not merely a ticket to heaven but the beginning of the curse’s reversal and the welcoming of the New Creation into our midst. Another way to ask the same question is this: “How is God’s solution so different from the way most human solutions might appear?” What does the Kingdom look like as it becomes a reality in my/our midst? How does this change my actions, thoughts, and beliefs as a follower of Christ?

The more you become familiar with these questions, the more natural application will become as you observe-interpret-apply the Word. You will cease to be somewhat mechanical as you move through the *True^North* process. The truths that rise to a level of importance in the interpretation often will be sent immediately through the mental list of application questions. Your thoughts about the text and its pertinence in your life will organically become Kingdom-minded. Reading equipped with this list of questions is a nice safety net to make certain that you have not missed something of vital importance in your consistent practice of application.

The True End of Application: Prayer in Jesus' Name

We have discussed repeatedly that our goal is not Bible knowledge for its own sake. The true end is a revelation about God and His plan that will lead to our mutual submission and the reshaping of our lives into the Image of God. The best way to practice this truth is to shape the facts we have found into prayers to offer back to God. Thus, His Spirit can bring about this tangible change in us. Bible study is not about acquiring knowledge but about being transformed into the person God has called us to be. It is less about “doing” and more about “being.”

Bible study is not about acquiring knowledge but about being transformed into the person God called us to be.

This reality is the full circle in which we began our pilgrimage in Chapter 5: *Pray First and Always*. Now we end with *Prayer in Jesus' Name*. One of the best places to find an example of this in Scripture is in John 15. Listen and read out loud Jesus' words to us. See if after you have read it the first time, you can return to read it once again with the voice inflection that Jesus may have put upon the words:

⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. NIV

John 15 is part of what is called “Jesus' Upper Room Discourse.” In John 13-17, Jesus gives His final teaching to His disciples before His approaching death. As you read through the entire five chapters carefully, His teaching's content is not a general series of goodbye statements. One specific question emerges: “How are the disciples (and we as future disciples) to live in the absence of Jesus' physical body?” The physical Jesus has returned to His rightful place on the throne of God. What will we do next?

Jesus' teaching here has a clear ethical and obedient tone to it: “If you remain in me AND my words remain in you, ask whatever you want, and it will be done for you.” This statement is not a “genie in a bottle” request. Jesus is stating a genuine cause-effect connection on the effectiveness of prayer in Jesus' name. “Remain in me.” Oh, how I long for you to dig deep into a word study on Jesus' use of “remain.” It would almost certainly reveal an inter-connected expectation which we do not often see in our culture. Then Jesus says, “and my words remain in you.”

We see the words of Jesus taking on life themselves. These words are not ink on a page, but the living, breathing truth. Jesus does not merely speak these words - He embodies

them. The disciples watch Jesus go about His daily life. He gives life to the dead, healing to the lame, forgiveness to His enemy. Over and over again, as He acts, they will point and say, “*Oh, that is what you were talking about.*” There is no discontinuity between what Jesus says and what Jesus does. The very prayer He taught us is this: “May Your Kingdom come, and Your will be done, *on earth as it is in heaven*” (Matt 6:10 NIV). Jesus operates according to a Kingdom agenda, not according to an earthly pattern.

That is what the New Testament means when it calls for us to pray “in Jesus’ name.” We can shape our prayers in the pattern that Jesus would - according to His knowledge of the heartbeat of God. It’s an others-centered prayer. A Kingdom-minded prayer. We offer it “in His name.” Now, this is not us forcing Him to act outside of His nature. Another way to put it would be to say, “we ask according to the character and nature of Jesus as revealed in the Bible.”

Let’s consider writing and offering our prayers accordingly:

- We open our prayer with an act of consecration to Him and deep-seated conformity to His revealed Word (“Remain in me and my words remain in you”). If you remember our earlier invitation, “Just say Yes.” We covenant with Him to obey all that He has revealed in our study.
- We then shape a prayer according to the truth we have recently discovered in the Gospel of Mark (or whatever book we are studying). Truth has several components to it. First, a cognitive quality - there are things I now know that previously I did not know. Second, it has a skills component - what I can now put into practice. Who should you forgive? Who should you serve? Who might you display love to that needs it desperately? Third, the truth has a dispositional element - what does God value? What or who does God love? Dispositional change takes place when I declare, “I want to want what God wants.”
- We close our prayer with these words, “In Jesus’ name.” These words mean we ask for Jesus to bring our prayer to the Father, and we give them full permission to respond to our prayers in a way that glorifies the Triune God.
- If you follow this pattern, you are not just being discipled, but you are ready to take someone under your wing as you serve as his or her disciple-maker. This person will soon become a disciple-in-the-making, and the cycle continues. If you remember, back in an earlier chapter, you began putting a name and a face to this person. Who is this person? Would you be willing to ask him or her to join you on this journey?

The End of the Beginning

I have had the immense privilege to walk with you through this *True^North* Bible Study. My prayer is two-fold - first, that you will never read the Scriptures the way you did before we met.

May they continually shout forth truth and life.

May this continue for the rest of your earthly life.

May you never be the same as you will find yourself continually in His Presence.

Second, it is also my prayer that you will refine these newfound Bible reading habits in the company of others. We interpret this sacred text in community for the transformation of the whole.

Let's end where we began in Chapter 1.

I see you.

In honesty, I have not taken my eyes off of you the entire time. Your spiritual growth in the Word has been my only hoped-for outcome. Allow me to briefly replay our journey together as we have charted a course according to the *True^North* compass. Here, you will see how far you've come.

First, you learned that being formed as a disciple of Jesus cannot be accomplished apart from the revelation which comes from the Word and the power of the Spirit. The journey begins with the *First Reading* of Scripture, either through your devotional time with Him or in a worship experience with others. Remember, we described the *First Reading* this way: we invite the text to engage our contemporary world, allowing it to speak to our personal and prayer-filled concerns. Yet, we can unknowingly remove the sacred text from its first-century context and culture. Moreover, we can make words mean what we think they mean. Together, we became aware that this practice does not consider what it originally meant to the inspired author. We also uncovered that the *First Reading* of Scripture has inherent limitations as a spiritual formation tool since we also defined it as “we are” rather than as “they were” (aka, *reading without proper interpretation*). This process makes for a real possibility that we can innocently shape Jesus into “our image of Him” rather than having the Word conforming us to the “image of the revealed Son of God.” In the end, we came to a simple conclusion: not maturing in our ability to read and interpret the Word is a dangerous decision. We must be disciplined in the Word.

Second, we must engage in the Second Reading of Scripture. This next step is not inviting the Word into our lives. Rather, we are called to enter into the world revealed as the Coming Kingdom of God. We are compelled to Pray-Observe-Interpret-Apply the Word of God as we position ourselves as the ancient listeners-readers of these documents. We interpret words to the best of our ability as the author has defined them. The culture and history of the first-century take precedence over the comfort level of our own 21st century world. We acknowledge that Scripture's content and framework may seem a bit foreign. Yet we are confident that the work of the Holy Spirit in our mind and heart will assist us in hearing the literature as the author intended it. The reading clues of an inspired writer were placed there by the same Holy Spirit who stands at our side.

Third, we must seek others to assist us in the interpretation process to serve as a Disciple-maker. This role is to acquaint us with the tools that help us move back to the world and the culture of the author. A Disciple-maker is not merely to help us discover the truth in the Word but also to hold us accountable in applying the truth to our lives. A *True^North* Bible Study is not a group of people having a conversation about God, nor is it merely the unearthing of an ancient culture's teachings. This Bible Study is about people on a journey together, searching for the truth of God's Word with a commitment to one another, saying an unwavering "Yes" to God as He reveals Himself to us. Scripture is the shaping document for a community that is correspondingly "Sent out" to be Christ-like witnesses to a spiritually hungry and thirsty world.

You and I have walked together through the Gospel of Mark. With practice, I have complete confidence you will be able to do this with the rest of the Bible.

Bible Study is A MUST - For God's Glory

True^North Bible Study is a must. If we make it optional equipment for believers, very few will become biblically knowledgeable. Most will take the path of least resistance. If we fail to move into the deeper water of Bible Study, the church will become completely unfit to carry out its mission; "as the Father has sent me [Jesus], I am sending you" (John 20:21 NIV). We must learn to LIVE SENT.

If we do not win this battle, we will lose the war. Our "Good Book" will end up being lost like the "Books of the Law" as the Israelites ignored them in much of Old Testament history. The Word of YHWH became so unpracticed and disconnected from their lives that it was shelved in the temple, unread for generations until discovered by King Josiah's high Priest (2 Kings 22). Upon discovery, the religious leaders did not even recognize it. We should not throw the first judgmental stone because the modern church has done the

very same thing. We go to Church with a sense of regularity but fail to pick up God's Word and allow it to shape our lives. We have cities filled with church buildings, but they seem to make little or no impact on our local communities' daily lives. Paul says, "You were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world" (Eph. 2:1-2 NIV). A life lived without the Word (Jesus) as interpreted by His Word (the Bible) is simply another way of defining the word "death".

It is not just us who suffer consequences for our short-comings and apathy. It is also the very Glory of God that suffers reproach. Let's overhear the prayer Jesus prays the day before His Crucifixion. I have edited this prayer a bit to focus on the impact for God's Glory:

After Jesus said this, He looked toward heaven and prayed: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. ... ⁴ I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. ⁵ And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

⁶ *"I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word." ⁷ Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. ⁸ For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me...*

¹³ *"I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. ¹⁴ I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. ¹⁵ My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. ¹⁷ Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.*

²⁰ *"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— ²³ I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. John 17 NIV*

Did you catch the emphasis Jesus places upon God's glory, Jesus' glory, and then, in the end, almost climactically in 17:22: "I have given them [this is referring to *you* and *me*] the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one"? We remarkably receive the glory of God! Biblically speaking, the last things that are said are often the most important. These are some of the very last words that Jesus speaks on earth. Jesus is literally on His deathbed, and He is praying for you and me. The essence of this prayer is for us to receive God's glory.

Notice how Jesus says this will take place. In part, it is utilizing His Word. Jesus gave God's words to the disciples, and they accepted them (17:8). The Word is also the means for our sanctification (17:17-19). As we internalize, digest, and appropriate this Word, we become just like Him: holy. From the opposite side of the argument, what if we neglect the Word? What if we feast at some other banquet table such as YouTube, Facebook, or other social media sites? What if we binge-watch shows that promote a much more unbiblical value system? Even worse, Christian men and women who are addicted to pornography are often in both the world as well as the church. What image is being shaped in our hearts and minds?

Now, you fully understand why I say this battle is worth fighting. Settling for a superficial understanding of His word is utter foolishness. We are discarding the truth which will set us apart for His work, which will make us one with each other and with the Triune God. As for me and my house, we will not settle for second best. How about you? How about your family? What about your church? Only one match needs to be struck to start a fire.

You have now moved from the category of "disciple-in-the-making" to a true "disciple-maker." It is my prayer that you will now take another disciple-in-the-making by the hand as their Disciple-maker.

I see you. You are ready. Now, LIVE SENT.

Let's do the hard work of Disciple-making and ***Integrate Learning into Life.***

In the end, Disciple-making is about life change. I want to give you room to move learning from your head down into your heart. If your Disciple-making plan is to simply read this workbook and consider your effort complete, allow me to correct this superficial assessment. We are called to be “doers of the word and not hearers only” (James 1:22). Let's begin this change of life NOW.

Most of us at some level are tactile-learners. One of the greatest disciple-making tools for you may be a pen or a pencil. When we circle important words, underline memorable sentences, or make notes in the margins, our depth of integration increases.

May I encourage you to grab the writing tool of your choice and scan back through this chapter as you set the learning tone for the rest of the workbook. Re-process this chapter with some of these questions in mind.

New Idea? List out new ideas or concepts that have been introduced to you. Short-term memory skills are greatly increased through the simple act of writing. I encourage you to write out summary statements in your own words to help you take ownership of an idea. Or, simply copy entire sentences to make my thoughts or God's words into your own. In this book, I will pledge to define words before I use them. Make sure you understand words and their meanings before we move on to the next chapter. If there is something that you are not quite getting, allow yourself the space to pause and understand this before moving on. Remember, words and their meanings have huge consequences on the way we think.

Re-Calibration? What new idea(s) have you encountered in this chapter that may hint you have been traveling down a wrong path in your spiritual development? Have these new truths called you to re-calibrate your life in a new compass direction to become more “like Jesus?” Maybe ask it this way, “Did you have any ‘aha’ moments?” If so, state them clearly. Maybe you had an “Oh No” moment, when you realized you were thinking or acting in a less-than-Christian way. Make this personally transformative. It might call for a time of verbal repentance and re-commitment. Please tell your accountability partner about this decision. This is both a confession of change AND a testimony to God's Spirit at work in your life

Refreshing? What biblical texts have refreshed your soul? Why not write them on an index card and tape them over your kitchen sink, on the refrigerator door, or a bathroom mirror? Let the Scriptures renew your mind permanently by memorizing them.

Appendices

APPENDIX

SECOND READING, PG.1



SECOND READING

Chapter Title

& BASIC CONTENT

Initial Observations

FROM YOUR FIRST READING OF THE BOOK

Chapter 1:

About original author:

Chapter 2:

Chapter 3:

About original audience:

Chapter 4:

Chapter 5:

About original time/place of writing:

Chapter 6:

Chapter 7:

About historical situation:

Chapter 8:

Additional Notes (including recurring themes/words/phrases)

APPENDIX

SECOND READING, PG.2

SECOND READING, *CONT'D*

Chapter Title

& BASIC CONTENT

Initial Observations

FROM YOUR FIRST READING OF THE BOOK

Chapter 9:

About original author:

Chapter 10:

Chapter 11:

About original audience:

Chapter 12:

Chapter 13:

About original time/place of writing:

Chapter 14:

Chapter 15:

About historical situation:

Chapter 16:

Additional Notes (including recurring themes/words/phrases)

APPENDIX

STRUCTURAL RELATIONSHIPS, PG.1



TrueNorth

STRUCTURAL RELATIONSHIPS & SAMPLE QUESTIONS

QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

Relationships of Logic

Below you will find all the basic structures or logic which can be used to shape communication between people. In our specific case, we are concerned about how

the stories in the Bible are written and the internal logic which holds it together. Moreover, each "logic-structure" which you find below will have a corresponding question(s) assigned to it.

Remember, Observation of the Big Picture is seeing "how a passage is held together" (aka, logic) and then to turn your observation into the form of a text-driven question.

These are sample questions or maybe even generic questions you can ask, guided by the structures.

They will come to life if you pour into these questions the specific content of any particular book or passage you are working with. For example, after studying Psalm 1,

it will become self-evident that the structure of "contrast" is the driving force of the whole Psalm. (Ps 1:1-3 contrasted with Ps 1:4-5).

The corresponding text-driven question that would become a wonderful study might be, "What is involved in the psalmist's contrast between the righteous, their character and fate, on the one hand, and the wicked on the other?" Thus, the logic or structure of contrast ties the entire Psalm together. And the text-driven question will serve as input into the next step of the *TrueNorth* Bible Study: Interpretation.

1. RECURRENCE

The repetition of the same or similar terms, phrases, or other elements.

Questions: What is the meaning of this recurring element (specify what recurs)? How do the individual occurrences relate to and illumine one another? Why this recurrence? Implications/Significance?

2. CONTRAST

The association of things whose differences are stressed by the writer.

Key terms: But, however.

Questions: What major differences are emphasized by the writer? What is the precise and specific meaning of each of these differences? Why did the writer stress these differences, and why did he deal with them as he did? Implications/Significance?

3. COMPARISON

Association of things whose similarities (likenesses) are stressed by the writer.

Key terms: Like, as.

Questions: What are the major points of similarity here? What is the precise and specific meaning of each? Why did the writer stress these similarities, and why did he deal with them as he did? Implications/Significance?

4. CLIMAX

Movement from lesser to greater, toward a high point of culmination and intensity.

Questions: How does this passage reach its climax? How does this climactic development illumine the climactic passage, and how does it and the material leading to the climactic passage? Why did the writer include this climax? Implications/Significance?

5. PIVOT

The device of the pivot to produce a radical reversal or complete change or direction.

Questions: What is the meaning of the pivotal passage, and how specifically and precisely does the pivotal passage produce this radical change of direction? How does this cruciality illumine the material on both sides of the pivot? Why did the writer include this cruciality? Implications/Significance?

6. PARTICULARIZATION

The movement from the general to the particular.

Questions: What is the meaning of this general statement? How is this general statement particularized in the material that follows? How do the particulars illumine the general statement? Why did the writer include this movement from general to particular? Implications/Significance?

APPENDIX

STRUCTURAL RELATIONSHIPS, PG.2

Relationships of Logic (continued)

7. GENERALIZATION

The movement from particular to general.

Questions: What is the meaning of the particular statement? How is the particular statement generalized in the material that follows? How does the general statement illumine the particulars? Why did the writer include this movement from particular to general? Implications/Significance?

8. CAUSATION

The movement from cause to effect.

Key terms: Therefore, consequently.

Questions: How does this cause produce this effect? What are the major elements involved in this movement from cause to effect, and what is the meaning of each? Why did the writer include this causation? Implications/Significance?

9. SUBSTANTIATION

The movement from effect to cause.

Key terms: For, because, since.

Questions: How does the substantiatory passage cause (i.e., support, or give reasons for) the preceding passage? What are the major elements involved in this movement from effect to cause, and what is the meaning of each? Why did the writer include this substantiation? Implications/Significance?

10. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The movement from means to end; a statement that declares the end, or purpose, and the means whereby the end is achieved.

Key terms: In order that, so that.

Questions: What is the meaning of

the purpose statement itself? How does this purpose statement illumine the means? How does it illumine the end? How does the means cause/produce the end? Why did the writer include this purpose statement? Implications/Significance?

11. INTRODUCTION

The background or setting for events or ideas.

Questions: What is the meaning of this background material? How does it prepare for what follows? Why did the writer prepare for what follows in this way? Implications/Significance?

12. SUMMARIZATION

An abridgment (summing up) either preceding or following a unit of material. (Sometimes very similar to a general statement, but contains more specifics than a general statement.)

Questions: How does this passage summarize the material that precedes (or follows)? How does the preceding material illumine this summarization? Why did the writer include this summarization? Implications/Significance?

13. PROBLEM-SOLUTION OR QUESTION-ANSWER

A problem or question, followed by its solution or answer.

Questions re. problem/solution variety: What is the meaning of the problem presented here? How is this problem solved? What are the major elements involved in the movement from problem to solution, and what is the meaning of each? Why did the writer include this interrogation? Implications/Significance?

APPENDIX

STRUCTURAL RELATIONSHIPS, PG.3

Relationships of Form

Notice how these relationships involve the “form” of the material. Think of it as “how” the writer chooses to present it rather than “what” the writer presents. More of a physical description of how the material is put together than the logical thought flow which is inherent with the primary structures above.

1. INTERCHANGE

The exchanging or alternation of blocks of material (a-b-a-b).

Questions, e.g., Contrast by Interchange: What are the major differences presented here, and what is the meaning of each? How does this interchange strengthen this contrast, and how does it illumine the major differences? Why did the writer emphasize these differences? Why did he thus support or strengthen the contrast by this use of interchange? Implications/Significance?

2. INCLUSIO

The repetition of the same word(s) or phrase at the beginning and end of a unit, thus producing a bracket effect.

Questions, e.g., Comparison by Inclusio: What are the major similarities presented here, and what is the meaning of each? How does this inclusio strengthen this comparison, and how does it illumine the major points of similarity? Why did the writer emphasize these similarities? Why did he thus support or strengthen the comparison by this use of inclusio? Implications/Significance?

3. CHIASM

The repetition of elements in inverted order (a-b-[c]-b'a').

Questions, e.g., Contrast by Chiasm: What are the major differences presented here and what is the meaning of each? How does this chiasm strengthen this contrast, and how does it illumine the major differences? Why did the writer emphasize these differences? Why did he thus support or strengthen the contrast by this use of chiasm? Implications/Significance?

4. INTERCALATION

The insertion of one literary unit in the midst of another literary unit.

Questions, e.g., Comparison by Intercalation: What are the major similarities presented here, and what is the meaning of each? How does this intercalation strengthen this comparison, and how does it illumine the major points of similarity? Why did the writer emphasize these similarities? Why did he thus support or strengthen the comparison by using intercalation? Implications/Significance?



WORD STUDY

Word Study for the Word _____ found in _____ :

STEP 1 Write down a few basic meanings of the word you want to study as found in the Greek or Hebrew dictionary found in www.BlueLetterBible.org. This gives you a set of good “generic” meaning(s) to your word. Remember, it’s only a starting point not the end. Remember, your word does not mean “all these things”. We are looking for the best definition in the original biblical context.

Meaning 1:

Meaning 2:

Meaning 3:

Now compare a few different translations for an initial thrust into the world of Bible translation. How do the NIV, NASB, and ESV translate the word?

NIV: _____

NASB: _____

ESV: _____

STEP 2 Start with the book you are reading. As you do this, I want you to move beyond merely restating the word as you find it in the text. I want you to elaborate and explore the meaning it may have in each context you find it in the same Biblical Book (e.g., Mark, Acts, Romans, etc.). Yes. All the occurrences of your word is found in www.BlueLetterBible.org. As you

examine each one, try to employ the sound sentence level observational skills you have developed. For example, is the word being compared to another word? Is it being contrasted? Maybe it is used in a list? Is it used as a noun, adjective, adverb, etc. Answer this question: How does this scripture and its context provide insight into the understanding of the Word you are studying?

Ref:	Describe Meaning in Context:
Ref:	
Ref:	
Ref:	

APPENDIX

WORD STUDY, PG.2

STEP 3

Examine several references in other NT books written by the same author.
(If none, skip to Step 4).

Biblical Book(s): _____

Ref:	Describe Meaning in Context:
Ref:	
Ref:	
Ref:	

STEP 4

Ponder the word meaning at this point. Think about the range of meaning(s) Summarize your work thus far. Remember, you are always searching for the meaning of the word "in the literary context" you are studying.

STEP 5

Look at occurrences in other books in the New Testament.

Biblical Book(s): _____

Ref:	Describe Meaning in Context:
Ref:	
Ref:	
Ref:	

STEP 6

Final Answer: This is the place to define your word and the evidence that supports that argument.

Discipleship Dilemma

The Church is failing to produce more and better disciples. Yet making disciples is the primary call of each local church. There is no backup plan. On top of this, the church has long affirmed the best starting point is for us to become people of the Word. But I do not find churches who disciple their lay-people in how to read and understand the Word.

Problem 1: Believers who follow the spiritual discipline of “reading Scripture” open up their Bible and read. Yet their first response is often a shameful confession whispered under their breath, “What is God talking about? And what does He want me to do?”

Problem 2: After a time of reading frustration, believers often give up Bible reading. It’s too hard. They are also saying out of discouragement, “The problem must be with me! I am not spiritual enough to read and understand.” Thus, in our private devotional moments, Jesus speaks, Isaiah declares, and the Apostle Paul teaches but we find ourselves groping in the dark wondering “what does the passage actually mean and how does it relate to me and my world?” This has spiritual danger written all over it and the end result is a biblically illiterate church. We are called to act like Jesus but do not know Him.

Problem 3: These same readers are encountering the Bible alone during what is called a “devotional time with the Lord.” Yet reading silently and reading alone is a brand-new way to encounter God. The Bible rarely hints about believers maintaining anything close to what we call a private and isolated relationship with Jesus. We are adopted into the Body, as we are to “do life together.”

Problem 4: Due to our lack of biblical understanding, we have unknowingly calibrated our internal life compasses according to the wrong mapping coordinates. The values of this world have slowly but surely taken over from the wisdom of God and His Kingdom principles. We are being constantly shaped and disciplined by YouTube, Hollywood, and the incessant news feeds of social media that subtly take root in our hearts and minds.

Solution

True^North. This is a holistic ministry designed to help Christians recalibrate their spiritual compasses according to the coordinates found by reading-understanding-applying the Word as we gather together in community and as we hold one another accountable to the revelations discovered in sacred Scripture. Lay-people reading the word in community, understanding and consequently being shaped by the Word should be the normal Christian experience. We can all become Disciple-Makers in the Word. Yes, even you.



May I introduce myself. My name is Dave Smith. I have been married to Angie for the last 40 years. We have two children, Joshua (married to Laura) and Hannah (married to Brian), five grandchildren. Angie and I have been in pastoral ministry following my ordination in 1986. Since 2007, my credentials have resided with the Wesleyan Church.

To give you a bit of my academic training, my undergraduate training was done at Circleville Bible College (Circleville, Ohio, now called Ohio Christian University) and Asbury University (B.A.; Bible). I then went to Asbury Theological Seminary for an M.A. in Biblical Literature (Old Testament). After several years of pastoring, we returned to Asbury Seminary for me to work on an M. Div. and then attend Durham University (England not N.C.) for a Ph.D. in New Testament Studies.

I am passionate about the Gospels and Paul’s letters but also have done extensive study in the Hebrew Bible. Angie and I have traveled extensively around the world teaching and doing leadership development through the Word. Most recently we have been working in local church-based community development in Malawi Africa through Circle of Hope, International.